

From Glasgow to Saturn ~ Issue 16

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A Not-so-near-death Experience

by Chi Ngai Chan

Back in the summer last year I signed up to charity abseiling down the University Tower for a new cancer centre or something. At the time I thought ‘what the hell, I haven’t done this before. It’ll be like one of those video games and it’ll be a laugh’. Three months and twenty one days later the day had come and the reality of jumping off a tower hundreds of feet tall suddenly dawned on me.

The day didn’t start well. I stayed up late the night before and I had to get up at 7 to be on time. I then received a call from my sister, who supportively asked: “So what is your facial expression going to be like when you are half way plummeting to your death?” I answered “It’ll be ‘AHHHH! I hate my sister’”, had breakfast, and departed (Departed? Surely that’s a bad choice of word).

I specially dug out a pair of combats and aviators because I figured if I am going to go, I might as well go looking good. The streets were empty as it was a Sunday morning and I should, like everyone else, be still in bed. When I arrived people were already gathering below the tower. Among them was the chaplain. ‘Why do we need a chaplain?’ I thought to myself.

Two ropes were dangling from the top and my eyes followed the two thin lines all the way up to the top, the people up there looked like small dots. I ignored the build-up of anxiety inside me and got on with kitting up. I figured if I see this as a job that needed to be done it’ll be easier.

Me and five other very anxious looking people took the lift to the base of the tower, then it was a never-ending spiral staircase up to the top in half darkness. Every 30 steps of so a small window illuminated the damp staircase and offered glimpses of high we were. I tried to ignore that as well and crawled up, still believing that this is a job to be done.

A flood of light hit my eyes when I reached the top and boy! What a nice day! What a nice view! The rising autumn sun blanked everything in gold and the city looked so gentle and calm. In a far distance wind turbines were spinning, planes were taking off from the airport and cars were travelling along a glimmering River Clyde. I could see my flat! It's going to be a beautiful day...

“Bloody hell it's bloody tall from up here...” someone said.

“Shut up!” I thought. A seaplane was coming to land on the river. Everything was so quiet...

“Are you nervous?” A man asked another.

“Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!!!” I thought.

We waited our turn at the top of the tower. A girl was getting set up with ropes and from her face it was plain for everyone to see that she was regretting this.

“Now you are ready. Step onto this chair and put your foot over.” The guy in charge said.

“Whhat?” the girl and I both exhaled.

“Yeah you’ll be fine, just put your foot over the edge...”

‘Wait a second...’ my palms began to sweat. ‘I thought we were getting training...’ In fact I convinced my mother, who had a tendency to panic over small matters, that there would be proper training for us on how to use the equipment, what to expect, how to deal with an emergency, what to do if aliens landed while we were still dangling mid-air, etc. “It’ll be alright.” The guy in charge said.

‘No it’s not ALRIGHT!’ I said under my breath.

After an initial struggle, the panic on the girl’s face turned to resignation to fate and stepped over the edge. She began to feed the black rope through her hand while hanging onto dear life on the red safety rope when a photographer appeared out of nowhere and said: “Ok stop. Just hold this position so I can take a picture of you dangling from the air.”

This was too much for me. I went back to admiring the view. The Kelvingrove Park was so beautiful, the trees swaying gently in the wind...

“Hey where’s she gone?” A lad next to me asked.

Everyone looked down. My blood pressure dropped. She had disappeared into view.

“It’s ok, she must have swung into the balcony down there.” The guy in charge said.

“How’s view down there?” There was no answer.

A minute later, the guy in charge turned to me and said these dreadful words: “You’re next.” As I got tied to the ropes I chatted to the photographer. He commented on my sunglasses and I jokingly said: “These are so that you couldn’t see the terror in my eyes”.

“So have you done abseiling before?” The guy in charged chatted.

“Well my character in Rainbow Six Las Vegas had abseiled down a lot of buildings.”

“Oh so you’ve played that game. My character is Sanchez, who’s yours?”

“I can’t remember his name; it was that Brazilian, not the electrician of course...”

Everyone laughed.

“Ok you’re ready. Put ye foot on this chair and the other foot over the edge.”

All of a sudden, it really hit me that I was putting my foot over the edge of a very-very tall building and I would need to let go of the handrail. Words couldn’t begin to describe the panic that was spreading in my cerebrum. ‘What the FUCK was I doing?!!! WHY DID I GET MYSELF INTO THIS?!!! Could I not do this...’

Meanwhile I tried to look cool because I was the only person wearing shades, I was the coolest person on that tower.

I was crouching on the edge of the tower, my feet wedged between the handrail and the cold stones of the edge. A twitch of muscle was the difference between life and death. “Can I swear if this all gets too much?” I asked politely.

“No, it’s all on camera.” The photographer said.

“Can you get a full body shot of me going down? (Bad choice of word again)”. I asked again, meanwhile hanging onto dear life. “I didn’t wear these combats and shades for no reason.”

“Yeah sure, just get on with it.”

It was in moments like these in life one would ask the question: ‘how much trust could you place in the hands of a complete stranger?’ Apparently it was the same among of trust I placed on the pilot every time I step into a plane. I said to myself “Let go.”

And I did.

I was still occupying the same space in the universe. The ropes prevented the application of the Laws of Gravity.

“It wasn’t so hard was it?” the guy in charge said. “Now to go down feed the black rope through your hand.”

“Wait-a-sec, wait-a-sec. I’ll take a good picture of you first. Lean back.” The photographer said.

I did my best impression of Blue-steel in my life. It was going on Facebook, if I survived...

“What was your character in Rainbow Six again?” The guy in charge asked me.

“Fuck knows...” I answered. There was over 200 ft of thin air between me and the ground.

I focused on the brown stone wall of the University Tower so that I didn’t have to look down and began to descend. My feet pressed against the wall. ‘Just like Rainbow Six, just doing a job...’

Then I ran out of wall as I got to the balcony. My feet were touching nothing. That was the second scariest moment of my life, with stepping out over the edge only just made it to the top spot.

And then as if on cue, the rope started to spin. West of Glasgow swung into view like a slide show and I looked down...it reminded me of the story of a Buddhist monk being chased by a tiger in the forest. He climbed up a hanging vine to escape the tiger

but as he reached half way up the tree he saw a poisonous snake about to bite him.

‘This is it.’ he thought, and looked around. ‘What a lovely view from up here...’

‘What a lovely view from here.’ I thought. I carried on descending.

And before long I was on the ground. Job done. The crowd was clapping. I took off my gear and went to collect my belongings and the complementary certificate. ‘This is to certified that I got nothing better to do on a cold, October Sunday morning than scaring myself to death 250 ft in the air.’

“How did you find it?” A woman asked.

“It’s alright.” I said.

“So what are you going to do for the rest of the day?” The office staff asked.

“See a therapist.” I said. Everyone broke into fits of laughter.

I got home. Promptly wrote everything down. And went back to bed.

I’ll probably do this again.

The Jangly Sounds of Summer

by Joe Freeman

In dream
He sat and pondered on the heath
Snow all about and frost beneath, below;
Unseen, unheard, a dull and scree built beach
Where rough and crooked tempests break and blow

Said he of suspirations, outward calm:
“Who lies upon this pale, so neat and close?”
With iced and slated skies above,
Not warm nor vital, not vivid nor verbose

By his face are letters, writ in rime,
 ‘I pulled a beat, stroking river time,
 But years passed me by and eyes lose their shine
 I stitched up my eyes, with needle and twine’

And tired old waves heave shaking hands to shore
Here; the unready and the awkward dead
In their drowning robes, sea drunk sailors worn
Here; their eyes salt blind and limbs as lead,
While all around is still and white,
No scent, no sound, no breath, no pause,
They falter step by step, on splintered bones in hushed lament
Dull of eye where living orbits wept

Lone now, in his whitewash room he recalls
His sandy feet and brittle hair, the past
A poster peeling from a pallid wall
The merry bouncing sound of broken glass

A smirk; this could have been you, old man
Frozen pilots, fire and ash, you’ll see
I’ll tear the sun from your sky, you know I can
Oxygen masks and flight delays, you’ll see

And still he remains, sea swelled cadaver,
The form of his name in snowflakes hid
From the braying gulls, for his wake gathered
In cold numb lips, and eyes of frosted lids

 And on that glorious day!
When sunlight tore through gaps in the pavement
To trace landscapes in the sky, like scripture
A creaking, deathless carriage, heaven sent
A sepia stained afterlife picture

 And on that glorious day!
Blood in the stone jars, and blood in the bone yards
Softly, redly shone the stars that day, they
Reflected in the tooth of every shard
Of broken, shattered glass

In the Shadows Still

by Chris McDonald

They say he helped take the guns at Carentan;

Was offered cold steel upon the breast

And within the thigh for his time and trouble.

They say his fortune was found in the ash of war,

In sepia stone and a deluge of pale white cheques,

Long squandered with Kings beneath burning neon.

His flesh lies upon a wounding bed,

Unmoving and voiceless with emptied eyes;

A corpse but for the callous tone declaring

The heart still ticks, void of all but blood.

They say he was known to wander

In the cool clutches of twilight,

Unseeing yet guided by arrows of ether,

Almost more wraith than man.

They say he came and went countless times,

Unimpeded and unhurt by the strange

Wonders of the unwaking world,

Returning each night to covers grown cold.

They say the last time he lingered too long,
Until the sun half-awoke, carrying the world with it.
The early dozing few littered the roads,
Still clinging to the sleep of the dying night.

I wonder if he felt the force upon his bones,
Heard the rubber vainly grasp the tarmac,
Tasted the blood, rust-red in the warming sun,
Rising to trap him forever between worlds.

Did he set off into the gaping dark,
To the sable serenade of whippoorwills
And the calm of the deadened streets,
Knowing he would never again awake?

They say the life support is to be cut;
That it is better for him to be lost,
For these rinds of a man to masquerade no more,
Than to linger on as blood and clockwork.

I wonder if he walks the shadows still,
In the darkest beams of moonlight,
His heart and mind there with him,
Awaiting the leaden click of a single switch.

Sifrin

*Interval drinks eavesdropping, The Shakespeare Theatre,
Washington DC, February 2007*

Don't you feel his treatment of Margaret and,
well, women in general in Richard the third
is quite something. I mean, the plight,
well, it's quite tragic isn't it.

eh jist a pint ay lahgur ay

aye sifrin

Sorry?

THAT IS EVERYTHING THANKS

*in yer token pish about whit's trajic
by thu way*

Sorry?

sifrin

Richard Elins

The Last Performance of Troilus Poe

by Gary McGhee

Troilus Poe stared out into the evening as stagehands bustled around him. He seemed totally composed peering out from the red curtain, but a careful observer might have noticed that the curtain edge he fidgeted with was starting to fray beneath his twitching fingers. Tonight was it – there was nothing he could do now but wait for the curtain’s raising. The seats reserved for Lenore – in the middle of the third row and directly level with the stage – were still empty. He had given her the tickets with an attempted air of casualness – “They give the actors extra, take them, I doubt I’d use ‘em otherwise,” he had rushed – not once since coming close to regretting the big pit buying them had made of his finances. He prayed she was coming.

The Royal Widmore-Linus was an outdoor theatre in the middle of Coronation Park, the only one of its kind in the Channel Islands. Tonight’s was the fourth showing (the last of its first week) of Sepulchrave’s tragedy *The Trial of the Seasons*, but it was the first with Troilus playing the lead. While he was the understudy to the great French actor Poquelin, the famous hypochondriac had dropped out of this evening’s show after Troilus made a calculated inquiry as to the state of his health that morning.

“There’s a flu going around, and I wanted to make sure you were feeling alright.”

“Never better son, pourquoi demandez-vous?”

“To tell the truth sir, you’ve been looking somewhat pale since last night’s performance.”

The Frenchman’s eyebrow had arched. By lunchtime he was languishing across a prop-sofa and reciting self-pitying Shakespearean elegies at anybody who passed. Troilus had not relished this part of the plan, but he decided that no ill would come of it, and it might well help the old ham learn to get a grip.

Unable to find Lenore in the crowd, Troilus reluctantly withdrew from his vantage point, despondent. The process, the method, it could not start until he knew she was here – the role itself, and all his hopes, hinged on her presence. He paced backstage on grasshopper legs, his protuberant eyes flashing

in reflection of his juddering anxiety. His co-star saw him, and she fluttered over to the youth. Fuchsia was playing the other half of Sepulchre's doomed pair, the Lady Juno Vacchiano to Troilus' Lord Virgil Loadholt.

"Five minutes to go - how are you feeling?" she asked, grinning. Her make-up was only half-applied and she did not yet have on her wig – with her black hair pulled tightly behind her skull, her appearance reminded Troilus of a harlequin. Caught off his guard, he flustered for a moment.

"I'm..." he paused, searching for the right word. He had always been better at saying things he had first had the chance to rehearse. "...fine."

"With an eloquence most befitting Virgil Loadholt," she observed, smiling. Troilus said nothing and looked away, too addled to offer a comeback. For a moment Fuchsia wondered if she should be concerned. In her fifteen years on stage she had never known an actor so consummately dedicated to their method as Troilus. When not actively rehearsing he was to be found at the library, pouring over tomes of antiquated criticism or embarking on intense re-readings of the old, varying manuscripts through which Sepulchre's 15th century plays had survived. Six weeks ago he had hired a professional fencer to train him and Poquelin for the fourth act's climactic sword-fight. The Frenchman had taken offense at what he took as a slight to his duelling skills, and an argument had started.

"An actor, boy," Poquelin had said, "should act. Audiences do not care if a performance is utterly true to life."

"Well," Troilus had muttered coldly, "*we* should." And Troilus had, sacrificing more of the little leisure time and cash that remained to him to become a capable duellist. There were more examples – Fuchsia had heard that, playing Hamlet at his alma mater, Troilus had deliberately not slept for days before performing. On stage, sheer force of mind had apparently allowed him to alternate at will between sly lucidity and reality-powered feverish paranoia, his total knowledge of the play carrying him through the whole night without a single mistake or erroneous pause. He had collapsed the second he left the stage, but the critical reception had been terrific.

But tonight something was definitely wrong with him. Melancholy pulled his face. Perhaps, Fuchsia wondered, nerves had broken his brain.

“Troilus?”

A burst of decisiveness snapped him out of his bleak ruminations. Time was short – last chance. He needed know if Lenore was there. “Yes, sorry Fuchsia. I was miles away. I just – I have to check something. Good luck...” He trailed off, gibbering rather than speaking, and ran without backward glance to his previous vantage point at the left edge of the red curtain, again staring out to scrutinise the summer twilight.

Most of the three-hundred seats in front of the stage’s arch were now filled. On the grass slopes that walled this ‘premiere’ section, men in tailor-fitted but well-worn suits were renting fold-out chairs at three shillings each, and the pit orchestra were tuning their instruments. The flow of the spectators was in harmony with the strings, the band members finding their notes as the audience found their places. In the pale dusk stars had begun to glint, as if they themselves had come out to watch. It was with totally incongruous speed that Troilus’ eye roved desperately over this picture of serenity.

In the front rows Jersey’s great and good were settling, but Lenore’s two chairs remained empty. He could see the elegant wife of Lieutenant-Governor Brisbane sitting with her sons, and a row or two behind them was Sir John Everett Millais the painter, apparently dozing. A slim young woman in blue disturbed the old man as she tried to edge along the row to her seat, and Troilus saw her make an awkwardly animated, but nevertheless sincere, gesture of apology when he jolted awake.

The orchestra quietly began a version of *Juno’s Sonnet*. Ethereal violins swirled around its core waltz, the orchestra’s three flautists running with them before issuing a melancholy descending note every sixth bar as the melody glided to its next variation. Deciding this was a sign, those still standing began to file quickly to their seats. Troilus could not see Lenore among them. A black hole opened and yawned under his hopes.

Then - an arm of pale blue was waving at him ebulliently. Troilus’ large eyes ran down the slim length to its termination and there was Lenore, alone, three seats to the right of Millais, who had continued to glare, apparently not forgiving her waking him. Colour flushed the actor’s pale face and, all reticence in disarray, he beamed and waved back. Lenore grinned. Troilus quickly wiped away his dopey smile and, in an attempt to look dignified, pretended to scan the rest of the park. He risked one final look at

her before jerking his head back into the busy dimness behind the curtain, etching the sight onto his mind. She had sat studying the programme, her amber eyes darting quickly from side to side as if she felt pressured to read the whole thing before the play started. A miscreant lock of golden-brown hair had fallen over her heart-shaped face, evidence perhaps of her rush to her seat. This misplaced coil, coupled with old Millais' frown and her merry waving, cast Lenore in Troilus' eyes that moment as a rebel, her natural manner flying in the face of the hampering decrees of bitter age and pointless, repressive decorum. His expression collapsed from that which was usually strode around grim and glaring backstage – to be seen there instead was old longing mingled with contentment. To Troilus, Lenore was the lovely evidence of goodness' place in the workings of the universe.

This then, was his plan. As the tragic Italian Count Virgil Loadholt he would tune his performance to Lenore's emotions, working them so that she, who he had loved silently for more than a decade, might open a higher place for him in her heart. Unlimited inspiration sitting metres away, he would love, mourn and die for Fuchsia's Juno Vacchiano as if the fictional duchess were Lenore herself.

The director signalled for the actors to get in position and retreated into the shadows of the prompt corner. Troilus moved to the right of the arch. Beyond the curtain the orchestra hushed and the whispering of the audience silenced. A lingering stagehand gave the set-pieces a final cursory glance before exiting stage left, where Fuchsia, now in full costume and make-up, waited in the alcove.

Troilus' heart hammered in his throat, and words sprang into his mind that he would be mortified to admit too – 'destiny', 'muse', 'fate' and such.

The lights dimmed – the scarlet curtain turned black before him, and Fuchsia turned to shadow at the other end of the stage. Hands settled behind levers and lights and the supporting players stilled in their hidden doorways. A spectral noise sighed around the theatre – rattling to a whispering height then silencing as the huge curtain parted, letting the evening in to fall across the stage.

Troilus blinked once, twice - breathed – and crept out into view, Prince Virgil Loadholt. Dressed in courtly finery, he made his way slowly to the centre of the stage, stealing through the Vacchiano family gardens for a forbidden rendezvous with his love. The audience, silent and dark,

were as absent from Troilus' thoughts as the distance between stars - save Lenore that is. Her heart-shaped face hung silver in space, a constant moon between reality and the world of the play.

Fuchsia, as Juno, stepped out of her alcove, and Troilus turned around, Virgil hearing something. Stepping backwards from the unknown sound, Virgil crashed into the flitting Juno. They both shouted and span to face one another, Virgil brandishing a sword, Juno a dagger.

VIRGIL: *Fiend! Do not hide from mine eyes coward! Reveal thyself!*

Fuchsia lowered the dagger and slowly undid her hood, revealing Juno's face. Beautiful as Fuchsia was, Troilus placed Lenore there, and, their chests pounding, Virgil met Juno in a fierce embrace. Lenore sat engrossed, the fount - though she had not the slightest inkling - of Troilus' performance.

JUNO: *My family could not keep me... (SMILING) Nor, do I guess, could your kin hinder you.*

VIRGIL: *Were the prize but your merest look, the massed armies of old Rome could not me keep.*

And so the play started, the first act communicating through exposition the family war that threatened Virgil and Juno's coupling. It involved several declarations of passionate love, and it was through these that Troilus began to deliberately conflate his emotions with those of his character. He knew *The Trial of the Seasons* back to front, and so Sepulchre's lines flowed from his throat with greater ease than his own everyday conversation ever did. Troilus' method was not about using each word as a carry of emotion – rather, he created a mental situation for himself akin to that of his character's. Thinking Virgil's thoughts, Troilus declared his love over and over for Juno, powered the whole time by his own feelings for Lenore. With each beat this became easier to do, Troilus' thoughts falling away while his passions endured to drive his Virgil.

The first act concluded with the pair deciding to forfeit their inheritances and elope. The actors embraced and stared into one another's eyes, Troilus seeing amber where in fact there was but blue. He was breathless, his deluded heart singing as loudly in his chest as if it were truly Lenore he now clutched and addressed.

VIRGIL: *We cannot linger long here this night, nor should we any day that follows hence.*

JUNO: *But our houses Virgil – they shall seek us out, wheresoever we doth fly.*

VIRGIL: *We can elude them. What weight do their whims carry that would ever equal that of the heavenly decrees of nature and love? Bosh and flimshaw, n-*

JUNO: (FINISHING) *None.*

VIRGIL: *None.*

JUNO: *Let us depart.*

As the actors left the stage, the governing part of Troilus' mind let Virgil fall away, and, after a second of bewilderment, he was himself again. On the boundary of the shadowy alcove he risked a look in Lenore's direction. She was tensed, perched forward in her seat. What's more – she was peering toward the right side of the stage, looking for him! Their eyes met, and, breaking out in a wide grin, Lenore pantomimed an ovation of clapping, a silver ring of hers glinting like starlight in her hand. Suddenly happier than he had ever thought possible, Troilus gaped for a moment and had to be yanked into the dark culvert by Fuchsia. He sidestepped his co-star with a skip, grabbed her in a hug and then high-fived her.

“You were terrific Fuchsia, absolutely wonderful!”

Fuchsia was stunned. For the first time since she had known him, Troilus looked *happy*. His face, usually so pallid, flushed a glowing pink and his mouth, so often pinched and grim, almost stretched off his face with smiling. His eyes danced with a heretofore unknown enthusiasm for life. Fuchsia laughed.

“You weren't too shabby yourself.”

Troilus dropped out of his dreaming and became suddenly thoughtful. “Well,” he said, mainly to himself. “Wait till she sees the rest of the play!” He disappeared backstage, needing to prepare himself for the play's tragic last three acts.

Fuchsia's eyes narrowed after him, and she smiled knowingly. Troilus' frequent sullenness had become much less mysterious.

When the second act ended and Virgil and Juno were in scenes again, Troilus, as before, buried his thoughts and lent Virgil his feelings. He blotted out the real Lenore with almost complete success, swapping Fuchsia for she in his mind's eye. But she was out there, an anchor to reality while his psyche played out a fantasy. Occasionally he would glance in her direction, and each time would see openly writ in her face the feelings he wanted his performance to elicit. With each view Troilus willed further descent into feeling – Virgil doing the thinking, his self just at the edge of recollection.

An hour passed, and the final scene of the last act was coming to its conclusion, with Virgil killing his masked father, who was played by a man named Peake. Lord Loadholt had personally tried to intercept the lovers' escape and his son, not realising who he faced, had engaged him in a duel. Troilus struck away Lord Loadholt's sword, and impaled the air between Peake's torso and arm. The older actor collapsed to the floor.

LORD LOADHOLT: (GASPING) *Son...*

Almost as one, the audience froze with tension. But, pointing his sword toward Loadholt senior, Troilus was suddenly brought completely out of the moment by movement in the third row. An indistinct shape was lumbering along it. Virgil died in Troilus' mind as paranoid connections quickly sparked between the gentleman in the audience and Lenore's other, empty seat. But, as if God had cruelly timed Troilus' epiphany, his panicked confusion was totally appropriate for the scene.

VIRGIL: *What? Who are you...?*

One eye on the man approaching Lenore, Troilus moved behind Peake's collapsed frame, shaking as he reached for the black mask. He stared into the audience, unable to think until he knew who that man, now bent and whispering to Lenore, was.

Troilus, remembering where he was, ripped off Lord Loadholt's mask. At the same time he saw Walt Pendleton, the great explorer and rumoured former suitor to Lenore, ease back in his seat.

VIRGIL: *You!*

It was written as a shout, but Troilus delivered a whisper. Many impressed nods were made among the unknowing audience at the exquisitely believable horror on the actor's face. Pendleton scratched his chin, and Troilus saw a silver ring on his finger. It glinted like a star, just as Lenore's had done. The actor stepped back on his foot, unbalanced for a moment. He touched his forehead while his thoughts swayed, battered at their foundations. *She's engaged.*

Lenore, as clueless as the rest of the audience, was moved to clasp her hands and furrow her dark eyes with pity. Troilus saw this and, with a last pained memory of hope, something in him broke. One last command went from the actor to his role – he might still move her feeling, even if there could never be the place for him there that he had wanted.

Peake, lying beneath him, was about to prompt the young lead – he had hesitated too long - when Troilus knelt down to him.

VIRGIL: *Where is Juno?*

LORD LOADHOLT: *Your lover – my bastard-daughter – perished on the Borgo cliffs.*

VIRGIL: (AGHAST) *'Daughter?'*

LORD LOADHOLT: (DYING) *Hence our resistance... to your union...Forgive me son... (DIES)*

Peake sagged, and Troilus wavered to his feet. His intellect was shook to pieces, and the lingering sense that managed the boundary between what was real and what was not had crumbled with it. Drunk confusion shouted at him. Clinging to Virgil now, he produced a dagger from his coat.

VIRGIL: *I cannot mourn her... Nor can we meet in heaven. The knot of my understanding is utterly undone. And so...*

Troilus lifted the knife.

VIRGIL: *...I must die.*

He plunged it to his chest, burying it up to the handle. Light exited the actor's eyes – Virgil died, and Troilus hit the floor with a heavy juddering of wood. The blunt stage dagger, the blade of which instantly sprang back out of the handle, clattered after him.

Lenore jumped up to lead the standing ovation for her friend, and the rest of the audience erupted in support. But Troilus did not stir from where he lay. Peake sat him up, and Fuchsia rushed out smiling to revive him. She suddenly burst into tears – Troilus was dead, though no knife had pierced him.