

Voyage of the Black Swan

(A Judicial Inquiry Regarding an Incident at Sea)

By Fengar Gael

Fengar Gael

gaelfengar@gmail.com

949-509-1338

Agent Contact:

Elaine Devlin Literary, Inc.

411 Lafayette Street (6th floor)

New York, NY 10003

212-842-9030

elaine@edevlinlit.com

*Saint Swithun's day if thou dost rain
For forty days it will remain;
Saint Swithun's day if thou be fair,
For forty days 'twill rain nae mare*



CHARACTERS: (two men, three women, and one non-binary actor (of either gender)

SISTER ANGELICA ANNE BOYLE, an elderly Irish emigrant nun

AUTUMN BLAZER, an artist and hospital volunteer, age mid 20s

DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN, a resident internist, age 40s

JULES HUMPHREY HOTCHKINS, a British medical scribe, age late 20s

FLORIAN HEATH, a radiologist and amateur climatologist, age 40s

THE SEA CREATURE, an amphibious intersexual

HAZMAT TEAM MEMBER ONE

HAZMAT TEAM MEMBER TWO

DOUBLING:

Doctor Florian Heath / HAZMAT Team Member One

The Sea Creature / HAZMAT Team Member Two

TIME:

The near future on the hottest day in July

PLACE:

New York City: a street in Manhattan; a hospital room and cafeteria; and the sitting room of a yacht at sea

PROLOGUE

(A solemn choral humming is heard as the blazing sun beams on New York City where PEDESTRIANS wearing hats, sunglasses, and skimpy clothes are crisscrossing a street. At first they walk swiftly, but as the light brightens, they turn and cross again, then again, becoming warmer, weaker, moving slowly through an increasingly denser atmosphere. Trailing the pedestrians is SISTER ANGELICA BOYLE dressed in a black habit. SHE faints, crumpling in a heap as the chorus fades and the sunlight dims to black.)

SCENE 1

(Tucked in a hospital bed, SISTER ANGELICA lies in a deep sleep with a fluffy white cloud suspended above her head. AUTUMN BLAZER, a young woman wearing hospital scrubs and a badge enters, spies the cloud, and draws a pager from her pocket.)

AUTUMN

Doctor! Doctor Stein! Please come to room twelve immediately!

(AUTUMN pokes the cloud with her finger, then DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN enters, followed by JULES HOTCHKINS, a medical scribe wearing scrubs, a badge, and a mobile laptop harness.)

AUTUMN

Look! Over her head!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

What the hell...?

AUTUMN

It looks like a cloud.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Is it toxic...?

AUTUMN

It's odorless, and her respiration seems normal.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Who is she?

(AUTUMN reads a chart attached to the foot of the bed as JULES taps the keys of his laptop.)

AUTUMN

There's no name listed. The ambulance picked her up at Broadway and fifty-seventh. She was treated for heatstroke: temp a hundred and four, accelerated pulse, skin hot, dry, flushed, unresponsive. They brought her vitals back to normal and she's scheduled for a C T scan.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

It's so wonderfully cool in here. How long has the cloud been hovering?

AUTUMN

I don't know, but she was checked in Wednesday at ten twenty; that's three days ago. Doctor Heller's the attending physician.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, dear, I'm afraid Heller's in the ICU with acute renal failure. What are you doing here?

AUTUMN

I was told to change the linens.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

This needs to be reported in case we need a HAZMAT team. *(taking a deep breath)* Oh, it feels so good to breathe again. *(pause)* Can a cloud seep in through a window or did it come from some source in here?

AUTUMN

I haven't a clue.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

If she doesn't wake up soon and tell us who she is, we'll contact the police. Why is she here in the first place? I thought all the private rooms were taken.

AUTUMN

I assume the former occupant passed away. Maybe one of the orderlies wheeled her in since there's no room in the halls. Soon we'll be checking them onto the roof.

(AUTUMN draws a phone from her pocket.)

AUTUMN

I'll take pictures in case the cloud evaporates, and nobody believes it was ever here.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Good idea.

AUTUMN

Oh, dear, my phone isn't charged.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Jules! Have you got your phone handy?

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN's pager beeps.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Damn, I've got to go! Listen, given the chaos here, let's just keep this to ourselves for now. *(to Jules)* Stay here and take pictures, *(to Autumn)* and you: put a quarantine sign on the door!

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN departs, followed by AUTUMN.)

SCENE 2

(JULES steps forward to face the audience of jurors, speaking with a refined British accent.)

JULES

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, my name is Jules Humphrey Hotchkins. I'm employed as the personal medical scribe of Doctor Miriam Stein. For the record, I've never testified at a coroner's inquest before, and since I've been instructed to recount the relevant facts, I'll start with the hottest day in July when the electrical grid was down so there was no air conditioning in the entire city. The temperatures reached a hundred and twenty degrees by noon; the staff was overworked, exhausted, protocol had broken down, and since our emergency generators were threatening to fail, the thermostats were kept at eighty. We were so busy nobody noticed the quarantined room and at six o'clock, Doctor Stein brought in Doctor Florian Heath, a radiologist known as the resident weather wonk.

(JULES continues his testimony as AUTUMN, DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN, and DOCTOR FLORIAN HEATH enter to study the cloud.)

JULES

He told us the cloud looked like...

JULES
...a stratocumulus.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
A stratocumulus,...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

....specifically a dense, light, and lumpy variety, but what's weird is they're rarely lower than three hundred feet with a lifespan of forty minutes, so this is a genuine anomaly. Of course, a cloud is really just a mass of condensed water that separates from the air when it reaches the dew point. The best thing about clouds is that they act as natural heat shields, reflecting the sun's rays back into space so -- oh, Jesus!

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH has glanced down at the patient.)

AUTUMN

What?!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It's Sister Angelica!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You know her?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

She conducts a choir, missed rehearsals, and the whole city's looking for her!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

(to Autumn) Inform the desk to call the police.

AUTUMN

Yes, ma'am. *(to Florian)* Do you know her full name?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

No, but it's Irish. Just say you found Sister Angelica and they'll know.

(AUTUMN departs as DR. FLORIAN HEATH turns to DR. MIRIAM STEIN while JULES types.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

So Doctor Stein, don't you keep up with the news?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Not lately. In case you haven't noticed, down here in the trenches it's a perpetual state of bedlam.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You should see the morgue: the freezers are defrosting and they're stacking corpses like firewood.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

It's worse than the pandemic! We're losing record numbers from strokes -- not to mention the drownings of fools who throw themselves in the river. We hardly have time to eat, sleep, shower, and now there's water rationing. So if this thing's really a cloud, where the hell did it come from?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Clouds form when warm humid air rises to meet cool air, so if the room above this one contains cold storage units, then that might affect the ceiling temperature, though with the grid down, that's unlikely.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH opens his satchel and pulls out two instruments.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I brought a digitized barometer, and this is a hygrometer which measures humidity.

(While they're focused on the instruments, SISTER ANGELICA sits up and gazes at the cloud until DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN glances up and gasps!)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh! You're awake! *(loudly)* Nod if you can hear me?

(SISTER ANGELICA nods, then speaks with an Irish accent.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, I hear you; I'm not deaf! *(pause)* Where am I?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

At Mount Sinai Hospital. You fainted from heatstroke.

SISTER ANGELICA

Good heavens.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You were brought here in an ambulance three days ago, but you had no I. D.

SISTER ANGELICA

No satchel...? Has someone pinched my satchel?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Afraid so. Now can you tell us your name?

SISTER ANGELICA

Sister Angelica Boyle.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Where do you live?

SISTER ANGELICA

At the Sisters of Charity Convent on Riverdale Avenue. Do they know I'm here?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

They will. Now we're going to take you from this room. In case you haven't noticed, there's a cloud hovering over your head and we need to know where its coming from.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, yes, I believe it came from Saint Swithun. You see, I've been praying for a cloud like the ones we had back home. *(pause)* I can tell you're a skeptic, but you'll have to admit it's a lovely swansdown of a cloud, all feathery and light.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It certainly broken the climatic laws of gravity.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Whatever the source, this room may be the only cool place in the city.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, since it's my cloud, I suppose I'll be taking it with me when I leave.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You'll get quite a following if you do; you'll be the most popular woman in the city.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ha! Then I'll run for office and become the new mayor.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Why not governor or president? You're already famous; your picture's all over the news.

SISTER ANGELICA

You mean I was missed...?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Apparently.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
You certainly were.

(AUTUMN reenters.)

AUTUMN
Oh, wow! Welcome back, Sister.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
This is Autumn, one of our volunteers and the first to discover your cloud.

SISTER ANGELICA
Bless you, my dear.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Sister Angelica thinks the cloud came from heaven.

SISTER ANGELICA
From the divine intercession of Saint Swithun, patron saint of weather, fair and foul.

AUTUMN
Oh, God, that's awesome -- a miracle!

SISTER ANGELICA
So you're heard of Saint Swithun?

AUTUMN
Well,...no.

SISTER ANGELICA
Dear Saint Swithun, fill the skies
With rain that falls from angels' eyes.
Their loving tears will douse the earth,
And yield the fruits that slake our thirst!
(*pause*) Now thank you for your hospitality, but it's time I returned to the convent.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Sorry, Sister, but you have to be formally discharged, and I can't advise your leaving just yet. Can you stand?

(SISTER ANGELICA starts to leave her bed, but notices she's wearing a skimpy hospital johnny.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, good heavens! Where is my habit? My veil!

AUTUMN

Your clothes should be in the closet; I'll get them.

(AUTUMN retrieves the Sister Angelica's clothes.)

SISTER ANGELICA

I can't get dressed with men in the room. Now, I'm feeling quite recovered, Doctor...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Stein.

SISTER ANGELICA

(to Florian) And you are?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Doctor Heath, resident radiologist and amateur climatologist -- just call me Florian.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, and who's the lad in the corner?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

He's my scribe, Jules Hotchkins.

SISTER ANGELICA

I see. Now forgive me, my dears, but would you mind leaving me alone to dress?

AUTUMN

I can help you.

ANGELICA

If you don't mind, I'd rather be alone; I need a few moments to pray.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

(pause) All right, Sister, but we'll be back.

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN, DR. FLORIAN HEATH and AUTUMN depart while SISTER ANGELICA makes the sign of the cross, and prays to the sounds of choral music as the cloud glows from within and lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

(Bright lights reveal a cafeteria table as JULES steps forward and continues addressing the audience of jurors while AUTUMN, DR. FLORIAN HEATH and DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN seat themselves.)

JULES

The four of us went to the hospital cafeteria where Florian wondered if the cloud contained some form of nitrous oxide since beyond feeling cooler it was...

JULES
...spiked.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Spiked...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
...with something because I can't be feeling this good from a blast of fresh air.

(JULES seats himself.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Actually you can. I feel the same because excessive heat triggers depression, and we've had a temporary respite.

AUTUMN
It's the humidity that makes me miserable; I could never live in the tropics. I'd miss the seasons: April showers, spring flowers, autumn leaves. *(she sighs)* Summer was my favorite until the sun became a malicious ball of fire determined to murder us all.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Actually, the sun's a ball of gas. It doesn't really burn but glows from the nuclear fusion at its core; hydrogen gets fused into helium, releasing enormous energy.

AUTUMN
Enormous misery! It's even bleached the colors in my carpets, my curtains...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Enough chitchat! Let's get serious: as soon as the Sister gets dressed, we'll escort her out of the room, then ask Security to call in a HAZMAT Team.

AUTUMN
But what if the cloud follows the Sister?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Please tell me you don't seriously think it's a miracle.

AUTUMN

I'm open minded.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

All clouds are miracles -- invisible vapors made visible, and if one spreads and falls to the ground, it's a fog.

AUTUMN

Oh, I love foggy mornings.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Fogs are just lazy stratus clouds taking a nap.

AUTUMN

Well, I hope the Sister's cloud expands into a giant storm cloud that suspends itself over the entire city and washes it clean.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Yeah, 'cause it's starting to smell like an open sewer.

AUTUMN

To think I used to resent clouds. I thought they were annoying blots threatening rain that ruined picnics, weddings, walks in the park...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, please! Do you ever shut up?!

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH'S pager beeps.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Sorry, ladies and (*turning to Jules*) what's your name again?

JULES

Jules.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right. I've got to run but keep me informed.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Not a word to anyone -- promise!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Like a sphinx.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH departs as AUTUMN sighs.)

AUTUMN

He talks about clouds as if they're alive. Who knew he had a poet's soul.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You're interested...?

AUTUMN

No! Oh, God, no!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Good. I suspect he's one of those men obsessed with hobbies that keep them glued to gadgets. I ought to know, I was married to one.

AUTUMN

I...I'm sorry. What was his hobby?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Handicapping horses, football, baseball, tiddlywinks -- you name it. *(pause)* So what brought you here?

AUTUMN

I was temping, though I have a Fine Arts Degree from Hunter College. The truth is my Aunt Margaret left me enough money to quit working for a year so I can concentrate on my paintings.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Lucky you, but that doesn't explain why you're here.

AUTUMN

My therapist suggested I volunteer at a hospital -- to put my problems in perspective and distract myself from homicidal thoughts.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Ha, ha! So is it working?

AUTUMN

I think so. I've met some amazing patients who let me sketch their portraits, and I really admire the nurses. They're so calm and caring and they aren't repulsed by broken bodies and all their hygienic needs. My mother calls nurses the saints on earth.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Right, while we doctors are drudges running low on fuel never mind faith.

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN'S pager beeps and she stares at the message.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, no! Not again!

AUTUMN

What...?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Let's go, Jules! Hurry! *(to Autumn)* Stay with the Sister!

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN dashes off in one direction and AUTUMN in another while JULES steps forward to speak to the jurors.)

JULES

It was another shooting. The heat was affecting bad-tempered men with access to guns. One of them shot eight customers at a bar in Chelsea, so Dr. Stein helped perform emergency surgeries, and I was told to return to Sister Angelica's room.

SCENE 4

(JULES enters the room where SISTER ANGELICA is dressed in her habit, and AUTUMN is tying the laces of the sister's sneakers.)

JULES

Pardon me, Sister, but Doctor Stein asked me to wait here.

(JULES seats himself in a corner then scans the room.)

JULES

Where's the cloud?

SISTER ANGELICA

I swallowed it.

AUTUMN

She yawned and inhaled.

SISTER ANGELICA

The whole thing slid straight down my gullet, so it must be in here (*patting her stomach*) but I'm feeling fit as a fiddle and ready to fly.

AUTUMN

I'm sorry, Sister, but you really shouldn't. You might have sustained some internal damage from your fall, and you'll need x-rays of your chest and stomach -- just in case the cloud was toxic.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, if it were, don't you I think I'd be dead? Truth be told, I was hoping to coax the cloud into a jam jar. Then I'd take it wherever it was needed, especially if it could disperse a brisk bracing rain like the clouds back home. (*she sighs*) Now I really must go and assure the sisters that I'm still among the living.

AUTUMN

I'm sure by now they've been informed, and you're not a prisoner. We can't legally stop patients from leaving, but we can strongly suggest you have some lunch, and you'll probably need to see Florian. He's a radiologist and he'll do a quick, painless scan, and then you can go back to the convent.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, he seems like a decent sort.

AUTUMN

In the meantime you can stay here if you like since it's the coolest room in the city.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, I see you're checking your watch. Must you leave...?

AUTUMN

Soon. In the meantime, would you mind if I sketched you?

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, all right, love, though I'm not at my best.

(AUTUMN retrieves a tote bag containing a sketch pad and pencils. SHE sits near the Sister and starts to draw.)

AUTUMN

Now try to keep your head still -- that's good. You know, even though I'm Catholic, I've never actually spoken with a nun.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, well, we're an endangered species, though there's more of us in Ireland. Have you ever been?

AUTUMN

No, but I'd love to visit. Do you miss it?

SISTER ANGELICA

Not much. I was raised in county Kildare in a farming family that lived as if the twentieth century hadn't happened never mind the twenty-first. There were eight of us; all boys but me, the eldest, and most likely to be doomed to an early grave.

AUTUMN

Oh, no.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, yes! From all the cooking, cleaning, and strained relations with scrappy brothers and drunken sot of a Pa. I'm making us sound like Irish clichés, but we were, ha, ha!

AUTUMN

How did you wind up here?

SISTER ANGELICA

The Lord blessed me with a soaring soprano voice, and one day after Mass, Sister Bridget convinced my Mam to let me join the choir. That's how I escaped my brawling brothers, but don't be thinking I didn't love them. I did, but I had dreams of my own. Anyway, at my wits end after wash day, I told my parents I wanted to join the Sisters of Mercy, and all hell broke loose.

AUTUMN

Oh, dear.

SISTER ANGELICA

Mam was reluctant to lose her live in maid and Pa hit me so hard I lost two canines and a molar. Then he said, "no more talk of leavin' or I'll knock out all your teeth and cut out your tongue so y'can't sing another note!" Well, I looked a bloody horror, so Mam took me aside and told me to run to the Sisters. They knew my Pa was a nasty piece of work, and God bless 'em, they gave me a home, a vocation, and took me to the finest dentist in the county. Years later when I asked to transfer to our sister house in New York, they gave me their blessing.

AUTUMN

You were lucky.

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes indeed, but we nuns are relics, living anachronisms. Nobody wants to join us and the Vatican dinosaurs are clinging to their power, though we have rebels in our midst -- sisters who secretly offer the sacrament to the sick and dying. But truth be told, people aren't as religious as they were. When was the last time you went to Mass?

AUTUMN

Last Sunday.

SISTER ANGELICA

Really...?

AUTUMN

I attend Holy Trinity every Sunday.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, good for you, and yet you never knew a nun...?

AUTUMN

I went to public schools.

SISTER ANGELICA

Humph! Public schools! Did they teach you to believe in the fires of perdition? Did they teach charity, compassion, and consequences for bad behavior, 'cause heaven knows we can't look to our leaders for moral guidance. (*she sighs*) I used to think that beneath a tyrant's stoney skin was a salvageable human being, but lately I wonder if beneath the stones are more stones and a bitter coldness colder than the black heart of Satan.

AUTUMN

But even tyrants have souls.

SISTER ANGELICA

Humph! The corrupted souls of strutting despots who worship money! The Age of Mammon is upon us; money is everything to everyone!

AUTUMN

Which is why we need a New Age of Miracles -- starting with a cloud like yours.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, my dear, what a dreamer you are! Even I don't believe that.

AUTUMN

But you said it came from Saint Swithun.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, yes, but truth be told, I'm flummoxed. I've prayed to Swithun hundreds of times and he didn't conjure so much as a drizzle, though I'd never asked for a cloud before. Such a pity it's gone. Something sort of came off of it, you know, a kind of sweetness.

AUTUMN

Like freshly mowed grass...

SISTER ANGELICA

And vibrations, a kind of humming. Did you sense it?

AUTUMN

It tickled the hairs on my neck!

SISTER ANGELICA

(coughing) Accckkkhhhaaaa!

AUTUMN

Sister?! Are you all right...?

(SISTER ANGELICA chokes and wheezes as AUTUMN pats her back and JULES leaps up to help. SISTER ANGELICA pushes them away and coughs up a crystal orb that falls to the floor.)

SISTER ANGELICA

What the devil...?

AUTUMN

Oh, my God, what on earth...?

(SISTER ANGELICA snatches a handkerchief from her pocket and stoops to pick up the orb from the floor. JULES and AUTUMN hover over her.)

SISTER ANGELICA

What have I spat up?

AUTUMN

It looks like a...a marble, but it's growing, expanding...

(SISTER ANGELICA stands, clutching the orb.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, have you ever seen the like? If it isn't just like a gypsy's crystal ball! *(to Jules)* You can sit down now -- Jude is it?

JULES
(mumbling) Jules.

AUTUMN
 Let me pour you some water.

(AUTUMN fills a glass from a pitcher of water on the bedside table and hands it to SISTER ANGELICA.)

AUTUMN
 Do you think the cloud condensed itself...?

SISTER ANGELICA
 So it seems, and thank Christ I coughed it up instead of passing it out the other end, ha, ha!
 Frankly, I preferred the cloud.

AUTUMN
 Try rubbing it and maybe it'll become a cloud again.

(SISTER ANGELICA rubs the crystal orb.)

SISTER ANGELICA
 No, it's still a ball.

AUTUMN
 Try tossing it.

(SISTER ANGELICA tosses and catches it.)

AUTUMN
 Try blowing on it.

(The SISTER blows to no avail.)

SISTER ANGELICA
 Still nothing! I don't have enough breath, so come closer, Autumn, blow with me.

(SISTER ANGELICA and AUTUMN blow on the sphere as a humming chorus is heard and a mist appears, enveloping the room.)

SISTER ANGELICA
 Will you look at that! We've made ourselves a cloud -- a fine mist of a cloud!

AUTUMN
 It's filling the room, thickening like a...a fog.

SISTER ANGELICA

A real pea souper! Ha, ha!

AUTUMN

What if the density can't be controlled? What if it escapes?

SISTER ANGELICA

Cars will be crashing, children getting lost...

AUTUMN

Now it's getting thinner, but so wonderfully cool. Oh, Sister, don't you think this is too good to keep to ourselves? It has to be shared.

SISTER ANGELICA

How...? Should we be blowing clouds into the other rooms?

AUTUMN

Yes! Maybe they'll spread and give birth to more clouds and cool the whole hospital. Then you could move on to the rest of the city, the state, the country...

SISTER ANGELICA

The whole wide world till we wind up at the polar ice caps, ha, ha! Imagine the welcome we'll get in Africa, the Middle East, and isn't India a hot bed of misery? So if you're serious, my dear, where would we start?

AUTUMN

"We"...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Of course -- unless there's something or someone keeping you here.

AUTUMN

Well, no, not really.

SISTER ANGELICA

Good! We mustn't take miracles for granted. Think of all the faithful who pray from the hell holes of the world. So why do you suppose Saint Swithun chose us as his emissaries?

AUTUMN

I...I haven't a clue.

SISTER ANGELICA

We'll need to find sponsors. There must be grants for heat relief -- climate control fund raisers. After all, clouds are a charitable blessing, especially if they bring rain, and Swithun's famous for conjuring a storm that lasted forty days and forty nights.

AUTUMN

If your clouds keep rooms as cool as this one, you'd be a millionaire! I mean, if you could figure out how to package and sell them.

SISTER ANGELICA

Now you're talking like a fat cat tycoon instead of a charitable Christian. Such gifts are meant to be given freely, not commodified, quantified, and sold like baubles in a boutique!

(A knocking is heard and DR. MIRIAM STEIN enters followed by a two person HAZMAT TEAM wearing protective suits, masks, and carrying toxic gas detectors.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Holy Mother of God!

AUTUMN

Oh, shit...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Sorry to intrude, but I spoke with Security and they want to be sure the cloud isn't toxic, though I see it's dissipated into a...a mist.

HAZMAT ONE

(reading his detector) Two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen; no indication of toxicity. It appears to be a colorless, odorless mass of condensed water vapor -- in other words, a cloud.

HAZMAT TWO

It's perfectly safe, but what's it doing here?

AUTUMN

Sister Angelica prayed to Saint Swithun and the cloud materialized.

HAZMAT TWO

Saint who...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Swithun, the patron saint of weather.

HAZMAT TWO

Uh huh.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Thank you for coming. Sorry to have troubled you, but better to be safe than sorry as they say.

HAZMAT ONE

There's such a nice chill here, I hate to leave.

AUTUMN

So it's all right if we open the door and let the mist cool the halls?

HAZMAT TWO

Yeah, sure, though it's already leaking out on its own.

HAZMAT ONE

It's time to go; *(waving)* so long, ladies.

(The HAZMAT TEAM departs as DR. MIRIAM STEIN turns to SISTER ANGELICA.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

So did your cloud decide to settle and spread?

SISTER ANGELICA

No, I yawned, swallowed, then spewed up a crystal ball.

(SISTER ANGELICA retrieves the crystal sphere from her pocket.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Here! It generated the mist you see before you now.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

(mumbling) Incredible...

SISTER ANGELICA

It's the truth as God is my witness!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Jules...?

JULES

Yes, ma'am, I've recorded everything.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Now Sister, if you really swallowed the cloud, then that's all the more reason for a thorough physical.

SISTER ANGELICA

No thank you, Doctor. I'm totally up to snuff as they say.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Frankly, you look jaundiced and those bruises are clearly the result of a fall. You could have a sprain or fracture...

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, rubbish!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I think you're afraid of what we'll find.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ha! I'm afraid of what it will cost.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Nothing for you.

SISTER ANGELICA

Really...?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Yes, really.

SISTER ANGELICA

Not so much as a penny...?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I promise.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, all right then, but just the scan.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Follow me!

SISTER ANGELICA

Now?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Yes, now!

SISTER ANGELICA

But Autumn hasn't finished my portrait.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

She can finish it later.

SISTER ANGELICA

May I take a peek?

AUTUMN

All right but it needs work.

(AUTUMN turns her sketchpad towards the SISTER.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, my dear! Like a witch you've captured me! Look!

(SISTER ANGELICA snatches the sketch pad to show DR. MIRIAM STEIN who glances, then turns to AUTUMN.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Leave your sketch here and you can finish it after the scan. Now follow me, and keep the door ajar.

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN marches out as AUTUMN drops the sketchbook on a chair, then leads the SISTER from the room. JULES starts to follow, but lingers to pick up the sketchbook and flip through the pages as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 5

(The vapors spread and the chorus hums as JULES turns to address the jurors.)

JULES

At first the staff and patients were startled by the creeping haze cooling the corridors, sliding down stairwells and slipping into their rooms. Some patients even claimed they saw spirits drifting down from the world beyond.

(As JULES continues, SISTER ANGELICA returns to her room along with AUTUMN and DR. FLORIAN HEATH.)

JULES

Unfortunately, our feelings of wonder soon succumbed to sorrow since Sister Angelica's scan revealed...

JULES

....malignant tumors.

SISTER ANGELICA

Malignant tumors...

SISTER ANGELICA

...in my lungs.

JULES

Florian conducted the scan, and was present when Sister Angelica said she refused to be...

JULES

...cut, burned or poisoned.

SISTER ANGELICA

Cut, burned or poisoned!

SISTER ANGELICA

If those are my options, I'd prefer to pray for divine intervention.

(By now JULES has retreated to his seat in a corner.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

So you're counting on a miraculous remission?

SISTER ANGELICA

Why not?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Because there are other more reliable options, and Doctor Stein and I won't let you leave without discussing them. Frankly, it's amazing you haven't shown any symptoms -- or haven't you told us?

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, I've had some pains (*patting her chest*) here, and felt fatigued and wobbly at times, and let's not forget the heat made me faint like a smitten school girl! But now that I've been diagnosed, I'll take the time I have left on the planet to make it more habitable.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You've certainly made the hospital more habitable. In fact word's getting out. People are sneaking into the waiting rooms, and it doesn't help that there's a cloud starting to form over the roof.

SISTER ANGELICA

Really? Over the roof...?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I'm calling it a homo-genitus cloud which means it's generated from human activity, but I'd like to know what happened to the original.

(SISTER ANGELICA retrieves the sphere from her pocket.)

SISTER ANGELICA

It hardened to a crystal sphere that's cloudy inside. Now since you're the weather expert, you can tell us where to begin.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Begin what...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Conjuring clouds! Since the crystal's a cloud generator, we need to know the best place on Earth to begin the process.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Well, I...I'd have to think...

AUTUMN

Excuse me, Sister, but while you were being scanned, I did some research and the hottest places on the planet are Iran, the Sudan, Ethiopia, Libya, Israel, Tunisia, but the closest to us is Death Valley.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Actually, the best place would be the ocean. Oceans absorb ninety percent of the heat generated by greenhouse gases. In fact, one one third of all sharks, rays, and mollusks are already gone, so I'd settle your clouds over the Atlantic. *(pause)* May I hold the crystal?

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, but handle with care.

(SISTER ANGELICA hands over the orb.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It's denser and heavier than it looks. Would you mind if I took it to the lab for analysis?

SISTER ANGELICA
No.

AUTUMN
Yes!

AUTUMN
Sorry, but you can't take it out of our sight.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Why? You think I'm going to steal it?

AUTUMN
Maybe.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
That's absurd! I'm not a thief; it wouldn't even occur to me!

AUTUMN
But it's occurred to you now, hasn't it?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
You're being ridiculous!

SISTER ANGELICA
Now, now, let's not argue. *(to Florian)* I believe poor Autumn has reason to distrust the male of the species.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH returns the orb to SISTER ANGELICA.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
I assume it was a failed romance.

AUTUMN
That's none of your business! *(to Sister Angelica)* Or yours!

SISTER ANGELICA
Sorry, love. Now if we're going to drop clouds on the ocean, we'll need to rent a boat, and Doctor, you really must join us. You don't get seasick, do you?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Nope.

SISTER ANGELICA
(to Autumn) And you, love...?

AUTUMN

No, but I've only been on the Staten Island Ferry.

SISTER ANGELICA

I was in a rickety skiff with cousin Clyde, but that was ages ago. So Autumn, it looks like we're going to have to hire some sort of sea worthy vessel.

JULES

Pardon me, I...I don't mean to interrupt but I have access to a boat.

(Pause as THEY suddenly notice JULES' presence.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Oh, hi! Joel is it...?

JULES

Jules. *(to Sister Angelica)* When were you planning your excursion?

SISTER ANGELICA

The sooner the better.

AUTUMN

What kind of boat? Will we be expected to row?

JULES

No, it's motorized, and also has sails.

AUTUMN

Can it hold all four of us?

JULES

It's equipped with a salon, galley, five berths, two baths, and a state of the art navigation system.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Your boat sounds more like a yacht. Where is she docked?

JULES

At the West 79th Street Boat Basin.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH glances at his phone.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I'm checking my calendar. I'm off duty this Saturday. *(to Jules)* Is that all right?

JULES

Yes, that's fine. Sister...?

SISTER ANGELICA

I'm free! *(to Autumn)* And you, love...?

AUTUMN

I can make arrangements.

SISTER ANGELICA

Wonderful! *(singing)* Hey, ho, hey, ho! To the briny deep we go!

JULES

I'll text you with the details of where to meet, so I'll need your numbers. Just type them into my mobile.

(JULES hands his phone to DR. FLORIAN HEATH who passes it to AUTUMN who types in her number, then passes it to SISTER ANGELICA.)

JULES

I...I was wondering if we should ask Doctor Stein to join us since she's been involved from the beginning.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Good idea.

SISTER ANGELICA

Very thoughtful of you, Jules, and absolutely right.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

She's such a workhorse, I doubt if she'll come.

AUTUMN

Does your boat have a name?

JULES

The Black Swan.

SISTER ANGELICA

So she's painted black, is she?

JULES

With black sails.

AUTUMN

I assume you know how to steer?

JULES

Yes, I have a license.

(JULES' pager beeps and he draws it from his pocket and glances at the message.)

JULES

Doctor Stein needs me, so I'll see you on Saturday!

SISTER ANGELICA

Ship ahoy, sailor boy!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I should go too. *(to Sister Angelica)* We'll talk later, Sister.

SISTER ANGELICA

Bon voyage!

(As soon as JULES and DR. FLORIAN HEATH depart, AUTUMN turns to SISTER ANGELICA.)

AUTUMN

"The Black Swan" with black sails! Who ever heard of black sails -- unless it's a plague ship. What if it's an omen?

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, don't be such a worry wart. Now that they've gone, you can finish my portrait.

AUTUMN

Okay, sure.

(AUTUMN retrieves her sketchbook as SISTER ANGELICA resumes her pose.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Who would think that a mousy lad like Jules was a classy yachtsman.

AUTUMN

The yacht probably belongs to his parents. Besides, if he's rich why would he be working here?

SISTER ANGELICA

What did Doctor Stein call him? A scribe, was it...?

AUTUMN

That's right. Scribes record and keep track of medical instructions. They follow doctors so they're free to interact with patients instead of computers.

SISTER ANGELICA

But he's *not* following her. He's usually here, sitting so quietly we forget he exists.

AUTUMN

That's because he's Stein's zombie spy.

SISTER ANGELICA

Now, now, though there is something odd about him; I suppose his posh Queen's English makes him seem a bit snooty.

AUTUMN

Or sinister. He gives me the creeps.

SISTER ANGELICA

(pause) You know, dear, I've found that people I first perceive as shy, shallow, or even repulsive, are often just the opposite. Some possess such soulful depths, it's as if they lived on a higher plane.

AUTUMN

If you say so, but let's be sure he has life jackets on board.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, don't be daft! And wasn't it kind of Jules to think of inviting Doctor Stein? Why didn't we think of that?

AUTUMN

Because she's a bitch -- sorry, but it's true. Everyone says so.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, I believe we're meant to meet the people we encounter in life, which is why you really must stop being so hostile to Florian. He means well and when you first met, he gave you the look.

AUTUMN

The look...? What look?

SISTER ANGELICA

You know, the "come hither" look.

AUTUMN

Ha, ha! If you're trying to be a matchmaker, forget it. He's too conceited, and I'm finished with all men for all time, so I'm not looking -- not ever again!

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, my dear girl, we're all of us always looking for love.

AUTUMN

Not after we've lost it.

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, even so, because then we know it exists. Will you tell me what happened?

AUTUMN

No! It's over, but I haven't been assaulted or anything if that's what you're thinking.

SISTER ANGELICA

Thank heaven for that. *(pause)* I promise to take your secret to my grave.

AUTUMN

It's hardly a secret and why would you care? You're a nun for godssake!

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, but the convent had a library, and I was an avid fan of the Austen, Bronte and Binchy novels, and what makes you think we sisters haven't had longings of our own?

AUTUMN

For each other...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, well that happens.

AUTUMN

Did it happen to you?

SISTER ANGELICA

That's ancient history, and we're talking about *you*, my dear.

AUTUMN

(pause, she sighs) Well, if you must know, I was engaged to a man named Daniel. We'd even chosen a date, location, and a priest and rabbi for the wedding.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, an interfaith ceremony.

AUTUMN

My parents were thrilled because Dan's a lawyer and his father's a judge. We were living together for nearly a year. I'd been visiting my cousin in Connecticut and decided to surprise him by coming home a day early -- but he surprised me.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah! You caught Danny boy in the sack with a harlot.

AUTUMN

Worse -- with my best friend.

SISTER ANGELICA

A sordid scene, was it?

AUTUMN

They were sleeping naked, so I snapped pictures, then activated the fire alarm. It was my apartment so I told them to get dressed, vacate the premises, and never cross the threshold again!

SISTER ANGELICA

Did they try to make amends?

AUTUMN

Yes, but I changed the locks, unfriended and deleted them from my life! I even threatened to get a restraining order when Dan started hanging outside the building.

SISTER ANGELICA

What about your friend...?

AUTUMN

She knew she was dead to me so she left me alone.

SISTER ANGELICA

What did you do with the pictures?

AUTUMN

I was tempted to E-blast them to everyone I ever knew, but only showed my sister and parents. My sister actually defended him, said it was a bachelor's last fling, but my parents knew he couldn't be trusted. Anyway, I deleted the pictures since I sometimes drink too much and didn't want to risk doing something I'd regret.

SISTER ANGELICA

Very wise, love. So how long has it been since the breakup?

AUTUMN

Five months, one week, and two days.

SISTER ANGELICA

Still bitter, eh? Still holding a grudge? *(pause)* Not that I blame you. I'd feel the same though it wouldn't be the best of me. As Christians we should resist the urge for vengeance when we've been betrayed.

AUTUMN

(pause, she sighs) My therapist prescribed an antidepressant and suggested volunteering at a hospital. I've been here nearly three weeks and gone four whole days without thinking of hiring an assassin.

SISTER ANGELICA

Good, and now you can think about our forthcoming voyage.

AUTUMN

I checked the forecast and there's no respite from the heat. *(checking her watch)* I'd better go. I'm scheduled to distribute dinners, then I'm going home to feed my cat if she's still alive. My apartment's such a hot box, it's impossible to sleep.

SISTER ANGELICA

Try praying the rosary. Now do you think you can fetch me at the convent on Saturday?

AUTUMN

Sure. *(flaunting the sketch)* There! I'm finished!

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, my dear, it's grand! Can you print me some copies to send to the boys?

AUTUMN

Of course.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, bless you, bless you!

(SISTER ANGELICA embraces AUTUMN as lights dim to black.)

SCENE 6

(JULES appears and continues testifying.)

JULES

I can report the conversation between Autumn and Sister Angelica because I'd attached a minicam to a lamp in the sister's room. I was hoping for more evidence of clouds forming from the crystal sphere, though hearing how I was perceived made me regret invading their privacy. In any case, Saturday was yet another scorching record breaker, but we all managed to board The Black Swan on time.

(Squawking seagulls are heard, then AUTUMN, SISTER ANGELICA, DR. MIRIAM STEIN and DR. FLORIAN HEATH, toting binoculars, gather in the parlor of the yacht while JULES continues speaking.)

JULES

After leaving the harbor, I set the helm on navigation-autopilot following a pre-charted collision avoidance course. The interior rooms were cooled by the ship's generator, and we glided in comfort with Florian calculating the ideal locations for launching clouds. I'd brought binoculars for everyone and stocked up on sandwiches, iced tea, and (*turning to the guests*) champagne anyone?

(JULES has entered the parlor holding glasses and a bottle of champagne.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Should we be drinking on a mission this speculative?

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, ye of little faith.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

That's right, Sister. I'm a rabid card carrying atheist, and if I hadn't seen your cloud with my own eyes, I'd say you were a candidate for Bellevue. Trust me, someday someone will discover a sound scientific explanation which won't involve praying to Saint whats-his-name.

SISTER ANGELICA

Swithun! Yet here you are, Doctor, and you must admit it's lovely -- the five of us drifting down the mighty Hudson. Surely one drink can't hurt?

(JULES pours and passes glasses of champagne.)

AUTUMN

I love champagne.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I'm game!

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

It's three o'clock!

AUTUMN

It's Saturday!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Oh, lighten up, Doc, join the party!

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, let us drink our wine with joyful hearts: Ecclesiastes.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Well,...oh, all right.

SISTER ANGELICA

(lifting her glass) Here's to Saint Swithun!

(THEY lift their glasses and drink.)

AUTUMN

Swithun!

SISTER ANGELICA

Delicious!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Jules, is this boat really yours?

JULES

Yes, I inherited it when my parents passed away.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Not at sea I hope.

JULES

No, in traffic. My father thought he could adjust to driving in right lanes at night -- after three martinis.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, you poor lad. So is this where you live?

JULES

Only lately because of the heat. I usually stay in my apartment.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

So Jules, are you rich?

AUTUMN

(mumbling) God, you're so rude!

JULES

My father was a partner in a private equity firm in London with offices in New York, so he left me...comfortable.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

How comfortable?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Really Florian, that's none of our business.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right, sorry, just curious, aren't you? After all, he's *your* scribe.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

That's a strictly professional relationship.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

But you're a guest on his boat.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Yes, and I'll continue to respect his privacy.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, if I may inquire: do you have any brothers or sisters?

JULES

No, just me.

SISTER ANGELICA

How old were you when your parents passed?

JULES

Twenty-three -- nearly five years ago when I was at Cambridge. After they'd gone, I was free to drop out, stay in New York, and do what I want.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

And you wanted to become a scribe...? Surely you had other options.

JULES

I took the course, passed the test, and it's helping me with research -- for my book.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, so you're an author!

AUTUMN

What kind of book?

JULES

A mystery. I had intended for my latest to take place in an American hospital, and wanted to make the setting authentic.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

So have your books been published?

JULES

Yes, under the name of Adrian Banes.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, a nom de plume!

AUTUMN

I love mysteries, so maybe I've read one of yours.

JULES

They feature a detective with a clubbed foot named Horace Boggs.

AUTUMN

Sorry, it doesn't ring a bell.

JULES

Well, they're not very popular. Even my publisher calls them "beach reads" which means he thinks they're trite, formulaic, and forgettable.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

The agency's background check only listed your academic records and that you had a proper work visa. If I'd known you were a published author, I wouldn't have hired you, though your grammar and spelling are exemplary. In fact, I was glad you had a low profile since I assumed you wouldn't be checking your social media status every two minutes like my last scribe. She lasted three days, though it sounds like you won't last long either.

JULES

Actually, I've enjoyed being your scribe. I've learned a great deal, and it helps structure my days -- gives me someplace to go.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Just don't use my patients as fodder for your fiction. I'm sure you know that confidentiality applies to scribes.

JULES

Of course, I'd never disclose their names. Besides, my books all take place in England after the Second World War, so most of your diagnostic tools weren't even invented. To be honest, I really just wanted to see what a doctor's life was like.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Ha! Trust me, it's nothing like it was then. In fact, I can't see how a doctor in the twenty-first century can possibly be of any use to you.

JULES

I agree, which is why I've decided to write a contemporary novel instead, something more ambitious with a plot that isn't contrived but has surprises, and perhaps even...enchantment.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah! So are you writing about the cloud...?

JULES

Well, yes. I was hoping you wouldn't mind.

SISTER ANGELICA

Not at all, I'm delighted!

JULES

I'd never witnessed anything so beautifully incongruous. *(pause)* When Doctor Stein suggested it might be toxic, I held my breath, but sensed it was benign -- probably because of my mother. We used to stand on the upper deck and play cloud morphing, comparing their shapes to animals or whatever came to mind.

SISTER ANGELICA

And now there's not a cloud to be seen, but isn't it grand to be out here at sea? *(to Miriam)* Now aren't you glad you came?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

(pause) Yes. At first I declined Jules' invitation, but later felt an urge to escape, to be somewhere I wouldn't be on constant call. The Chief even encouraged me, told me a day at sea would help keep me grounded, ha! And being a sadistic prick, he also reminded me that I'm not as indispensable as I think I am.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

He said that?! Ha, ha! Well, he's wrong, and you do have a right to some fun, Miriam.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH pours more champagne into Doctor Stein's glass and his own.)

AUTUMN

This novel of yours -- will there be a scribe in it?

JULES

Yes, and doctors, nurses, and a monk.

SISTER ANGELICA

What?! A monk?! Oh, Jules, love, please reconsider! There are plenty of books full of monks, priests and popes! The world needs novels with nuns -- brilliant, benevolent sisters bound by vows of poverty, chastity and compassion.

JULES

All right, I'll reconsider, but like I said, the characters aren't like any of you, and even the cloud will be metaphorical, serving as an omen -- before the Climatic Apocalypse.

SISTER ANGELICA

Or The Rapture as in the epistle to the Thessalonians: "After The Chaos comes The Rapture and everyone living will be carried on a cloud to the Lord God in heaven."

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Now there's an idea: clouds as a mode of transportation, ha, ha! Climatologists have tried to tame them with seeding, but it's too expensive and doesn't provide enough precipitation to stop droughts.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, how I've missed seeing clouds! The sun burns them out with impunity.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right, especially lower clouds like yours. They're nature's sunshades and if we had more they could slow down global warming, but clouds are hard to track.

SISTER ANGELICA

So they're shifty, are they?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Oh, yeah, and unique. Think about it: all clear days are exactly the same, but every cloudy day is cloudy in its own special way.

SISTER ANGELICA

You should put that in your novel, Jules!

AUTUMN

Have you started writing yet?

JULES

I've written four chapters and so far it seems to be more about a doctor who finally cares about something beside his own reputation.

SISTER ANGELICA

Is the doctor an atheist like Doctor Stein.

JULES

He's a Russian born cardiologist who doesn't believe in god, saints, angels or even that the cloud exists. He thinks he might have been drugged and hallucinating or that it's a hologram projected by someone who wants to harm him.

SISTER ANGELICA

(pause) Is there a volunteer like Autumn?

JULES

No, but there's a nurse who's brilliant, beautiful, and attracted to the scribe.

AUTUMN

Yeah, right.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Of course she is, ha, ha!

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, so there'll be a romance.

JULES

Not really. The scribe avoids her because he knows she's been betrayed and hates men, so she'd reject him in the end. The book is really going to be about the human hunger for connections with some characters succeeding while others fail, so the cloud is more than an omen. It represents a lack of clarity, the characters' limited vision, their failure to see each other's humanity.

SISTER ANGELICA

That's because they're trapped by the distractions of the material world.

JULES

And the digitized world.

AUTUMN

Except for the holier-than-thou scribe. You should make him a techie who hacks patients' records, screws up their meds, and wreaks chaos.

JULES

He's not that interesting. In fact, he's so bland people keep forgetting his name and feel free to say anything in front of him -- except he remembers everything.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

If people are seeing clouds, they'll think they have cataracts, so your doctor should be an ophthalmologist instead of a cardiologist -- not that I care. I stopped reading fiction years ago; novels seem frivolous compared to the traumas I witness every day. Why should I care about imaginary people living imaginary lives in stories that are rarely properly resolved.

JULES

But some stories can't be resolved; some lives are illogical and inexplicable to the bitter end -- which is why people like mysteries. All the loose ends tend to be tied up neatly by shrewd detectives.

AUTUMN

Will your novel include a weather wonk like Florian?

JULES

Yes, but he's a she, a pediatrician from Havana.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Havana?! If she's anything like me, she needs to be from a more temperate climate like Paris, Madrid, or Vienna.

SISTER ANGELICA

Whatever you do, you must make the cloud a blessing, something that helps heal the planet.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You know, Sister, not everyone thought your cloud was a blessing. When it was drifting through the hospital, one of my patients thought he was being gassed, that we were euthanizing him.

AUTUMN

(*to Florian*) I heard a patient in the I C U thought the cloud was a ghost, so maybe yours could be possessed.

JULES

I'm not writing a horror story.

AUTUMN

Why not? People love a good horror story.

JULES

Then feel free to write one yourself.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

There's nothing wrong with horror stories, but if you're going to end with a climatic apocalypse, then you should be writing science fiction.

JULES

That's not my style. I prefer literary classics full of impassioned idealists who speak in memorable sentences.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You mean like Moby Dick?

JULES

Well, yes, though I suppose that sounds pretentious.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

At least you're ambitious -- just keep me out of it.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

But you'd be the most interesting character. I mean, you seem aloof and cynical, but you're respected as a brilliant diagnostician, the best internist in the city, and you even wield a knife when you're needed. In fact, if you ever get over your miserable divorce, I predict you'd have plenty of offers.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Offers...?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Dates.

SISTER ANGELICA

And will you be one of them?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(mumbling) Maybe.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, stop!

AUTUMN

Ha, ha!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Look, what I meant was that I don't think writers can invent characters as complex and compelling as the real people they're based on.

JULES

Then you haven't read the right books.

AUTUMN

You know, Jules, you're nothing like you seem at the hospital. It's as if the sea air makes you more confident, more...assertive.

SISTER ANGELICA

My Mam would say he's hoity-toity, but without the flash and swagger.

AUTUMN

But writers need "swagger" to win awards and sign books while their loyal readers stand in lines.

JULES

I just want them to turn the page.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, fess up, Jules, you want more than that.

JULES

Well, yes, I suppose I'd also like to break their hearts.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ha, ha! That's better!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right.

AUTUMN

Break their hearts and curdle their blood?

JULES

No, that's *your* novel; mine will make them laugh out loud and weep copious tears.

AUTUMN

Oh, really?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Humph!

SISTER ANGELICA

That's the ticket, ha, ha!

JULES

I want to transport them, bedazzle and delight them; make them feel lost then found, then compelled to read the book all over again.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

After buying copies for all their friends.

JULES

That's right.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Yes! Ha, ha!

(A beeper is heard from one of Florian's weather instruments.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Whoa! Okay, Sister, we're six miles out now. *(to Jules)* I keep wondering if we should be warning the Coast Guard, though I realize we don't know what's going to happen -- if anything.

JULES

If everyone's ready, we can go to the upper deck, or stay here and open the doors.

SISTER ANGELICA

Let's stay here where it's nice and cool, and Florian can take pictures.

(JULES steps forward, opening a door, as the wind blows and THEY gather around SISTER ANGELICA who draws the orb from her pocket.)

SISTER ANGELICA

(to Autumn) Are we ready...?

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH adjusts his phone/camera as SISTER ANGELICA holds the crystal sphere in her palm. AUTUMN joins her and together THEY blow to the sound of choral humming as a vapor forms, thickens, and surrounds them.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It appears to be moving out and spreading itself over the water.

SISTER ANGELICA

How marvelous.

AUTUMN

Awesome...

JULES

It's starting to rise.

(THEY crane their necks, gazing upwards as the sky dims.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It's darkening, turning into a hefty cumulonimbus.

SISTER ANGELICA

Whenever Granny Boyle saw such a cloud, she'd say "Here comes the wet breath of Eire" as if the land itself had lungs and could breathe.

(Rain sounds are heard.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

It looks like the breath's turning into a sneeze.

SISTER ANGELICA

We could use a good rain.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

But not a monsoon.

(Intense rain is heard followed by whistling winds and loud cracks of thunder!)

AUTUMN
Maybe we should head back..?

SISTER ANGELICA
I'm feeling a bit queasy...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Jules, turn the boat around!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Oh, Jesus...

(Wild whirlwinds resound as THE PASSENGERS start swaying, stumbling, and shouting.)

AUTUMN
Oh God...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Whooooaaa...

SISTER ANGELICA
Bloody hell!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
(*shouting*) For chrissake, turn back!

(Lightning strikes! The screaming PASSENGERS are tossed about, thrown together, then apart, until THEY fall, crashing unconscious to the floor as darkness descends.)

SCENE 7

(Sunlight reveals JULES stepping forward to address the jurors.)

JULES
When the storm ceased, I staggered to my feet, reversed our course, then stared out the window to observe the cloud elongating itself, skimming the surface of the water, encircling us like a mystical halo but growing darker, denser.

(As JULES continues, the OTHERS slowly recover.)

JULES
We were shaken up and to make things worse, (*to the passengers*) we were blown off course.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
But we're headed home, right...?

JULES
Yes.

AUTUMN
(*mumbling*) Thank Christ.

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, that was bracing!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Are you all right, Sister?

SISTER ANGELICA

Still finding my sea legs.

AUTUMN

What happened to the cloud?

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH peers through his binoculars.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It appears to have turned into an Arcus Volutus, that's a roll cloud with a tunnel shape caused by cool air from the storm cloud's downdraft.

(JULES, DR. MIRIAM STEIN, AUTUMN, and SISTER ANGELICA focus their binoculars.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Our bright white swansdown of a cloud's has spawned a long leaden snake.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

But what if it's a smart snake? It could be absorbing chemicals like acid rain, then taking them away.

AUTUMN

Taking them where?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

It's too soon to tell, but it's moving quickly, leaving a wake.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

As long as it doesn't take us with it.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH'S phone beeps and he glances down.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hey, the cloud's been spotted. It's being reported and tracked by weather drones. They're calling it a funnel fog.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

What if they trace it to this boat? *(to Jules)* I assume The Black Swan is legally registered?

JULES

Yes, and it's rarely used for smuggling.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Ha, ha!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

That's not funny!

AUTUMN

It's moving so fast I can hardly see it anymore.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(swiping his phone) It looks like it's headed towards Bermuda; I'll keep track.

SISTER ANGELICA

Should we follow it?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Are you nuts?!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Not a good idea.

SISTER ANGELICA

Then should we conjure another cloud?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

No!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You're joking, right?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Honestly, Sister, do you really want to risk another storm?!

AUTUMN

(still gazing through her binoculars) Oh, God! There's someone out there!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Where?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Show me!

AUTUMN

(pointing) Look to the right.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, yes, I see...

SISTER ANGELICA

He's waving!

AUTUMN

He's holding on to something...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Some sort of plank...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Jules, have you got a rope?!

JULES

I'm getting it now!

SISTER ANGELICA

Hurry, he's sinking!

(JULES opens a box, retrieves a rope, and tosses it out to sea.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Good, he's reaching...

AUTUMN

(pause) He's got it! He's got a grip!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Let's pull him in. One, two, three, pull!

(JULES, AUTUMN, and DR. FLORIAN HEATH tug on the rope, dragging a small, sopping SEA CREATURE who flops onto the boat and collapses. HE/SHE is sunburned, has long white hair, a scraggly beard, voluptuous breasts, webbed feet, and is wearing tattered rags. DOCTORS. MIRIAM STEIN and FLORIAN HEATH squat beside the SEA CREATURE.)

SISTER ANGELICA

(mumbling) Good God Almighty.

JULES

I'll get the first aid kit!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Step back! His breathing's shallow, pulse erratic, skin hot.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You sure he's not a she?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I'm going by the beard.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

But those breasts...

AUTUMN

Look at the feet!

SISTER ANGELICA

Have you ever seen the like?

AUTUMN

On ducks!

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN draws back the SEA CREATURE'S hair.)

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

He has what appears to be small vertical slits...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Gills...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Will you look at the wee snails in his beard.

(JULES returns with the first aid kit and hands DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN a digital thermometer.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

His core temp's a hundred and five degrees. *(to Jules)* Do you have a tub?

JULES

There's a tub off the master suite; we could add ice from the fridge.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Let's cool him off, then to bed.

SISTER ANGELICA

He'll need pajamas.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Autumn, start filling the tub with ice!

AUTUMN

Aye, aye, Doctor!

(AUTUMN salutes then dashes off.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Jules, help me carry him. Ready? One, two three!

SISTER ANGELICA

Heave ho!

(JULES and DR. FLORIAN HEATH lift the SEA CREATURE and depart, followed by DR. MIRIAM TEIN, leaving SISTER ANGELICA alone to to pray.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Holy Mother of Mercy, please help us heal the maladies of this wretched creature whose destiny brought him to The Black Swan and the blessings of modern medicine.

(Lights dim to black.)

SCENE 8

(JULES returns to the yacht parlor to address the jurors while SISTER ANGELICA is frozen in prayer.)

JULES

After his temperature returned to normal, his skin took on a clammy sheen. When the doctors stripped him, we saw he possessed the phallus of a man and the breasts and vulva of a woman. Florian took pictures and we all agreed to employ male pronouns because of the beard. I should mention that when we tucked him in bed, we noticed his back was encrusted with miniature (*turning to Sister Angelica*) barnacles...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Barnacles!? Like on the hull of a ship?

JULES

Yeah.

SISTER ANGELICA

Good Lord. Well, we must regard the poor soul with pity. (*pause*) So tell me, Jules, are you sorry you offered the loan of your boat?

JULES

No, not at all.

SISTER ANGELICA

So you didn't mind the deluge and taking on another passenger?

JULES

No, the storm was unexpected, but I didn't mind being thrown off course. In fact, I secretly wished it.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, did you now? And why is that?

JULES

If we're lost, then I'd have your company a little longer. Unfortunately, the navigation system's too dependable to be lost for long.

ANGELICA

I take it you don't have many friends.

JULES

Not here, though I had a few at Cambridge.

SISTER ANGELICA

I sensed that you were a lonesome sort.

JULES

Really...? Do I seem pathetic?

SISTER ANGELICA

Only a bit melancholy, but I'm the pot calling the kettle. After all, I abandoned my brothers who mourned my loss as I've mourned losing them.

JULES

Well, I admire you for leaving, for daring to claim your right to a better life that allowed you to use your talents. You don't seriously regret having left...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, no, it's been a great adventure, and this voyage a very special chapter. I only hope we all stay friends forever, and by the by, Jules, feel free to use me in your novel. Unlike Doctor Stein, I don't wish to be forgotten, and like you, I love to read. In fact, I'd rather starve than live without the nourishment of good book -- that and the sacred songs and rituals of the Mass.

(AUTUMN, DR. FLORIAN HEATH, AND DOCTOR MIRIAM STEIN have entered to join them.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Well, this is another first for me: I've never encountered anyone I would remotely consider amphibious.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, but his face: he's the image of Saint Swithun!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I hope you're not suggesting...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, no, just that he bears an uncanny resemblance to the statue at Winchester.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Then so does every old fisherman. They all look like The Ancient Mariner.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, yes like the poem: "Water, water everywhere, / And all the boards did shrink; / Water, water everywhere, / And not a drop to drink!"

JULES

"The very deep did rot -- Oh, Christ, / That ever this should be, / Yet slimy things did crawl with legs..."

JULES

...Upon the slimy sea."

SISTER ANGELICA

Upon the slimy sea!

SISTER ANGELICA

(applauding) Bravo, Jules!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Very nice, but I'd describe our guest as an elderly hermaphrodite or intersexual with syndactyl toes, keratosis pilaris, and paired external respiratory organs attached beneath his ears. Jules, you should be transcribing this.

(JULES retrieves his laptop and starts typing.)

JULES

(mumbling) Intersexual with syndactyl toes, keratosis pilaris, paired external respiratory organs...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Add that he's severely sunburned, dehydrated, and a likely victim of endocrine disrupting chemicals, usually from the first three weeks of gestation. He's sleeping soundly, and may not regain consciousness, but one of us should stay with him in case he wakes up.

(Pause as THEY seem reluctant to volunteer.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Why don't I go? I'll pray for him, and if necessary, perform Last Rites.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Thanks, Sister.

(SISTER ANGELICA walks off as JULES finishes typing.)

JULES

I should report our rescue to the Coast Guard.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Fine, but spare them the details.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(gazing at his phone) Don't bother; they've got their hands full. Apparently several boats in close proximity have collided after being engulfed by a dense fog caused by an expansion of the funnel cloud. Check out the wreckage.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH displays his screen.)

AUTUMN

Oh, God...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I'll request an ambulance meet us at the marina.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right, and I'll forward pictures to prepare the staff on call.

(The DOCTORS turn aside to dictate their messages as AUTUMN approaches JULES.)

AUTUMN

Jules, is there any more champagne?

JULES

Sure.

(JULES opens his refrigerator, pulls out a fresh bottle of champagne and pours two glasses.)

AUTUMN

So is this a new plot twist for your novel? Of course, it might end in tragedy. He doesn't look well and did you check out his teeth -- like Dracula! If he recovers, he should see a dentist.

JULES

And a dermatologist.

AUTUMN

He could get hormonal treatments for whatever sex he settles on -- unless he wants to stay the way he is. I can't imagine what it must be like, though I suppose he could have partners of either sex.

JULES

Does that appeal to you?

AUTUMN

No, nothing appeals to me -- nothing and nobody.

JULES

I'm sorry to hear that. You're too young and talented to be bitter.

AUTUMN

How would you know? You haven't seen my work.

JULES

Well, actually, I have; I looked through your sketchbook when you left it in the Sister's room. Your drawings of the patients are so original and...moving. You capture them in just a few wild strokes of your pen. It's as if you've discovered a whole new style of portraiture.

AUTUMN

Gee, thanks. I plan to combine all the sketches into a painted mural called Solar Survival. Don't tell Doctor Stein, but I sketched her as well, and I'd like to sketch her scribe -- if you don't mind.

JULES

No, I...I don't. Will you need me to pose?

AUTUMN

Yes, that would help.

JULES

Where are you planning to paint the mural?

AUTUMN

I found a wall in the second floor lobby that I'm going to propose as a possible sight -- once I have enough preliminary sketches to show the appropriate people.

JULES

Will you include our new passenger?

AUTUMN

Maybe if I can capture his likeness. I mean, it's hard to tell if he's Asian, African, Mexican, or European.

JULES

Or everything and anything in between.

(The DOCTORS approach, having overheard Jules and Autumn. DR. FLORIAN HEATH pours more champagne for them both.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

So Jules, will our new passenger be grist for your mill? You could make him a multiracial omnisexual who feeds on creatures drowned in the sea -- which is why he needs those shark teeth.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You have a sick mind, Florian.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Yeah, but think about it: what if he and his ancestors lived in the ocean for decades, but now that it's polluted, he has to swim to the surface to breathe. It makes perfect sense since warmer temperatures leech oxygen from the oceans, and they become more acidic. Our passenger could be the result of mutations caused by humans poisoning the sea.

JULES

You're making him seem more metaphorical than real.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

But since he's real, we should approach him with respect. God knows what will happen once they see him at the hospital.

AUTUMN

He'll definitely attract attention.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Like some carnival freak, so we should protect him, keep him from being exploited.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Good thinking, Doctor. I like you more and more.

AUTUMN

About your book, Jules: you should concentrate on clouds. There's plenty of books about mermaids and sea monsters, but a cloud turning into a fog that leaves a wake that gives birth to a new species -- now that's cool. You could call it The Phantom Fog.

JULES

I was thinking of something like The Swan Clouds of Swithun.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

That's too soft and sentimental, and nobody knows who Swithun is. What about Night of the Nimbus or Cumulus Chaos...?

JULES

You should write your own book!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Ha, ha! That's telling her Jules.

AUTUMN

Why don't we all write the book together? Each of us could write a chapter from our own points of view.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Never mind Jules' book. We have a patient to deal with, and we haven't even considered what will happen if he wakes up.

AUTUMN

He seems too weak to be violent.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I suggest we try keeping our conflicted feelings to ourselves. If we manifest fear, it could elevate his cortisol and adrenaline levels -- not to mention our own.

AUTUMN

Don't you wonder why we haven't already heard of him? How has he escaped being discovered and exposed on the Internet?

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Maybe he's been forcefully isolated or preferred seclusion. Can you blame him?

JULES

Somehow he's managed to adapt and survive; for all we know there might be more like him.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(gazing at his phone) Hey, the cloud's being telecast and already has a following.

AUTUMN

The cloud has a following?

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Sure, among weather wonks. Lots of people watch the weather and some even take online courses to become certified meteorologists.

(SISTER ANGELICA enters the living area.)

SISTER ANGELICA

I think he's rousing himself! *(pause)* I was plucking the snails from his beard when he opened then closed his eyes and started making sounds -- such sounds! *(clasping her breast)* Oh, Lord...

AUTUMN

Are you all right, Sister...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Well, truth be told and God forgive me -- oh, never mind.

AUTUMN

What...?

JULES

What's wrong?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Speak up!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You're among friends, Sister.

SISTER ANGELICA

I...I don't know how to say this...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Oh, for gods sake!

AUTUMN
Please tell us.

SISTER ANGELICA

You'll think I'm daft, but I...I felt something coming off him, something ghastly and I don't mean the stink. It's how my Pa was after too many pints; it's the kind of despair that makes men mad and you can see it in their watery eyes. *(she sighs)* As a Christian, I strive to see the Lord's presence in every person and try not to judge, so I kept repeating, "You are loved, you are beautiful; you are loved, you are beautiful," and soon my revulsion turned to sorrow, but then the sorrow turned to an impulse, an urge to throw us both in the sea and end it all. *(she sighs)* I'd never felt so bereft of hope...

AUTUMN

Oh, Sister, I...I'm so sorry.

(AUTUMN embraces SISTER ANGELICA as lights dim and THEY freeze in time.)

SCENE 9

(JULES steps forward to continue his testimony as the OTHERS seat themselves.)

JULES

We were all moved by Sister Angelica whose cloud had changed our lives, and watching Autumn comfort her made me grateful for our passenger's presence -- until he entered the room.

(The SEA CREATURE enters wearing Jules' plaid pajamas, making musical sounds. JULES, AUTUMN, SISTER ANGELICA and the DOCTORS stare in awe.)

SEA CREATURE

Ahhhhhhhoooooooooolllaaaaaa...

AUTUMN
(pause) Hello there, nice P Js.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
(stifling a nervous laugh) Ha, ha, ha...

SISTER ANGELICA

You certainly have an impressive vocal range.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Jules, get some water would you?

(Pause as JULES retrieves a bottle of water and hands it to the SEA CREATURE who drinks greedily. Then HE/SHE spies the champagne bottle and swills it down.)

AUTUMN
Oh, shit...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
That can't be good.

JULES
Maybe he's hungry; I'll get some sandwiches.

(JULES leaves for the galley.)

AUTUMN
Hello, do you speak English? *(pause)* Habla usted Ingles? *(pause)* Parlez vous Anglais?

SEA CREATURE
Ohhhhhhhhaahhhhhhhh....

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Heatstroke can cause aphasia.

SISTER ANGELICA
Look at those eyes: black as pitch.

(AUTUMN approaches the SEA CREATURE.)

AUTUMN
My name is Autumn. *(pointing to herself)* Autumn.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
(pointing to himself) I'm Florian. *(to Dr. Miriam Heath)* Your turn.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
(pointing to herself) I'm...Miriam.

SISTER ANGELICA
(pointing to herself) I'm Sister Angelica -- Angelica.

(JULES returns with a platter of sandwiches.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
(pointing) And he's Jules.

SEA CREATURE

Juuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu...

(The SEA CREATURE snatches the platter then scurries to the side to gobble the sandwiches.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Apparently the poor guy's starving, but I wonder if he understands a word we're saying?

(The SEA CREATURE rejoins the group, approaching AUTUMN.)

SEA CREATURE

Muuuuuuuuuuuummmm...

AUTUMN

Hello again. Do you have a name?

SEA CREATURE

Paaaaannnnnnnnnn...

AUTUMN

Pan...? Is Pan your name?

SEA CREATURE

Pannnnnnnnnnnn...

JULES

(pause) Pan would make sense. "Pan" is from the Greek meaning many forms.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Right, and he's anatomically pansexual.

AUTUMN

Pan it is then!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

What if I show him a pictorial map? Maybe he can point to where he's from.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH swipes his iPad and approaches the SEA CREATURE.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You were clinging to a wooden board which we assume came from a boat. Nod if you understand. *(pause, no response)* You were found in the wake of a funnel fog. *(pause as he swipes)* Apparently it's now off the coast of Cuba headed towards the Caribbean and is being tracked by weather cams.

(The SEA CREATURE smacks the screen then backs away.)

SEA CREATURE

Naaaahhhhhhhllaaaaa....

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Sorry. *(mumbling)* This isn't working.

AUTUMN

Maybe since he's singing to us, we should try singing to him...?

SISTER ANGELICA

Now there's an idea, "Music soothes the savage beast."

JULES

Actually it's "the savage breast" from a play by Congreve.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(mumbling) Christ, Jules...

SISTER ANGELICA

Good to know.

SISTER ANGELICA

(to Autumn) Now let's sing one of our hymns, shall we? You know Dona Nobis Pacem.

(SISTER ANGELICA starts the song and AUTUMN joins her singing in harmony. DR. STEIN, DR. FLORIAN HEATH and JULES sing as well.)

SISTER ANGELICA

*Dona Nobis Pacem, Pacem
Dona Nobis Pacem...*

SISTER ANGELICA and AUTUMN

*Dona Nobis Pacem
Dona Nobis Pacem
Dona Nobis Pacem
Dona Nobis Pacem*

(Now THEY sing the song as a round with SISTER ANGELICA conducting and the SEA CREATURE joining in with trilling sounds.)

SISTER ANGELICA, DR. FLORIAN HEATH, JULES

Dona Nobis Pacem, Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem...

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem...

AUTUMN and DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem

Dona Nobis Pacem

SISTER ANGELICA

That was lovely; you should all join my choir!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

(to Miriam) I must say, you're full of surprises.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

So are you.

(The SEA CREATURE approaches AUTUMN and grasps her hand.)

AUTUMN

Oh, my God.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Try to stay calm.

(The SEA CREATURE strokes AUTUMN'S hair.)

AUTUMN

This is getting weird.

SISTER ANGELICA

He's smitten.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Relax, Autumn, let's just see what happens.

AUTUMN

(mumbling) Easy for you to say.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Take a deep breath. Remember, he may be disoriented, so be gentle.

(The SEA CREATURE strokes AUTUMN'S face, then her arms and breasts as SHE shudders.)

AUTUMN

(mumbling) His breath is...fishy. What if he bites?

(JULES approaches the SEA CREATURE.)

JULES

Leave her alone.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Shush! Back off, Jules.

(JULES steps back as the SEA CREATURE kisses AUTUMN lightly on the lips and SHE backs away.)

AUTUMN

What salty lips you have.

(The SEA CREATURE kisses her again more passionately, but sensing her revulsion, HE/SHE pushes AUTUMN away and shuffles towards JULES, grasping his hand.)

JULES

Oh, geeze...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hang in there, Jules.

JULES

His hand feels rough, calloused.

(The SEA CREATURE gently strokes JULES' face.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Perhaps he's thanking you, expressing gratitude. Try to smile for godssake.

(JULES grins.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Not like the Cheshire cat! Be sincere, and let's try talking *to* him, not *about* him.

JULES

Hello, welcome aboard The Black Swan.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

That's better.

SEA CREATURE

(backing away) Wwwwiiiiieeeee...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I'm afraid he senses your anxiety.

(The SEA CREATURE sidles to DR. MIRIAM STEIN, grasping her hand.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Well, hello there, I can see you're feeling better.

(The SEA CREATURE pats her on the head.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

He seems to be trying to comfort you.

JULES

He senses her anxiety.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Touché. *(pause)* Pan, in the unlikely even that you understand English, then you should know we're headed to a hospital in New York City where they'll treat you for sunburn and a possible stroke.

SEA CREATURE

Stroooooooooooooooooo...

(The SEA CREATURE turns away and shuffles to DR. FLORIAN HEATH, grasping his hand.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Your turn, Florian!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Oh, yeah. *(pause)* So how's life, old buddy?

(The SEA CREATURE snarls and grasps Florian's ear.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hey, I wish you wouldn't do that.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Don't resist. He seems to find your ear fascinating.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Ouch! What the hell! That hurts!

SEA CREATURE

Fiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii...

(The SEA CREATURE releases the ear and moves on to SISTER ANGELICA, clasping her shoulders, then embracing her.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh my, we're getting cozy, aren't we?

SEA CREATURE

Weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Relax, Sister, he likes you; he's actually smiling.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, Lord, he's got his hand on my backside! Now he's in my pocket!

(The SEA CREATURE snatches the crystal orb from the Sister's pocket, scurries aside, then holds it up to the light, staring with fascination.)

AUTUMN

Oh, God, oh, no...

SISTER ANGELICA

Now you be careful with that! It's not a toy!

(The SEA CREATURE dashes about the yacht, tossing the orb in the air, followed by AUTUMN and SISTER ANGELICA.)

SISTER ANGELICA

For God's sake, don't drop it!

AUTUMN

Somebody stop him!!

SISTER ANGELICA

(reaching) Give it back this instant!

JULES

Should I tackle him?

AUTUMN

No!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

No! Don't!

(The SEA CREATURE hurls the orb high in the air.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Catch it!

(AUTUMN, JULES, and DR. FLORIAN HEATH attempt to catch the orb but crash into each other as the orb falls to the floor with a thud! AUTUMN dashes to pick it up.)

AUTUMN

Oh, damn! It's cracked! It's broken!

(SISTER ANGELICA grasps the SEA CREATURE by the shoulders.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Now look what you've done, you beastly devil!

(The SEA CREATURE wiggles free then grasps SISTER ANGELICA'S hand and drags her towards the edge of the boat.)

SEA CREATURE

Yaaaaaaaweeeeee...

SISTER ANGELICA

Wait! Where are we going?!

AUTUMN

Let go of her!

SISTER ANGELICA

Stop! Stop! I'm not a swimmer! Oh, Lord, oh, no.... Hellllp!

(JULES leaps up and grasps the SISTERS' other hand.)

JULES

Hold on, I've got you!

SISTER ANGELICA

Holy Mother of God!

(JULES pulls one way as the SEA CREATURE pulls the other, then FLORIAN clasps the SEA CREATURE by the waist, wrenching HIM/HER away from the SISTER. The SEA CREATURE shrieks, then attacks JULES knocking him down.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, Florian, you're bleeding.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I'm fine!

(The SEA CREATURE continues pounding JULES who punches back causing the SEA CREATURE to fall!)

JULES

Oh, no, oh, God, what have I done?

SEA CREATURE

(*moaning*) Uhhhhhohhhhhhhh...

AUTUMN

Sister, are you all right?

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes, yes, never mind me!

(SISTER ANGELICA stoops down to whisper to the SEA CREATURE.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Sorry, but I'm not at home in the briny deep! (*pause*) Oh, no, oh, Lord, he's not breathing!

DR. MIRIAMSTEIN

Step aside!

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN kneels, placing her fingers on the SEA CREATURE'S neck.)

DR. MIRIAMSTEIN

No pulse.

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN performs CPR rapidly pressing on HIS/HER chest.)

JULES

Oh please, let him live!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Here, let me!

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN steps aside as DR. FLORIAN HEATH kneels and pushes on the SEA CREATURE'S chest, pumping frantically as SISTER ANGELICA prays.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Good, keep going, keep going!

SISTER ANGELICA
(mumbling) Holy Mother of God, have mercy...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
(overlapping Sister Angelica) Damn! Come on, come back!

(After a few moments, DR. FLORIAN HEATH ceases pumping with a sigh.)

AUTUMN
Don't stop! Keep trying!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
I'm sorry, but he's gone.

JULES
(pause) I killed him.

SISTER ANGELICA
(mumbling) I killed him.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN
Nonsense, he fell!

JULES
Because I punched him!

SISTER ANGELICA
I cursed him.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
(to Jules) Easy man, he was out of control.

JULES
So was I!

SISTER ANGELICA
To think the last face he saw was mine, full of fear and loathing instead of love. *(pause, she sighs)* Autumn, bring me some water.

(AUTUMN hands a bottle to SISTER ANGELICA who kneels beside the SEA CREATURE, making the sign of the cross. Then she wets her fingers and touches HIS/HER forehead while reciting The Last Rites.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Through this anointing may the Lord God in His infinite love and mercy, and through the grace of the Holy Spirit, free you of sin and raise your immortal soul to the heights of heaven, amen.

AUTUMN
(*making the sign of the cross*) Amen.

JULES
Amen.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH
Amen.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Come on, Jules, let's carry him to the bed.

(JULES and DR. FLORIAN HEATH lift the corpse and depart, leaving the WOMEN behind.)

AUTUMN

Since Pan's home was the sea, maybe we should return him there.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

You mean drop him overboard...?

AUTUMN

Yes, but with prayers -- a burial at sea.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Well, I'm afraid that's not an option. We have an ambulance waiting and Florian sent pictures. There'll be an autopsy and possible inquest.

AUTUMN

An inquest...? You mean a trial?

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

That's right, but only if the autopsy's inconclusive, if the coroner can't decide how he died.

AUTUMN

But there can't be an inquest if they don't have a body. We can say he was never here, that Florian sent the pictures as a joke, and you can cancel the ambulance. We'll avoid being questioned and having Pan turned into a sideshow.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Sorry, Autumn, but it's illegal to dump a corpse in the ocean.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH and JULES return.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I've been explaining to Autumn that we don't bury bodies at sea anymore; however, we can insist on discretion -- absolute secrecy from the staff.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hah! Nobody in that hospital can keep a secret. I'm betting he'll be poked, prodded and exposed through videos that go viral and spawn a cult.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Really Florian!

AUTUMN

Oh, God no...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Trust me, as soon as we land all our lives are going to change -- which is why disposing of his remains isn't the worst idea.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Look, it's too late: you've sent pictures; we've both sent messages. Aside from all that, it just strikes me as wrong.

AUTUMN

(pause) You've been quiet, Sister; what do you think?

SISTER ANGELICA

I agree with Doctor Stein, and don't we owe the poor soul a decent burial? If we toss him in the sea, he'll be feeding the bloody sharks. *(to Jules)* You can't write an epitaph on water, can you?

JULES

No.

SISTER ANGELICA

I'm not sure we should be burdened with such a secret -- the denial of the existence of a fellow creature, our own Ancient Mariner. *(pause, she sighs)* Perhaps God puts flesh on the fishbones of our sins and sorrows to create creatures like Pan; then He drops them in the wake of miraculous clouds to test our humanity.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

I don't think so, Sister; I think Pan was just...Pan. At least an autopsy will teach us more about his anatomy and who knows? He might help convince skeptics that there are tragic consequences for poisoning the seas.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You have a point there -- not that the industrial waste-makers will give a damn.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Oh, Jules, stop looking so woebegone.

JULES

I can't help feeling responsible.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Well get over it! If you hadn't intervened, he could've thrown the Sister overboard.

SISTER ANGELICA

That's right, I'm no helpless maiden, but I think you're heroic.

AUTUMN

So do I, and I'll gladly testify on your behalf -- if it comes to that.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

We all will.

JULES

Thanks, but now there's so much we'll never know. *(pause)* I keep wondering if Pan's parents left him to fend for himself. I mean, he must've been a shock, so where was his home? How did he manage to live so long?

AUTUMN

When word gets out about Pan, then people who might actually have known him could come forward. They'll tell us his real name and where he lived.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

(pause) Jules, I want you to make a formal report, explain everything that's happened since we left the marina, but no authorial comments -- just the facts.

JULES

Then shouldn't I begin *before* we left -- with Sister Angelica's cloud.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Yes, all right.

SISTER ANGELICA

I don't suppose you'll be mentioning Saint Swithun.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

No! Just write that the cloud became a crystal sphere that produced a storm, followed by a funnel fog creating a wake that contained a disoriented intersexual stranger. Then end it by saying the stranger was rescued but fell and couldn't be revived. Just try not to make it sound like a delusional fantasy.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hah! Good luck with that!

JULES

I'm beginning to wish it were a delusion, that the cloud was infused with opiates, that this entire trip was a dream and we'll all wake up in our beds.

(AUTUMN lifts the crystal from her pocket and turns to SISTER ANGELICA.)

AUTUMN

Do you think it's badly broken? Can we can still conjure clouds?

(AUTUMN starts to blow on the crystal sphere and SISTER ANGELICA joins her.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Hey, stop that!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

What are you doing?! Are you insane?!

(SISTER ANGELICA and AUTUMN cease blowing, and the SISTER clasps the orb, holding it up.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Nothing -- not so much as a wisp.

DR. MIRIAM BERNSTEIN

Thank Christ

JULES

What if the crack doesn't matter and it's just used itself up like a battery that needs time to recharge. If you'll trust, me I'll be its guardian. I can keep it here in the safe until our next outing.

AUTUMN

You'd do this again?

JULES

Sure, wouldn't you?

AUTUMN

Well, yes.

SISTER ANGELICA

Yes!

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Yes.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH retrieves his iPad and swipes as the OTHERS gaze over his shoulder.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

The funnel's moving fast. Weather cams tracked it to Barbados and it looks like it's headed towards Trinidad. *(pause)* Apparently there's speculation that it's siphoning up debris and toxins because it's getting bigger, darker and humming at a weird frequency. *(pause)* Oh, Sister, you'll love this: People are taking their boats out to look, and some are claiming it's a sign of The End Times.

SISTER ANGELICA

Ah, The Rapture! Now about that report, Jules. You must mention the strange beauty of Pan's voice -- a pity we didn't record it.

JULES

Actually, it was recorded. My father was afraid of pirates and had surveillance cameras installed *(pointing)* here and over there.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You mean everything we've said and done here's been...?

JULES

Yes.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Shit.

SISTER ANGELICA

Good!

SISTER ANGELICA

A recording will be proof of the miracle of the clouds and the rescue of Pan.

AUTUMN

And his death! Jules could be charged with murder!

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Nonsense! It was self defense and there's nothing Jules or any of us did that wasn't appropriate.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

I agree, but Jules, my friend, just so you know: I resent being spied on. You should've had the decency to tell us.

JULES

Sorry.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

So do you spy on everyone who comes on board?

JULES

Well, so far you're my only passengers.

SISTER ANGELICA

Oh, leave the lad alone! What do you have to hide? I'm the one who called Pan a devil, despite knowing what I know.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Which is what exactly...?

SISTER ANGELICA

That wherever we are, whomever we meet, all are sacred encounters, all are evidence of the hand of God.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

The hand of God wasn't very kind to Pan.

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Yeah, God's been smacking us around lately. He hasn't protected us from pollutions, viral pandemics, and if He keeps up these storms and droughts, there won't be anyone left to slap around.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

What do you say to that, Sister?

SISTER ANGELICA

I'm as flummoxed as you are, so sometimes I simply accept "That ours is not to reason why; ours is but to do and die."

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

If we didn't "reason why" we'd still be living in caves and dying of plagues we can cure.

(AUTUMN has been gazing through her binoculars.)

AUTUMN

We're almost home.

(JULES focuses his binoculars.)

JULES

It looks like the Harbor Police are trailing us, and it seems we have a reception waiting.

AUTUMN

Oh, damn...

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

Oh, no... \

SISTER ANGELICA

Land ho, my dears!

JULES

(to Autumn) I'm not ready to say good bye.

AUTUMN

(to Jules) Neither am I.

JULES

Then don't, please don't.

(JULES grasps AUTUMN's hand and THEY freeze in time as lights dim.)

EPILOGUE

(JULES steps forward to continue addressing the jurors at The Coroner's Inquest.)

JULES

As you know, the autopsy confirmed that Pan's body contained toxic levels of lead, mercury, petroleum distillates and other pollutants that affected his endocrine system, creating his unique physique. As Doctor Florian Heath predicted, pictures of Pan have gone viral, though so far no one claims to have known him. As for the cloud: it's skimmed along the coast of South America then finally settled near the Falkland Islands. If you want more details, you can read my forthcoming novel which my publisher claims defies genres, has characters who resist credibility, and a plot that's too meandering. Whenever I encounter the original characters in the halls of the hospital, they feel compelled to share their thoughts about the book, especially Doctor Stein who's threatening to replace me as her scribe. She's always insisting I make the story and characters...

JULES

...scientifically plausible.

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Scientifically plausible...

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

...plots are essential if you want to be taken seriously.

(DR. MIRIAM STEIN has stepped forward.)

DR. MIRIAM STEIN

Write the truth, Jules! A novel is too fatuous a form to confront the biggest danger to humanity.

(DR. FLORIAN HEATH steps forward.)

DR. FLORIAN HEATH

You should be writing Cli-Fi -- climate fiction. Start with our old fears of atomic mushroom clouds to there being no clouds at all, just scorching heat, raging fires, and melting ice caps.

(AUTUMN steps forward.)

AUTUMN

If you're going to focus on Pan, then consider making a movie. His barnacles could be contagious and spread like measles to everyone he touches.

(SISTER ANGELICA steps forward.)

SISTER ANGELICA

Write a jolly musical about a nun who conjures and captures clouds in jam jars from the convent kitchen. Then she and a friendly volunteer take them wherever clouds are needed.

JULES

As I told the Sister, I don't want things to end badly; in fact, now that I'm seeing Autumn, I don't want them to end at all.

SISTER ANGELICA

Then one day, when the Sister opens a jam jar, Saint Swithun intervenes and makes it rain...

SISTER ANGELICA

...for forty days and forty nights.

JULES

For forty days and forty nights...

JULES

...it will rain. And when the rain ceases, clouds appear everywhere, fluffy white cumulus clouds morphing into swans or anything we dare to imagine.

(Rain is heard and the sky darkens to music hummed by a choir.)

End of Play

