

THE BEE CHARMER, A FULL LENGTH PLAY FOR THE STAGE

By

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A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham  
for the degree of

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA AND THEATRE ARTS  
COLLEGE OF ARTS AND LAW  
THE UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM  
MAY 2010

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**School/Department:** DRAMA AND THEATRE ARTS

**Full title of thesis/dissertation:**  
THE BEE CHARMER, A FULL LENGTH ORIGINAL PLAY FOR THE STAGE.

**Degree:** MPHIL (B) PLAYWRITING STUDIES

**Date of submission:** MAY 2010

**Date of award of degree** (leave blank):

**Abstract** (not to exceed 200 words - any continuation sheets must contain the author's full name and full title of the thesis/dissertation):

*The Bee Charmer* is a full-length play for the stage, the principal theme, the coming of age of a young bee charmer. Honey spends the school holidays with her grandfather, a beekeeper with a strange talent for charming bees; he can approach a swarm and not be stung. They also allow him to conduct their flight patterns. He teaches Honey his dark art, but when she discovers a message in the swarm pattern, she falls ill. Honey's mother is swiftly recalled from her conference about the global disappearance of the honeybee. Veronica is a scientist determined to solve this modern mystery. The family dynamics mirror what is happening in the natural world with the breakdown of order in the beehives. There is also an accompanying essay, which charts the drafts of the play from original conception, through rehearsal and performance at the Mphil Showcase in June 2009.

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## WRITING THE BEE CHARMER

### THE PATH TO PLAYWRITING

In approaching this project there were many challenges to be faced, the most urgent concern, would I be able to adapt to the kind of writing a full-length work for the stage called for? It was something I had never attempted before; a writer schooled in the arts of poetry; judging the weight of a line, end stopped or enjambment, creating ways to use an image to make the world strange and although a single poem might occupy your thoughts for months, there is an element of a poem being a finished and absolute creation. Script writing on the other hand has the blueprint quality. A script, I would learn, is messy, often unfinished and requiring the input of other theatre makers to make it a complete entity.

My background academically had been an English Literature BA at Leeds and an MA in Creative Writing at UEA in their poetry strand. Disenchanted with the somewhat insular nature of poets I found the idea of drama appealing, with its suggestion of a more collaborative atmosphere and took in a workshop at my local theatre, The West Yorkshire Playhouse. Steve Waters led that first workshop. It was the first of many introductions into this brave new world, hearing the names of unknown playwrights ringing out in the rehearsal room and talk of the space, how we use it, public and private space and the kinetic energy of different spaces. I left inspired and in search of an idea with which to apply to the Mphil. I am used to hunting down ideas for poems, anything can be material, used and knocked into shape draft by draft to get at the essence of what you are exploring. Something would turn up.

Something did turn up, that weekend there was an article in the Guardian about the disappearance of the bees. Interviews with beekeepers, both commercial and hobbyist and all devastated at the destruction of their hives. It's a modern mystery and still nobody knows the exact cause of the vanishing. If you think of poetry and bees you very quickly get to Sylvia Plath, a subject well documented by the so called horror poet and a path I had no wish to tread in my own poems. But as a play, a horror play even, this could be something and I quickly realised that all the bee keeping paraphernalia, the suits and the veils, were very theatrical and this might be an idea worth investigating. Convincing the admission panel that letting a novice playwright enrol on the MPhil with no formal, nor indeed informal, drama training was a good idea would be grounded in persuading them of the challenge inherent in dramatising science and my will to tackle that challenge. I would have to acquire a sound and specific knowledge base and very quickly too.

#### TOWARDS A FIRST DRAFT

Once I started thinking about how I was going to dramatise the plight of the bees, there were several immediate questions. Should the bees be represented? If so, how? I investigated the classical Greek plays, going back to Aristophanes *The Frogs* in particular, which I had studied as part as part of a Classical Civilisation A-level many years ago. Could the bees become a kind of chorus, commenting on the action? But if they were commentators they would need some action to comment on and what could that be? After some consideration I discarded the choric idea and decided that there would be no bees in the play. Later I realised it was because I hadn't believed it could be done in a convincing way and I hadn't known how to handle them in the script. The rehearsal process was to show what a theatrical experience might have

been missed, simply down to my inexperience at this point, before I had even begun writing.

Our first task was to formulate a pitch for our prospective plays. I found this enormously helpful in pinning down what I thought I wanted to write. Imagining huge sets of giant beehives, taking inspiration from Series 4 of *The X-Files* opener, *Herronvolk*, beehives large enough to enter and accommodate several people – in such a structure Veronica could set up her laboratory. Because I had a couple of characters now, Veronica, a scientist believing she could find an answer to the mystery and Mick, the bee charmer, who believed in nature and tales from folklore. The idea of a bee charmer appealed to me because without the bees this rare skill will completely vanish into the realm of myth and fairytale alongside rain kings, sunken churches and we would keep them and their bees in the world, magical, but real like horse whisperers.

Over the Christmas break nothing would work. The dialogue was too obvious; the story didn't make sense and there was too much going on. There were absent characters, a device I liked from Mamet, off stage action that pulled the focus from what was happening and when would I learn to write a scene longer than a couple of pages? Where was the focus of this piece? There wasn't one yet in the miasma of melodrama I had created. I read Tim Fountain's book *So You Want to Be A Playwright* and learned about inciting incidents, first act climaxes, crises and escalations and started again. Reading Richard Bean's play *Harvest* was of help at this time in determining that my play would be a rural play, something I had been unconsciously resisting- possibly because I hadn't read many rural plays. *Harvest* is set on a farm and begins with the requisition of the horses for the war effort and one of the threads of the play is William's dream of keeping pigs. Robert Holman's play,

*Across Oka* also helped me to envision an ecological play rooted in family life. The second half of the play is set in a wildlife reserve and helped me think about the approach to take with my own work, since I was trying to emulate a parallel with my bee play.

I tried out a couple of pages of dialogue between Veronica and Mick but they wouldn't take flight. Finally, Henry arrived. He just walked out onto the page and started talking and this is a character that has always worked, everyone who has read him has felt drawn to him. The exercise with Henry has therefore always been to try and find his darker side and in moving towards that Mick had to be cut. Advice from Steve Waters directing the class to think about the 'right characters to tell the story' (Waters seminar, 09/02/09) crystallised the fact that Mick was taking Henry's light and duplicating his character function, which is how Henry became the eponymous bee charmer.

Another character, Honey, was introduced as the troublesome teen that went to stay with her grandfather and against her mother's wishes was taught how to charm the bees. This decision raised a number of questions such as: why would Henry do this? Was this the only way he could find to relate to his granddaughter? Could he be losing his gift? Was his diminishment mirroring the bees' destruction? In trying to find answers I found a story, a human story of a family disintegration that would mirror and stand as metaphor for the global disintegration of the hive world. In this way I would pull an audience in and not blind them with the science behind the vanishing, this was a way to entertain with Honey's antics and her fascination with fire, a parallel to *Across Oka* where Matty's fascination with the rare White Siberian Crane eggs induces the fear that he will somehow break them. In that play Robert Holman has Matty's grandmother, Eileen, crystallise the fear that the precious eggs

will be broken: ‘No fooling about’ (1988, p57) and reminds him, ‘You know what a responsibility this is, don’t you?’ (1988, p57). His retort, ‘I am not a child’ (1988, P57) does not instil confidence that he can play his assigned part in looking after the eggs. However Holman finds moments like this where we are sure something will happen and nothing does in order to make the most of the moment when Matty will deliberately choose to break the eggs at the end of the play.

Finding a time structure for the play was another challenge; a basic three-act structure seemed the most logical. Through many visits to the theatre I began to understand how other structures worked, in particular the pressure cooker atmosphere of the one act play, which was really brought to life for me in the Donmar Warehouse production of *Creditors* (Strindberg, 2008). I would have my play move from a living room scene at the beginning to a clinic scene in the second act and then to a giant beehive in the third. Once I began writing with these sets in mind however, it seemed cramped and the sets did not serve the scenes. I began to write more complicated stage directions, frontloading the scene with everything that might be needed during it. Advised that I was trying to settle too much before I let the characters talk to each other for long enough and find out what the play was really doing, I felt I still needed some kind of framework to let these characters loose in. My research into the bees gave me a clue, a honeybee lives for six weeks. Six weeks is the duration of the schools summer holidays, so this led into three days during the summer holidays, one day per act and Honey has come to stay with her Granddad, it is going to be her summer with the bees. Possibly a rites of passage story where Honey loses her innocence and is inducted into this world of bees and the countryside, where the rules are less regimented than in the town. Thinking about Honey, who is fifteen, led to the creation of another character, a romantic interest for her and so Paul came into the

play. This established the character base as Veronica, Henry, Honey and Paul. It focused the story, helped to bring out the difficult relationships in this family dynamic without the interference from outside, absent characters and meddling social workers, or clinics concerned about cults of bee worship.

## THE SECOND DRAFT: RE-ENVISIONING THE SCRIPT

Catherine Smith's collection of poetry *Lip* uses a Yeats quote from *Meditations in a Time of Civil War pt 6*, 'O honeybees come build in the empty house of the stare' (1991, p139). This seemed too good not to use and so I included the quote in the first draft. The trouble was there was rather too much poetry, Yeats, Gillespie Magee's *High Flight* and some of my own too. The idea of equating poetry and bee charming, something that both Henry and Honey could share an interest in really appealed to me. Something the more scientific Veronica would not have an immediate appreciation for but might give the other generations a rapport. I realised quite early on I was leaning too much on this supportive craft but still wanted to find a way for the poetry to meld into the work. About this point I started to read Sarah Kane's work. I had read *Blasted* before and it had not encouraged me to read the rest of her work but when I did, I found the later work, *Crave* and *Cleansed*, showed a way to include a poetic mode of language for a modern play without relying on long extracts of other writer's work for example A's speech in *Crave*,

And wonder who you are but accept you anyway and tell you about the tree  
angel enchanted forest boy who flew across the ocean because he loved you  
...

And try to get closer to you because it's beautiful learning to know you and  
well worth the effort... (2001, p170).

Kane's use of poetic language juxtaposed with her meaning in giving an enriched speech to this character, as explained in David Greig's Introduction to the *Complete Plays*, where A is 'given the memories and desires of an abuser' (2001, p xv). This all helped in jettisoning the majority of the poetry. I have, however, kept a few lines from *High Flight* because it is a work that has resonance for me. It was my Great Uncle's favourite poem, he had been a navigator on the Lancaster bombers during WWII and I read it at his funeral. I also like the idea of a bee charmer having been a flier and now attempting to re-create the old bombing runs with his bees, and I think it serves as a useful insight to Henry's character.

The tent scene with the wild hives came about because I wanted Honey to find her own space, she was always either in Veronica's space or Henry's and with domestic or commercial bees never with wild bees that she could perhaps tame and make her own. There is definitely a wildness in her character that seemed to fit with this idea and initially she had run away from home and found this space for herself. In later drafts she is shown this place by Paul. At one point Paul shines a torch and Honey tells him off for disturbing the bees sleep, he thinks she is joking but she is deadly serious and talks about humans exploiting the bees work ethic and inducting them into a kind of bee slavery. It is one of the points in the script where the bee research and science of bee husbandry came in very naturally. I later changed this so that Paul would have something to teach her about the bees, something she would take on board - it's not her mother telling her, she doesn't have to try and drown it out, be unimpressed. Honey later turns to her Grandfather's belief that the bees are vanishing when she finds a message in the swarm pattern that the bees are leaving. The land is no good for them anymore and they are disappearing to the Rapture, being

recalled to Heaven by God himself. This belief chimes with the call to God at the end of *High Flight* ‘in the high untrampled sanctity of space, / Put out my hand and touched the face of God.’ (2000, p35)

#### INTO REHEARSAL – POLISHING THE BLUEPRINT

The theatricality of the work, using the beehives and thumping them to get the drone song in response, was brought home to me at rehearsal. I’d spent so long thinking about reading poetry to bees, singing to them and charming them, driving their flight into all sorts of wonderful shapes and being involved with the page and having people tell me this was a really strange idea, I’d forgotten that it would also be very exciting to watch. A rural play is something different to the often edgy, urban studio plays of modern small theatres and suddenly here we had something that took up a lot of space, the garden of beehives. The director was determined to realise the bees, where I had thought perhaps we might be limited to reading out the stage directions, so as the bees were directed to start their drone song, they did. I had envisioned the bees being realised with music and light, in a full stage production, which would prove a mystical scene perhaps, where you were not quite sure what was real. The actors not required for a scene made the bee song and Henry charmed them, using his figure of eight shapes and spirals, directed to look as if he was conducting music underwater or practicing tai chi. The actors still had to hold their scripts but they managed to bring the scene alive making shapes with one free arm. They were all interested in the science behind the play, which was new to most of them and although I have always known this project is an entertainment if people are drawn to care about what is happening with the bees, then that can only be a good thing.

The rehearsal took in the entire play, although only a short extract would be performed in front of an audience. It was useful in uncovering some improbable physical actions, principally for the actor playing Honey. In this draft Honey lost her reason and is put into the care of a psychiatric clinic. They put her in a straitjacket for visitors, fearing that she will do some harm to them and she leaps about her cell shouting nonsense at the moon. The actors thought some of what she was required to do in the scene would be impossible and they didn't believe that it would happen. The director, Clare Smout, said 'the straitjacket scenes are too extreme and she needs more of reason to wear it' (Smout rehearsal, 08/08/09). The actors also thought that if Honey was that much trouble in this day and age she would be shot full of drugs. The scenario sounded as if it was set in a different age and that wouldn't work because the bee crisis is happening now. This section would later be dropped completely and Honey's madness in this draft was translated into a deep communion with the hive mind, which had her entering a trance like state from where she would try to decode the message in the swarm pattern that the bees were leaving.

The other section, highlighted by performance and discussed by the panel afterwards, was Veronica's conference speech. It was always a problem, how to get the science into the play without disrupting the story. I felt it might work as a device because as it was the second scene, it sets up the seriousness of Veronica's mission early on and then we work with the information that comes from it. However, it disrupted the flow and pulled people out of the world created by the garden of beehives and they didn't like that, they wanted to stay there. It was very good feedback because on paper it seemed as if it was working and even in rehearsal, I had liked the way the actor had played the scene.

Working with the actors and director was a rewarding experience, particularly watching the director giving the actors space to come to their own conclusions. In setting the first scene the stage directions state there should be honeysuckle, sunflowers, lupins and lilacs in the unkempt borders and a clover lawn. The director asked why these particular plants should be in the garden. To attract the bees came the answer. But pushing the enquiry further led to the idea of nourishment, this is a place that means to protect and nurture. The rehearsal highlighted impossible challenges in the script for those being the bees, particularly in the third act. As each pressure mounted, from the storm, Henry's drunken outburst, Honey's reappearance in her shift from the clinic, (scenes omitted from the final draft), the bees swarmed, getting louder and louder and although the actors were determined to see it through it became impossible.

#### SPECIFICS OF CRAFT

Finding a form to tell the story of the bees' disappearance, linked in to the family story was at first complicated by too many ideas and characters. I needed to work through these to find the underlying story and in fact to find the eponymous bee charmer, who turned out to be Henry. Stepping back from the initial set of ideas to try and concentrate on how much an audience can accept at any one time was a concept I struggled with, always seeming to pack in too much information, often in clunky dialogue as I tried to get to grips with the story. From the first ideas of the script I had written scenes that were too short, existing merely as information drops. Overloading scenes with narrative that got in the way of learning about who the characters were.

An early exercise in duologues asked how long could I keep two characters talking. Not very long it turned out, I didn't know enough about them. Had I chosen

to write a duologue with Henry I might have fared better but at this point Mick, Honey's father, was still in the play. Perhaps the fact that he was being such hard work should have told me this character wasn't working. Realising that Aaron Sorkin, the writer of the *West Wing*, preferred to work principally with duologues having other characters adding on for a few steps during a walk and talk and then peeling off again to leave the initial duologue running was a step towards thinking perhaps I would stick with duologues. My reading was helping with this too particularly David Hare's *Skylight* in learning to pick up on the beats of emotion concealed behind the dialogue. What is not said being as important, often more so, than what is said e.g. when Tom and Kyra argue vehemently about the coat, (1995, p19) and about Kyra's choice of lifestyle 'this ridiculous self-righteousness' (1995, p41) and when the past hurt and unbearable pain of separation bubbles up to the surface so Kyra must break the tension by throwing a box of cutlery across the room (1995, p49). The end of Act One of *Skylight* sees Kyra losing the fight to keep her distance with Tom, she thinks she will retain integrity if she can keep her word that the affair is over but the stage direction has them 'take each other in their arms' and she 'shakes with grief' (1995, p54) the depth of feeling she has been struggling to contain in this scene finally exposed.

A seminar with David Edgar focused in part on finding the sentence that defined the play, a sentence you could fit on the back of a postage stamp. Over the drafts this has been a helpful exercise, although it has changed from the initial conception as a horror play – too melodramatic, a psychological drama, a disintegration play, to a simpler concept of a rites of passage story – essentially Honey's summer with the bees. The Edgar seminar also covered, amongst other things, exits and entrances, the importance of a great line when leaving the stage and

how this was a particular problem with real time plays. If each of the three acts was going to take place over a single day this could cause problems. Again the play needed re-envisioning and from another direction, each time we had a seminar this seemed to happen and another part I thought I had a handle on would start to unravel but this was all part of the process. Paul, who would be Honey's romantic interest, became Henry's gardener simply through thinking out a way he might enter the scene, which he does by pushing a mower around the hives. Henry leaves that scene to fetch Honey hot, sweet tea to get over the energy drain of charming the bees. He returns carrying a queen bee he has found dying in the house. It is the first death in the play and sets up a shadow of what will follow, and follow on after that, using the set up and pay off premise expounded in David Edgar's classes, 'foreshadowing, set-ups, reiterations, pay-offs, echoes; sometimes varied and disguised so what you think is a pay-off is a reiteration en route to another pay-off' (Edgar seminar, 07/10/08). We know the bees are under threat but here is the first indication that the threat has arrived.

The play demanded a feel for the rural environment, an audience would need to believe in the garden of beehives and the psycho-geography of place before they could be led down a more magical path and believe in the bee charming that would take place there. If there were any false notes here they wouldn't be willing to follow this myth no matter how tightly woven into the family story. Nell Leyshon creates a wonderful sense of place in her depiction of the Somerset levels in her plays, *Glass Eels*, a simple story about sexual awakening and in *Comfort Me With Apples*, about life in a changing rural landscape. Reading these plays showed a way to thread in a feeling for place, which had been missing and also faith in a further paring down of the script, seeing how this process would not diminish but improve it. The stage

directions and the spare dialogue in *Glass Eels* for example create a feel for the Somerset Levels as a watery place: ‘And after the floods. When the water went back, there was eels hung on the bushes, dangling off the branches like strips of ribbon.’ (2007, p29) bring a haunting quality to the work on the page, conjuring images of these strange creatures twisting themselves into knots, which mirrors the contorted emotions of the characters in the play.

The business with the Zippo lighter was introduced to give some interaction between Honey and Paul. We know that she has been expelled from school for starting a fire, Henry is supposed to keep her away from anything to do with fire and here is this young lad giving her a lighter as a pretence to have further interaction with her. It causes a worry, what will she do with it? A comment from Peter Leslie wild in the panel after the showcase, advised that it was ‘a great moment when Honey decides to keep the Zippo that Paul has “accidentally” mislaid, it is like the Chekhovian gun’ (MPhil Showcase: Wild, P 12/06/09) and would keep people wondering about the damage she might do with it.

In the chapter on *Thought* in Sam Smiley’s book *Playwriting, The Structure of Action* the author talks about ‘a functional definition of character is a personage who makes a series of choices that impel action.’ (2005, p153). This made me think about Henry’s choices that affect the action; choosing to employ Paul (a decision that predates the action), choosing to take responsibility for Honey, to be the cool Granddad and induct her to bee charming and his choice to recall Veronica when he can no longer cope. These choices chart the forward momentum of the play to varying degree, the principal one being him showing Honey how to charm the bees, as it is from this point that the rest of the play unfolds. From the moment when Veronica is

recalled, Henry loses his ascendancy and he is diminished - losing both his bees and his power to charm, plus being ousted as the decision maker in his own home.

Honey's choices are small but have wider ramifications that introduce a note of chaos. She chooses not to go to America perhaps thinking this will stop her mother leaving. However, the resourceful Veronica finds a way around this and leaves her daughter with Henry. Honey chooses to steal Paul's lighter and ushers in the destruction of the hives. She compels the question what would she do if her choices were larger? Veronica makes the choice to leave Honey with Henry but is brought back to her role as queen bee to bring order to chaos in Act Three. She backed Henry into a corner in the first act – help me with Honey and reconnect with your family or lose us – and is backed into the same corner in the third. The play then becomes about responsibility and blame culture, who is responsible for Honey? For the bee crisis? In Act One Veronica devolves responsibility to Henry and in the second this plays out with his inability to discipline Honey. In choosing to take on this role and attempt to reconnect with his daughter he brings his own world crashing down around him.

Through my reading and visits to the theatre over the course of the year I have come to value the stage for the sustained scene it can handle. The one act pot boiler of *Creditors* (Strindberg, 2008) set in the small space of the Donmar Warehouse taught me about the intense focus a piece of theatre can deliver, no breaks, no set changes and three characters. In Steve Waters' double bill *The Contingency Plan* there are two acts in each play and only six scenes in total over the course of the two plays, which completely immerses you in the plot and the characters interweaving dynamics. These plays in particular made me determined to get to grips with a sustained scene and I began practicing having the characters talk to each other with concealed agendas,

nothing that would necessarily be in the play itself but to practice this element of craft.

Another element of craft I found myself trying to master was the picking and choosing of which elements of the story to include. I generally found that when a scene was becoming laboured and awkward it was because there was too much going on. It was a re-adjustment from the kind of storytelling we see on television, the short scenes and cars driving away and people knocking on doors that you just don't always need to see on the stage. Discovering the plot of the story through the awkward drafts meant I could uncover a structure, from which to try and hang the beats of thought and emotion. Leaving room for the underlying structure to become architecture for both the spoken and unspoken was all part of learning how a script becomes a blueprint for performance.

The challenge of representing science and nature in the play was given to the adult characters in the play, Veronica the cool headed rational scientist who worked for an answer to the problem and Henry who believed in the folkloric aspects of nature and God and that he would look after the bees. He is at first reluctant to admit to his opinion and tells Veronica her mother would be proud of her, quite telling that he doesn't say he is proud of her. He tells Honey about the theory of Rapture, perhaps sensing an ally in her but again doesn't outright admit he believes in the theory. His bee charming skills, which are God given, and not a science that can be studied and acquired but an innate ability show him on the side of nature and a natural order. He tells Honey that the skill can skip generations and that Veronica is full of fear of the dark art. Honey has no fear and shows talent in charming the bees and communing with the hive mind but she is so successful at it that she gets into trouble.

David Edgar's book *How Plays Work* talks about obligatory scenes, 'the confrontation between two characters we have all been waiting for' (2009, p146). In *The Bee Charmer* this is between Veronica and Honey. It is delayed from the first act where Veronica reluctantly discusses her daughter with Henry and tries to provide him with some guidelines to her discipline before she heads off to her conference. Honey has managed to get herself expelled and her mother has no time to look for another school for her. Veronica is leaving her with her own father she hasn't seen in some time, wanting to escape his disapproval of her life. When Veronica returns Honey is unwell so again the confrontation is postponed as Veronica is forced into the role of caring mother. This section was later cut and led to the confrontation outside the techno hive. Honey is angry the wild bees have been tricked but Veronica avoids an out and out verbal fight. Honey eventually decides to go in and make her mother listen to her. But they are diverted by the approaching storm, which takes the fight out of them and the silencing of the bees, which makes Honey's complaint resonant as she tells her mother over and over that she never listens. When Veronica is finally ready to listen, it is too late, the bees are gone. Here Honey's character is functioning as a warning, as she has throughout the play, ringing warning bells that should be heeded even if it is not quite clear what the warning is. Time is running out, time to discipline Honey, time to find out the answer to the bees vanishing, time to revel in Henry's skill as a bee charmer, time to find answers to the questions some are not even ready to ask.

## LAST STAGES

The challenge with the final draft for this process was as always to continue trying to find more subtle ways for the dialogue to carry information that the audience

needs to know, embedding and implying rather than stating. Threading the geography more closely into the script by using Paul more to give bearings on where the action was taking place and adding more local colour to Henry's language.

Honey's assimilation into the environment happened too quickly and she needed to be more at odds with this strange world for longer, before she is initiated into bee charming. Veronica needed to lay down the law more clearly for us to see Henry playing the cool Granddad and trying to relate to this teenager he hardly knows in this way is a very bad idea. Once his character had rules to break, the conflict in the family dynamic should become more clear-cut. We ought to feel that Veronica leaving her troubled daughter in the hands of somebody who doesn't really know how to look after her is a bad idea. The second act needed completely re-structuring as I now aimed to keep the three acts to the same kind of outdoor setting with the bees prominent and not divert to the indoor clinic sets, which took us away from gardens and beehives. Trying to stick to what was distinctive about the play and not being drawn into almost stereotypical clinic scenes, (see Appendix A) which have a formula in their set up and destruction was also something that became a clearer goal in the re-writing and the paring down. This approach began to resemble that of one of the visiting playwrights, Anthony Weigh, whose approach is to write out some scenes and then look for the narrative arc: 'like doing a jigsaw puzzle where you try to find the missing pieces in order to tell the story' (Weigh seminar, 27/10/09). The idea of Honey's madness in the original draft was interesting to explore but there was no clear reason why this should happen until she was caught up in the hive mind. Once I reached this conclusion it seemed quite natural that she would have such a gift for bee charming that it would overwhelm her and almost drive her mad and at the very least make her dangerously ill. This made Honey integral to the play instead of sidelining

as the distraction to Veronica's mission, she would have a central role to play in taking on Henry's mantle and attempting to find an answer, the whole family now having stakes in the future of bees.

In one draft the techno-hive of the final act is built in the woods, taking over the space Honey and Paul had found together but this led to awkward moments in the storytelling regarding Veronica's return. She either had a complicated arrival in one draft or that aspect and her confrontation with Henry was omitted, simply having her appear at work in the techno-hive. The confrontation with Henry was important to see, realising this was a diminished character who couldn't cope and so Veronica's return was brought back. Thinking then about the staging elements, it made sense to shift the newly constructed hive to Henry's garden, where it replaces the idyllic setting of bee harmony of the first act with all the attendant symbolism.

In an outdoor environment all the sets would have an element of magic about them, the garden of beehives; entered at different stages over one day, mid morning, midday and midnight for the first act. The wild beehives and the tent covered in the glow of fairy lights in the second and the transformation of the auditorium into a giant beehive in the final act. However, if the main action – the family dynamic- and the realisation of the bees was kept as naturalistic as possible and of course some of these decisions would be for a director and lighting designer to engage in, a balance might be struck for an interesting theatrical experience.

## THE EXAMINERS

In answer to the examiners first reports, I have made several changes to the script. The first in making the script less reliant on duologues brings Honey into the first scene and exhibiting brattish behaviour, ignoring her Grandfather and attempting

to get a signal for her mobile phone. Veronica doesn't go straight away anymore, but slips away to go to her conference later, avoiding a scene with her daughter who doesn't want her to go. In response to the stageability points, the techno hive and wild hive sets are gone and we are merely left with the garden scene as a set throughout, the tent scene is moved into the garden. I have more baldly stated stage directions in the hope that the examiners can see that this is clearly intended for the stage, with plays such as *Enron* creating whole sets with little more than sound and light eg the entire floor of the stock exchange, I would hope to engage the audience imagination in the visual experience of this play and ask a reader to fully engage and put aside their scepticism on a first read through. Honey has lost the 'firebug' element of her character that was found so unbelievable and is now merely a sulky teen and feels neglected. To answer to the 'quasi religious' criticism I have changed some of Honey's songs but kept Henry's because that is his character (in the prior version Honey used hymns because Henry urged her to) and of course Henry is religious, what else did he have to put his trust in when he went up in those tin cans of warplanes on bombing runs? He wants to believe in a religious explanation for the bees' disappearance because he could almost accept it. Also to note, Honey singing Kum Ba Ya received a huge laugh when this play was staged at the Showcase, her first attempt at grappling with her grandfather's world well received. Bee charming is a magical enterprise and I can only state that no one mentioned a problem of 'basic plausibility' prior to your report including theatre professionals in a panel of nineteen people. It is based on a folklore tradition and the idea of rapture with nature, a communing with the natural world.

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THE BEE CHARMER

## Characters

Henry – a man in his 80's, a retired pilot.

Veronica – Henry's daughter, 30, a scientist.

Honey – Veronica's daughter, 15.

Paul – Henry's gardener, 19.

## Setting

The play takes place during the summer of 2007, during the height the bee disease Colony Collapse Disorder. The set is Henry's garden in Gloucestershire, filled with a mix of beehives the old fashioned round kind and the newer box type.

## Notes on the Text

The punctuation and some spelling as follows dictates the rhythm of a character's speech and therefore does not strictly follow the laws of grammar.

A slash (/) indicates the point of overlap in interrupted dialogue.

An ellipses (...) indicates trail off of thought where a lack of confidence is felt by the character in what they were about to say.

Poems quoted in the text are to be found in full in the Appendices.

## Notes for production

The play as written presents visually as non-naturalistic narrative. There are no bees present in the play, they should be realised by light and sound and colour to encourage the imagination of the audience.

## ACT ONE

SC 1/

*It is mid-morning, a hot day at the beginning of summer in a country garden in Gloucestershire. There are beehives dotted everywhere, a mix of the old fashioned round type and the newer box frames, some of them have white tap buckets next to them ready for the next honey harvest. The garden is filled with honeysuckle, sunflowers, lupins and lilacs in the unkempt borders and has a clover lawn. There is some garden furniture, a couple of chairs and a table. Henry, a man in his eighties, wanders amongst the hives inspecting them. He carries secateurs to deadhead the flowers. Veronica, his thirty-year old daughter, waves him over to her. She carries an apiary veil which she twists nervously in her hands.*

Henry: The bees are flying.

Veronica: Yes, I saw them.

Henry: You sleep all right?

Veronica: Yes. The garden's looking lovely.

Henry: And the little one? Sleeping off the long trip from London I expect.

Veronica: I'm sorry we were so late.

Henry: Friday night traffic. Everyone rushing to leave the city. Plenty of townies filling up the houses round here on a weekend as it happens.

Veronica: Funny, I never think of myself as a townie.

Henry: You are though, aren't yer? After all this time.

Veronica: I didn't get much chance to say... to fill you in, last night.

Henry: Fill me in?

Veronica: Catch you up.

Henry: You do 'phone, every now and again.

Veronica: Events moved quickly this week.

Henry: You in trouble? Only I thought it was unusual. Out of the blue you might say.

Veronica: Why do you immediately jump to trouble?

Henry: City life is not all the girl needs. We're land folk. Always have been, this country is losing the feel for the land you know.

*He inspects the flowers and snips the dead ones with his secateurs.*

Henry: You know you can always come home. (*Beat*). Hives is strong, full of honey and plenty of stock.

Veronica: I'll have that to look forward to, when I get back.

Henry: Yes. What? Get back from where?

Veronica: My conference.

Henry: And you want me to look after the kid?

*Enter Honey dressed all in black and waving her mobile in the air.*

Honey: No pissin' signal. Where the hell are we?

Henry: Colourful.

Honey: Don't you get any signal?

Henry: What is she talking about?

Honey: Useless piece of crap!

Veronica: Her mobile phone. It's comes installed with every fifteen year old and actually is a part of her, if you try and remove it, screaming and fainting ensue.

Honey: Nothing...absolutely... fucking dead!

Henry: Don't you pick her up on it?

*A beat.*

Veronica: She's been in some trouble. Going to have to set up some ground rules.

Strict bedtimes, no wandering in and out when she likes.

Honey: We'll see about that.

Henry: What sort of trouble?

Honey: Weren't my fault!

Veronica: Another fight at school, she's been expelled this time.

Henry: Rough there, is it?

Honey: Oh yeah. They use the cane and everything Granddad.

*Honey wanders away from them, still trying to obtain a signal.*

Henry: You on the run? Don't know about harbouring fugitives.

Honey: Funny, old man.

Veronica: I'd be back before you know it. No longer than the span of a honeybee.

Henry: I don't know, that's a fair spell.

*A pause.*

Veronica: Too much to ask?

Henry: And you'll miss her birthday? Sweet sixteen this one.

Honey: What do you think? / It's not like it's important or anything...

Veronica: Don't do this, you always do this!

Honey: ...time to split.

*But she stays on the edge of the garden to listen.*

Veronica: I can't be everywhere, I can't do everything! And...her messing

everything up...we'll have to find her a new school and I don't have the time, there's no time! Everyone's out of time, the school year is over, we've got to get Honey in somewhere, I've got to get to the conference, the bees... the bees are running out of time too, don't you think they deserve my complete attention right now? The whole species in crisis and she, she's had my undivided attention for fifteen years – is she grateful? Is she? Not a bit of it!

Henry: Oh grow up, kids don't think like that and you know it. Were you grateful to us? (*Beat*). Of course not, that's not how it works Veronica.

*A pause.*

Henry: And the research? How's that going? (*Beat*). Pesticides still your thing? Hey?

*Beat.*

Veronica: I need to get out of the lab and into the field.

Henry: Here? Don't know about that. Two women around, upsetting my bees. (*Beat*).

So what's really going on?

Veronica: Current rate of decline... the projections...led to professional differences.

Henry: And you couldn't keep your temper?

Veronica: It wasn't like that.

Henry: They wouldn't back you?

Veronica: They chose the other guy. S.A.D vs C.C.D.

Henry: S.A.D?

Veronica: Mostly affects commercial stock, Stress Activated Decline. But... well there's reasons for that. Not for C.C.D. not for total collapse. Anyway...

Henry: You lost the funding.

Veronica: And the flat.

Henry: Ah. (*Beat*). Sorry to hear that.

Veronica: Came home.

Henry: Its good to see you.

*Beat.*

Henry: How long do you reckon we've got?

Veronica: By my numbers?

Henry: Of course your numbers.

Veronica: We're all done by 2035. May as well pack up and....

Henry: Go home? (*Beat*). They'll see me out.

Veronica: Dad!

Henry: It's only the truth.

*Beat.*

Veronica: We had some in the lab, twenty-five different pesticides inside them... and getting worse, they're catching everything that's going.

Henry: The land's no good to them anymore. No wonder they're leaving.

Veronica: The whole eco system's.... dying, you mean?

Henry: Yeah, dying. I meant dying.

Honey: It's bloody hopeless.

*Snaps her phone shut and exits.*

*A pause.*

Veronica: All your colonies are clean at the minute?

Henry: There's no infestation here M'am!

Veronica: You're very lucky.

Henry: Luck's got nothing to do with it. Good bee husbandry is that. (*Beat*). Now

what would you like for lunch? I've got a freezer full of stuff Mrs West dropped off from the farmer's market on Tuesday, / there's all sorts.

Veronica: Anything'll do for me but Honey's got these allergies, I wrote out a list... tomatoes and she should be careful around the hives, wear her hat and veil. She won't want to of course, it'll mess up her hair... and could you try not to be at your bee charming tricks in front of her?

Henry: Tricks? You make me sound like a third rate magician.

*Beat.*

Veronica: I brought a veil, didn't think you'd have one.

*Veronica offers him the veil she's been holding.*

Henry: I don't 'ave 'em. Don't 'ave no need of 'em.

Veronica: But we will.

*Henry takes it. Honey appears on the edge of the garden drinking a glass of water noisily.*

Henry: I wouldn't frighten the girl Veronica.

Honey: (*Mutters*). I am not wearing that.

*Beat.*

Henry: Remember the Wilson's?

Veronica: Twenty-five colonies?

Henry: Wiped out.

Honey: You two want to get a life. Listen to yourselves. Boring!

Veronica: Funny, when I do get a life you don't like that either.

Honey: Didn't say it had to be on the other side of the world, did I?

Henry: It's not Australia.

Honey: May as well be.

Henry: Teenagers.

Honey: Don't psych me old man.

Henry: What's she saying?

Veronica: She's being rude. Apologise.

Honey: Whatever. Sorry. Whatever.

Veronica: That's the answer I get to everything, whatever.

Honey: Whatever.

*Honey wanders off, away from the hives.*

Veronica: Could you take that glass inside please? Don't expect me to clear up after you.

Honey: Whatever.

*Honey exits.*

Henry: Restless, isn't she?

*A pause*

Veronica: Was it varroa? An infestation?

Henry: Looks like. They all have to go for research now, carcasses them's as 'ave carcasses. Course when it's the vanishing... well, you've seen it. There's nothing.

Veronica: Horrible. Toxic cocktails, whole hives brought in...but your stock remained clear?

Henry: For now. Any new guidelines coming?

Veronica: I'm out of the loop.

Henry: You brought some equipment? I've saved some of the dead, like you asked.

Veronica: Yes, see I think the mix of hives is interesting, of course they don't want to hear that, you know. Don't want to hear about the domestic situation, they're not interested in stats from outside the compound. *(Beat)*. I guess that includes me now.

Henry: You keep fighting. *(Beat)*. Your Ma'd be proud Veronica. Our girl against the world. *(Beat)*. Though it's beyond me what you get up to in your lab. But I applaud it, we've got to try...

Veronica: Dad...

Henry: No love, she would. *(Beat)*. And your girl, she looks healthy enough. Likes poetry I seem to remember?

Veronica: She did. I'm not so sure now...

Henry: You missed a treat this morning a great cloud lifting off together, the magical swarm. Made me think of the old 101 squadron taxi, taxi, taxi and then whoosh the air flying by and tears for looking, goggles up on my head, the pilot cursing me for an imbecile and the feeling, oh the feeling of it. We wheeled and soared and swung, high in the sunlit silence... You know the old poem, Veronica.

Veronica: I do, but I like to hear you recite it.

Henry: Oh, I have slipped the surly bonds of earth

And danced the skies on laughter silvered wings;

Sunward I've climbed and joined the tumbling mirth

of sun-split clouds.....

....And while, with silent lifting mind I've trod

the high untrespassed sanctity of space,

put out my hand, and touched the face of God. <sup>1</sup>

*Beat.*

Veronica: Beautiful.

Henry: Good old Gillespie and a fine day, it puts heart into you.

*A pause.*

Veronica: Tea?

Henry: That'd be most welcome.

*Veronica exits.*

*Henry bangs on the nearest hive to him and receives a grumble of drone song in response from the bees.*

Henry: Good, healthy hives. We should be all right out here. Out on the edge of the city. *(Beat)*. My lords... ladies... gentlemen... your majesties, may we have a small taste of your wares this fine morning?

*Enter Honey carrying the hat as Henry reaches into the nearest hive and pulls out a clench of dripping honeycomb, the bees register a low grumble but do not sting him. He crouches admiring the honey before putting it into a bucket with a tap at the side of the hive.*

Honey: She's sent me out...OMG! What are you doing?

Henry: Hush now and put your veil on.

Honey: You're stealing the honey!

Henry: Quiet. *(Beat)*. Look at the colour! Well done my beauties...it's not stealing, we're honey farmers, always have been, always will... if it was dairy farming

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<sup>1</sup> See Appendix A

you wouldn't say we were stealing their milk would you?

*A pause*

Henry: Well, maybe you would. But the thing is the bees make so much honey there's plenty for them and plenty for us as well. How do you think the family made their money all these years? (*Beat*). Farming honey's not stealing. Take some, taste it!

Honey: Aren't you supposed to do something to it first?

Henry: Like what?

Honey: I don't know, like pasteurise it or something.

Henry: That's milk you daft girl.

Honey: It's not very runny.

Henry: Clover honey is that. Lovely. Got density to it, viscosity.

Honey: You're not wearing any protection! Mum said I have to wear this stupid hat... why don't the bees sting you?

Henry: I'm a bee charmer.

Honey: Where's your top hat?

Henry: What?

Honey: Aren't you supposed to wear a top hat? The tamers at the circus/ all do...

Henry: Charmer, bee charmer. You want to wash your ears out.

*Beat.*

Honey: Aren't you scared?

Henry: You've been away too long.

Honey: What do you mean?

Henry: You were never scared before. You had them tangled up in your hair once, at

a picnic. Darndest thing. Everyone panicking but you and me. There I was trying to scoop them out of your hair and you so calm.

Honey: Yeah, I remember.

Henry: Bravest thing I ever saw.

Honey: (*Mutters*). I was scared stiff then.

*A pause.*

Honey: Would I be able to do it? To charm bees and get the honey?

Henry: Doubt it. There's not many as has the gift of it. And what would your mother say? No I don't know what your mother would have to say about that. Aren't you in enough trouble?

Honey: Maybe if I could be useful she wouldn't give me such a hard time.

Henry: I wouldn't mind if you watched your language. Then maybe I wouldn't give you a hard time.

Honey: Mum doesn't care.

Henry: My house, my rules. Right?

Honey: I'll try.

*Honey puts the hat on.*

Henry: That's my girl. Go on then, try some.

*Honey dips her finger into the bucket. A trundling noise is heard and Paul enters, a young man of seventeen pushing a mower, dressed head to foot in a beekeeping costume.*

Paul: All right Boss?

Henry: Can't complain young man, can't complain. How's yer Mam?

Paul: Oh not too bad, thanks fer asking Mr White. Transferred her to the hospital yesterday, said it was getting too much to keep coming all the way out here each day. Stopped the meals on wheels an' all worse luck.

Henry: So you're all on yer own?

Paul: I'm all right Mr White, man of the house and all that.

Henry: We'll have to keep an eye out for each other.

Paul: Don't you worry yer head about me.

Henry: It's for the best I'm sure. Lots of work changing all them dressings and that.

Paul: I didn't mind like, taking care of her and that.

Henry: Can't be long and you'll be taking your driving test surely?

Paul: Oh I've to get a bit more practice in first Mr White. Put the old girl into a 'aystack, forgot where the break were.

Henry: You'll have to let me know when you're planning on going out again, so as I can stay indoors!

Paul: You do right Mr White.

Henry: She's not in too much pain now? (*To Honey*). Had a nasty do with 'er leg. His Mother, see. Used to look in on me she did, keep an eye out.

Paul: She's got an ulcer on 'er leg see.

Henry: Nasty do is that. Paul, this here is my granddaughter, Honey, you'll remember her?

Paul: I do remember, the girl with bees in her hair, never forget it.

Henry: See there Honey, you're famous!

Paul: Few summers ago now I s'pose... anyway... (*Beat*). Am I ok to have my smoke now then?

Henry: I thought you were quitting.

Paul: I am. In a bit like.

Henry: Not around the hives, if you don't mind.

Paul: Right y'are Mr White, gotta look after the stock.

Henry: That's right. Time for a cuppa I think, Honey? Yer Mam's probably got her nose lost in a book.

Honey: I'll follow on.

*Exit Henry.*

Paul: You hot in that get up?

Honey: You hot in yours?

*Beat.*

Paul: Damn! Must've dropped me lighter. Can you help me search it out?

Honey: What's it look like?

Paul: Silver Zippo. Expensive, that's what.

Honey: Not yours then.

Paul: Cheeky.

*They search in the grass around the hives.*

Paul: So where did you get them fancy clothes?

Honey: What's wrong with my clothes?

Paul: Bloody hell! I've tore the bastard suit.

Honey: It's not too bad.

*Beat.*

Honey: How do you know my Granddad?

Paul: Live over the way.

Honey: How old are you?

Paul: Nineteen. You?

Honey: Sixteen.

Paul: All grown up now ain'tcha city girl? (*Beat*). So, you want to go out, sometime?

Honey: Maybe.

Paul: We could get together. If you like.

Honey: I don't care.

Paul: You got a boyfriend then?

Honey: Maybe I do. Maybe I don't.

Paul: Have you got a light?

Honey: Filthy habit. (*Beat*). I remember you. Narky little kid always hanging around.

Paul: You were the entertainment. Going out of my mind with boredom I was, school holidays in the country, sod all to do.

Honey: Yeah well, the city's much the same.

Paul: So what's the story with you?

Honey: Got expelled didn't I?

Paul: Blimey!

Honey: So, where would you take me then? If I was interested like.

Paul: Oh, interested now are you?

Honey: Didn't say that. And I'm sort of grounded anyway...

Paul: Shame. See, there's this great little place I know, back of the woods, not far from here and there's these giant wild hives I can show you and that. Your family always seems mad keen anything to do with bees. But of course, well...we don't have to...

Honey: All right then.

Paul: All right then.

*Exit Paul. Honey checks he has gone before displaying the silver Zippo she has palmed and sparks it to life. She stares into the small flame as if looking for answers.*

SC 2/

*A couple of days later. Mid-day in the garden of beehives, it is extremely hot. Henry addresses his bees.*

Henry: It's been several hours since my last confession. Honey's settling in, nice bit of company for me

*Enter Honey carrying her sketchbook. She wears a white cotton shirt and her black trousers.*

Honey: Who are you talking to?

Henry: Got the bees here.

Honey: You talk to the bees?

Henry: Only ones I get any sense out of... well, see it's an old folk tradition.

Honey: Quaint.

Henry: I suppose. But we'll do anything; try anything to keep them alive. I read them poetry sometimes. They like the cadence of Mr W.B. Yeats I find. Listen to this:

We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;  
More substance in our enmities  
Than in our love; O honeybees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.<sup>2</sup>

*A beat.*

Henry: See now, never take 'em for granted. Never. (*Beat*). Put your veil on.

Honey: I look stupid in it.

Henry: Look more stupid covered in suppurating pus-ridden sores and red sting blotches wouldn't yer?

Honey: There aren't even that many here, flying about and that.

Henry: Your mother's not long out the door and here we are, already breaking rules.

Honey: All right Granddad, keep yer wig on.

Henry: And here was I going to ask if you want to see something...cool?

*Beat.*

Honey: Like what?

Henry: Go stand over there, out the way and whatever happens just stay still and quiet with your hat on, understood?

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<sup>2</sup> See Appendix B

Honey: Whatever.

Henry: Seven stings can be life threatening.

Honey: You never wear one.

Henry: And when you're as old and as stupid as me you can do as you like. 'Till then...

*Honey puts the veil on.*

Henry: And keep quiet.

*Henry bangs his fist on each hive to wake the swarm and begins humming, the light grows darker as the swarm takes shape taking us into the world of the bee charm a magical realm realised in sound and light. We do not see the bees' movements but as we hear them we must imagine their movement, like shoals of fish busy together.*

*Henry starts making the bees fly shapes, spinning them into spirals as his hands describe circles and figure of eights; he keeps a singsong tone to his speech as they talk.*

Honey: OMG! What are you...how...how are you doing that?

Henry: Imagine yourself into their space, think how they think, open yourself to the hive mind.

Honey: It's mad. Really mad.

Henry: You see the shapes in your mind, really see them and fly them into it like a dance. Sometimes I make them fly old squadron patterns. Reliving the glory days, the old bombing runs. It's a difficult thing to explain Honey but I'll do me best. It's more of a feeling of communicating with the hive you see. You couldn't force them to do anything they didn't want to do but it can be handy if you want a nip of honey of a

morning. You can drive them in all shapes and mostly the humming lets them know, you're not going to hurt them; you're going to protect them. We give them space to live and they pay their rent in honey. I'll send them back to their queen now.

*Henry finishes his charm with a flourish.*

Honey: I don't remember you doing that. Before. When we used to stay.

Henry: Your Mother didn't want you seeing it, when you were younger. Thought you would get scared.

Honey: Scared?

Henry: That's what she thought.

Honey: I wouldn't have been scared.

Henry: That's what I thought.

Honey: She always gets her own way.

Henry: That's Veronica.

*A pause.*

Honey: Will you show me again? About making the shapes? (*Beat*). It looks amazing.

Henry: I've still got it then.

*He clutches his head in sudden agony.*

Honey: Granddad?

Henry: Cluster headache. It'll pass. (*The pain goes*). You any good at maths?

Honey: Not really.

Henry: It's helpful to know something about trigonometry. Could be there comes a

day when it saves your life.

Honey: Adults are always saying that about maths. Everyone I know hates it.

Henry: Is that right? In your class is that?

Honey: I'm in the lowest set. (*Beat*). Was in the lowest set, I s'pose, before they chucked me out. Glad to get rid of me I suppose. They always thought I was weird.

Henry: Why's that?

Honey: 'Cos I'm different. I guess. They don't like me. (*Beat*). Sometimes...odd stuff happens around me... I don't know why.

Henry: Like what?

Honey: Like I don't remember fighting... I remember getting mad and then it's like... I dunno really. I get mad and people get hurt.

Henry: Need to keep an eye on your temper then.

Honey: I know.

Henry: Maybe we can get you doing some tai chi.

Honey: Very zen.

Henry: Sounds like you need it kiddo.

*A pause.*

Henry: You got your sketchpad there?

Honey: Can you draw?

Henry: Good enough to make spirals and a few bees flying. I used to like trig, at school. Trig we called it. (*Taking the paper*). Now let's see. You watch closely. The simplest form, keep them spiralling in a figure of eight. Elegant like.

Honey: It looks simple on paper.

*A pause.*

Henry: Think you'd like to give it a go?

Honey: Me? I couldn't do that.

Henry: Wearing your veil aren't you?

Honey: I don't think this is what Mum had in mind.

Henry: I'll start out and you come on in, just copy me if you feel up to it.

Honey: I'm not sure about this...

Henry: We'll be right, just keep your eyes on me.

*Henry begins to walk towards the hives and begins to hum The Lord's My Shepherd. He makes slow shapes with his hands as if he is conducting music underwater or practicing tai chi. He concentrates hard, for him the world almost disappears as he conducts the bees flight, Honey begins to copy him and joins her humming to his. The bees drone back and the pitch increases. As she gains in confidence and strength in her voice Henry drops lower and lower until Honey alone is commanding the bees flight, she mimics Henry and he backs off, the bees drone song gets louder, they accept Honey as they accept Henry. When Henry speaks he maintains a singsong quality.*

Henry: That's good, very good. Keep it going. Make them spiral, yes that's the way...

Like a fearless angel standing there... now think of a tune and start to sing, got to be something that will come every time you need it to... a song? A hymn maybe? They like a nice hymn, brings 'em to the source.

Honey: What about poetry?

Henry: Song would be better; you have more control with a tune. It's got to be

something that'll come every time.

Honey: Oranges and Lemons say the Bells of/ St Clements...

Henry: Surely we can do better than that? What about a nice hymn? Christmas carol even?

Honey: Isn't it bad luck to sing carols when it isn't Christmas?

Henry: Is it? Well think of something, quick now.

Honey: Kum Ba Ya My Lord ...(*hums more*).

Henry: That's it, keep it aloft as long as you can you're doing great kid... keep them going, well would you look at that... amazing Honey, you're a natural kid...

Honey: Getting tired...

Henry: ...really see your figure of eight shapes, there keep it going...

Honey: ...getting really... oh God, see the pattern...

Henry: That's the hive mind connecting with yours, perfectly as it should be... all right kid?

Honey: Yeah... it's like they're talking... there's a pattern in the dark...

Henry: It's not dark Honey, it's just gone midday... keep your cool now... don't want you losing your reason, come on stay with me, keep a balance...

Honey: It's like they have a plan.

Henry: Very organised society bees, good work ethic... that's probably enough for now...

Honey: No, wait I want to see, I want to see what they're up to... oh no, they've shut me out! Like a black wall, a wall that moves and shivers and then... nothing. Silence.

Henry: ...and the royal wave, hand them back to their queen.

*A pause.*

Honey: Wow Granddad! That was amazing.

Henry: It truly was, you little bee charmer you.

Honey: Bee charmer! I'm a bee charmer?

Henry: It's in your blood; any fool could see that straight off.

Honey: My legs are shaking.

Henry: Need a sit down, is all. Cup of sweet tea and be right as rain.

Honey: What is that dark circle?

Henry: Don't know but they've been doing it more and more. *(Beat)*. Some say it's to do with the Rapture. Your mother ever get to telling you about that?

Honey: No, what is it?

Henry: But you know they are disappearing, don't you?

Honey: Yes, yes all her research.

Henry: There's some as has a different theory to yer Mum. Some think they've been recalled to Heaven, gone to the Rapture.

Honey: That's crazy! *(Beat)*. Isn't it?

*A pause.*

Honey: Granddad! You don't believe in that do you?

Henry: Well something's going on kid.

Honey: My head!

Henry: Sit down love, it's a side effect, it'll pass soon enough. It's just the bees having their fun.

Honey: Fun? Oh. It's gone.

Henry: See? It's only a short pain. Worth it really don't you think? For what we can do? *(Beat)*. Well done, lass. Power and control on your first sortie. Incredible.

Your mother never showed any aptitude for it, but full of fear is Veronica - that's always been her problem.

Honey: Mum? Afraid? Never!

*A long pause.*

Henry: Oh yes. After her mother died.

Honey: How did she die?

Henry: She was swarmed.

*Beat.*

*Enter Paul, still in full beekeeping costume and carrying a large jar containing a queen bee.*

Henry: Here comes biohazard.

Paul: How do Mr White?

Henry: Paul.

Paul: I'm not done from earlier, lost me spark up.

Henry: Take it as a sign son.

Paul: I suppose so, just it's not mine, I had a borrow of it from a mate.

Henry: I'll let you know if I see it, what you got there?

Paul: Found a queen in the shed.

Henry: Let me see. *(Beat)*. Hot in that suit is it?

Paul: Roasting.

Henry: You'll be safe enough, they've gone out on the forage.

Paul: Mebbe I'll risk it.

Honey: I've been bee charming.

Paul: Oh! You an' all eh?

Honey: Yeah, me an' all.

Paul: Funny job for a girl.

Honey: We're honey farmers.

Paul: You've been here two minutes and you think you know it all don'tcha?

*Henry hums a little to the jar and shakes the bee into his hand.*

Paul: The old man's really missed you, and yer Mam.

Honey: What do you know about it?

Paul: He talks to me sometimes, he gets lonely.

Henry: Look Honey, it's a queen.

Honey: A monster bee! Can I touch it?

Henry: I don't suppose it'll harm now.

Honey: So soft. Feels furry, look at the beautiful colours, a fiery orange... like flame... and the black... Granddad, my head...

Paul: Hey, careful there. You all right?

Henry: Headache back?

Honey: A blinding flash... I can't see straight...

Paul: Shall I take her?

Henry: She's dying and each one that dies now is a great loss. She's on her way to the great beehive in the sky. Worked hard all her life and given jobs to millions of her kind. Provided order in a chaotic world.

*A pause.*

Honey: Painkillers?

Henry: Paul, perhaps you could give Honey some room, space to breathe lad eh?

*(Beat)*. It is sad to see your majesty brought so low.

Paul: I'll put her in the hedgerow.

*Paul exits with the bee.*

Henry: *(Sighs)*. How are you doing lass?

Honey: Better.

*Beat.*

Henry: You watch yourself with him, has a bit of a reputation if you know what I mean. Jack the Lad.

Honey: You don't have to worry Granddad.

Henry: I hope not. I'm off for a lie down, this heat is terrible. You'll be all right?

Honey: I was gonna draw the hives.

*Honey walks to the table and sits facing the hives, chewing on a pencil.*

SC 3/

*Midnight in the garden of beehives. Twilight light. Henry is crouched down with a torch shining into a silent hive.*

Henry: Midnight and not back yet. Are they lost? Makes no sense, there's plenty of honey, your majesty but where are your subjects? No varroa, did they think it wasn't safe? Look, plenty of good honey stock. Neighbours have plenty. They gave

me no warning in their dark, wheeling pattern... is it now what's been foretold, is it the Rapture? Why would some go and not all? Have you gone? Your work done as mine is and now discarded, frail and useless. But your work isn't done! It is never done, you are always needed, from earliest medicine you have been needed! (*Beat*). Madness to walk that path. Come honeybees, come build...

*A pause. Henry moves to examine the hive off the stand, lying on its side.*

Something in there, something shining up at me...glinting at me... can't make it out... smells...smells of burnt sugar, smells like toffee apples in the air...

*Henry pulls out a sticky mass around something silver.*

Under attack they abandoned ship? (*Beat*). Better check the rest. Wake 'em all if I have to.

*Henry does the rounds in the garden, thumping on the hives, rousing the drone song and they each respond apart from the one empty hive he had been examining. Henry speaks through the bees until he is almost drowned in the sound and the song cuts off abruptly into black out.*

Something's coming. Something, I can't see the shape of it yet but something... it was in their dark circle ... and we're hurtling towards it, can't stop it. It'll come. Hunt us down, just as it's hunting out the bees, picking off the colonies. I cannot save you; you must save yourselves... save yourselves. Stay safe now and take shelter, find shelter against the coming storm.

## ACT 2

SC 1/

*A week later, it is just getting dark in the garden. Honey enters wearing a cotton summer dress and carrying a cool bag. She takes a freezer block from the bag and holds it to her forehead. Paul enters awkwardly trying to carry lots of camping equipment, tent and poles.*

Honey: Oh thank God. It's far too hot to sleep in the house.

Paul: Give us a hand then.

*They start to set out tent poles and put up the tent during the next.*

Paul: Does that pole say A on it?

Honey: Yeah.

Paul: Pass that over...should slot into...

Honey: What college are you going to?

Paul: Agricultural. Not far. Need my wheels though.

Honey: You know all about haystacks, I heard you telling him.

Paul: A bit of practice is all.

Honey: When does the canvas go on?

Paul: Right after I've attached this... hang on a sec... sorry, right there you give me that end and I'll just need to reach past you...

Honey: Hey!

Paul: Sorry. How does that look?

Honey: Is it supposed to be a yurt?

Paul: A what now?

*One side of the tent collapses.*

Paul: Bloody hell! This is supposed to be one of those easy tents so drunk festival goers can manage.

Honey: Shame you can't.

*Beat.*

Honey: Looks like it should be/ this side...

Paul: Like a townie would know how to put up a tent.

Honey: Some of us have gardens you know.

Paul: So you've slept under the stars before.

Honey: Not as such.

*A beat.*

Paul: What you needed was company.

*A beat.*

Paul: Watch this.

*He switches on fairy lights, creating a soft glow around the space.*

Paul: Magic. Well, Duracell.

*He tries to embrace her but she wriggles away.*

Paul: Hungry?

Honey: Starving. It's been meals on wheels.

Paul: Nice. My mam hates the stuff but I'm no cook.

Honey: You're a real catch aint' cha?

Paul: Sarnies and cider, that's about my limit.

Honey: Cider?

Paul: Good and strong too.

*They set out a blanket and break out the picnic in front of the tent during the next.*

Paul: Don't hide your beautiful face.

Honey: Honestly, you must think I'm such an idiot.

Paul: You grew up different to how I thought you would.

Honey: What's that mean?

Paul: Spiky. You know, like a hedgehog, gets all defensive.

Honey: Who are you calling a hedgehog?

Paul: I just calls it like I sees it.

*A beat.*

Honey: I'll have a swig.

Paul: Get that down you.

Honey: Strong...

Paul: Made at our place.

Honey: Really... strong.

*A pause.*

Paul: So, where's yer Dad then?

Honey: What?

Paul: Yer Dad? Where is he?

Honey: Not around.

Paul: Yer Granddad never talks about him.

Honey: It was Mum decided to keep me.

Paul: Lucky for me.

Honey: You're a charmer aint'cha?

Paul: I'm all right if he's around. More cider?

Honey: Go on then.

*A beat.*

Paul: Do you know the constellations? The star formations?

Honey: Teach me.

Paul: Now that's the Great Bear over there.

Honey: Doesn't look like a bear. Are you sure it's not a 'plane?

Paul: Shines the brightest light in the night sky, Sirius, is the other name.

Honey: Doesn't seem to be moving, maybe it's not a 'plane.

Paul: ...then there's the Little Bear...

Honey: There is no Little Bear...

Paul: ...and that's the Giant Teacup...

Honey: Now I know you're definitely making this up...

Paul: ...and there's the Middle Sized Bear...

Honey: Yeah and that's the Unicorn...

Paul: ...now you're getting it...

Honey: The Tiny Island...

Paul: ...and if you take that one, just there and draw an imaginary line through to this

and this and this to you right here with me, like this you end up with precious

Goldilocks stuck in the wood with nowhere to run to... you don't like me kissing

you?

Honey: No, I do.

Paul: Keep you safe and warm. (*Beat*). I want you to be safe. You never know when a giant bear might tumble out of the sky and come chase you.

Honey: Or a unicorn.

Paul: Or a unicorn.

*They kiss. Then scramble into the tent, looking out at the night.*

Honey: Did you hear something?

Paul: No.

Honey: Give us that torch?

Paul: What?

*Honey switches on the torch. The bees grumble lazily in the background.*

Paul: No, turn it off.

*Honey switches off the torch. The bees settle.*

Paul: These bees get to sleep, unlike the commercial stocks where they're working the world's bees to death, it's a sort of bee slavery, you know?

Honey: Says who?

Paul: Yer Granddad. Says in that America they truck 'em place to place and 'cos they are so hardworking when they find themselves somewhere new, they just set to and work as hard as they can without rest. It's evil.

Honey: Evil?

Paul: They don't get to hibernate, they take advantage - we take advantage of their work ethic. Imagine if you never got to rest, had to work on the farm twenty-four

seven until you dropped down dead. Poor beasties.

Honey: Come on, there are plenty of bees.

Paul: Well, we don't have to fight about it.

*A beat.*

Honey: I'm cold.

Paul: Come here. Warm as a grizzly me.

Honey: I've been warned about you country boys.

Paul: And I've been warned about you city girls.

*They kiss.*

*Black out/*

SC 2/

*The next morning. Honey is standing by one of the hives humming (can be some pop song, whatever is in the charts). She reaches in as we have seen Henry do and pulls out a fistful of broken honeycomb. The bees ignore her, hardly raising their song from a dull grumble. Honey licks her fingers.*

Honey: Maybe I should try and take you out for a spell. Can't be too hard.

Paul: Are you talking to the bees?

Honey: Telling them my life story.

Paul: Can't deny you're his granddaughter can you?

Honey: S'pose.

Paul: He'll be worried.

Honey: Hasn't far to go to find me.

*A beat.*

Honey: Want to taste the honey?

*They kiss.*

Paul: It's good. *(Beat)*. Glad I missed you gathering that, might have felt compelled to stop you.

Honey: I want to see if I can fly them.

Paul: Without the old man? Isn't that dangerous?

Honey: Could be. Scared to stay?

Paul: Be careful.

*Honey approaches the hives, humming a half remembered song. The bees drone fiercely as if resisting her, then settle their sound, rising to the bee charmer's song. Honey conducts their flight, copying her grandfather's movements. For a moment all is well, then it is as if she has been winded. She struggles to remain upright under the pressure and focus of the swarm, her breath comes in sharp intakes and she is clearly in trouble.*

Paul: Honey finish it! It's too much for you.

Honey: There's a pattern in the dark... it's a message, what are they trying to tell us?

I must try and remember it, ah my head, my head... this isn't supposed to happen

until we're done...wait let me see... don't you shut me out! Let me in, let me see...

*The swarm darkens the garden. They surround her. Honey sinks to the ground exhausted from battling with the swarm mind and suddenly as if at prearranged signal the bees leave and they leave her alone. Paul cautiously approaches her.*

Honey: Strong, determined even. They have a purpose and they... they want to finish it, whatever it is... sense of time running down, sand through the hourglass but their determination... weird... almost like they hadn't got time to play...

Paul: It's mid-summer, they've got plenty of time to lay in their winter feed ... What can you see?

Honey: A mirror of a thousand faces all spiralling up in a dark cloud, trying to get towards the light... there's a signal... encoded in the pattern... it means something... something important...it's important ... so dark... such darkness, it gets behind your eyes...In the swarm, everything's so dark and so many mirrors... I can't see, I can't see...I'm blind! I'm blind! Help me!

Paul: Calm down Honey, you're not blind... you're not... it's just.. it happens sometimes, like the old man said. God I hope she'll be ok. Don't be frightened, the darkness is only like the headaches, and they pass don't they, it'll go and you'll see again, you'll be all right... Can you walk?

*Paul helps her up and she leans against him, half crouching.*

Paul: No, of course you can't walk... I could probably carry you...

Honey: I'm so dizzy, they spin me around, spinning, spinning up into the light, a great mass of them...

Paul: Drink some water.

Honey: It's like they're underwater... they swirl up and up and... and... or maybe it's

me that's underwater... being swirled around, there's confusion and...

Paul: And what? Tell me, what do you see? I'll have to get the old codger... Henry!

Henry!

*Enter Henry in dressing gown and slippers.*

Henry: Where's the fire?

Paul: Help her!

*Honey is lying on the ground in a trance.*

Henry: She been doing what I think she's been doing?

Paul: Bee charming.

Henry: You didn't think to get me?

*Henry takes her pulse.*

Henry: Racing. It'll be a while.

Paul: She'll be ok?

Henry: Expect so. Put this on, she has no need of it.

*A long pause.*

Henry: Used to be we'd have to turn the hive.

Paul: For a death in the family, yes.

Henry: Naw, that's draping 'em wi' black ribbons. This is a change in the power structure.

Paul: What are you saying?

Henry: It's in nature. That's what happens.

Paul: What if she's not staying?

Henry: She won't have a choice.

Paul: She's a townie.

Henry: It chooses you.

*A beat.*

Paul: How long is this... gonna go on?

Honey: I can hear you.

Paul: Oh you can? Good, she's coming out of it.

Henry: Not yet.

Honey: Why are you guys so far away?

Paul: We're right here Honey.

Henry: She's not out of it yet.

Honey: Feel so strange.

Henry: That's what happens when you go messing about in things you're not ready for.

Honey: Paul gave me cider.

Henry: Did he?

Paul: Only a bit, like. For a taste.

Honey: Think I'm drunk.

Paul: No... Honey that was yesterday, remember? It was yesterday...

Henry: I see.

Paul: No, no you don't really...

Henry: Why don't you scarper eh? 'Fore I put the bees to you, 'fore the charms leave

my hands, one last time.

Paul: You wouldn't!

Henry: Wouldn't I? The one good thing I had in my life... if she'd have told me she wanted it I would've passed on my dark gift, when the time came... I would've done it willingly, with love and knowing they would be taken care of... but not like this... not like this...

Paul: I don't understand.

Henry: The townies are taking over.

Paul: That we could wear black ribbons for.

Henry: History doesn't tell us what to do when the hive dies out.

Honey: They're leaving us...so many leaving...taking a journey up to the stars...

Paul: Should I go for the doctor?

Henry: She's not ill, she's communing with the hive mind. I'm sure it all looks very odd to you. Bee charmers 'ave to take the rough with the smooth. Cluster headaches and carrying the warmth from the hive, burns us up. It's a dark art is bee charming.

Paul: So you said...

Honey: Where are you going? Why are you leaving us?

Paul: ...bee charming. It's frightening. It's not normal.

Henry: It is a kind of magic when it works. She's in a bit deep is all. Frighten you did she? (*Beat*). Good. (*Beat*). Don't think I don't know what you've been up to. There'll be hell to pay when her mother gets to hear. Hell to pay!

Honey: The message... in the pattern...

Henry: The pattern's all corrupted in this world.

Paul: You can't do anything to me. She's sixteen, it's her choice.

Henry: That's all you know. Sixteen!

Paul: What?!

Henry: She tell you that?

Paul: Henry?

Henry: I'm getting to know her in way I wish I didn't.

Paul: Look here... she said she was....

Henry: It's all about fear. Who has it, who's controlled by it and who is fearless, who can stand fearless in front of them, they respect that. If you show fear you're lost.

Absolutely lost. (*Beat*). You know the thing about fear? Happens to everyone in some form or other at least once... it's like swimmers in open water. They can be fine for years and then one day there they are out in the deep green crystal waters of a lake and it attacks them. Everyone deals with fear. Just some are better at hiding it.

Veronica, she thought she could hide it from me, but I always knew. Proud of her I was, taking up work in Apiary Studies, facing her fears. That's something to be proud of is that. Facing yer demons.

*A beat.*

Paul: Are we just going to sit here?

Honey: (*Groggy*). I can walk. Leave him alone. (*Beat*). Feel a bit better now.

Henry: You've gone to the bad haven't you?

Honey: It's gone. The message.

Henry: What message?

Paul: Leave her alone.

Henry: I wish you'd 'ave left her alone.

*A beat.*

Honey: Can we go inside?

Henry: You wait for me. I'll try my hand one last time. I want to be sure.

Paul: Honey, if you can walk let's get you out of here.

Honey: He's going to do something crazy, stop him.

Paul: He can go to hell, now come on!

Henry: They won't hurt me.

Paul: He's the only one that knows... leave him now.

Honey: I won't leave him, they'll kill him, they're too strong for him now.

Henry: So you knew? You knew what you were doing? You knew what you were taking from me?

Honey: (*Crying*). Only... only when, it was too late... Granddad I'm sorry...

*Paul picks up Honey and exits, Honey protesting. Henry walks towards the hives, the bees start to grumble an alert to each other. Henry puts his hand to the hive and hums Land of Our Fathers, he doesn't try to take the honey and it is an impasse. The bees give a low-level drone song.*

Henry: Not let me in? This is a strange development. It's a life gift, not something you can lose surely? What is this? I've been charming bees since before...

*A pause.*

So, it's a glimmer of the world without you. Enough to make an old man shiver and feel his mortality. (*Beat*). Getting morbid. You'll not be charmed today?

*A pause. The bees get quieter and quieter.*

A lost gift? A punishment akin to that handed out to those who waste love... or talk at

the theatre ...my turn to be expelled? I could help...

*A beat.*

But you really don't welcome my sort of help do you? What a world I have lived to see...my bees, alien to me, not willing to recognise... wake up! Wake up to the threat, it's here, whatever it is, it has arrived, you cannot escape... listen to an old bee charmer!

*Henry thumps the hive but the bees quietly ignore him.*

### ACT 3

SC 1/

*Midday in the garden of beehives, one week later. Several of the hives have been taken from their stands and lie on their sides in the grass, apart from one, which Henry is examining, he wears a hat and veil. It is one of the old fashioned round hives propped up in the middle of the table. Enter Veronica, wearing a smart suit, carrying cases.*

Veronica: What a journey.

Henry: You're back then.

Veronica: Amazing place, I've got some snaps, you should see these new techno hives they've got, seal in the control group and ...Dad, are you listening?

Henry: I'm busy. (*Beat*). It's not healthy sealing 'em in, how's they supposed to get out and forage?

Veronica: Sugar feed.

Henry: They needs variety.

Veronica: We need variety, you mean. They don't. Food's just food.

Henry: Don't put your stuff on the table! Can't you see me working here? Two minutes back and already interfering. It's all your lot are good for.

Veronica: My lot?

Henry: Bloody scientists.

Veronica: Ah. (*Beat*). Varroa inspection?

Henry: It's not varroa.

Veronica: Varroa's rife. Gone global, so they say. Showed a film, poor beasties each

trying to get these damned vampires off their backs and others helping and then getting them on themselves. Heartbreaking.

Henry: I don't care about global, I care about here.

Veronica: If we don't care about global it will be here! (*Beat*). Only place is safe is Oz.

Henry: Well we'd best book tickets.

(*Beat*).

Veronica: Why are they all down?

Henry: They're not all down. Not yet.

Veronica: They were very interested in your mixed hypothesis.

Henry: Oh they were, were they?

Veronica: Some box, some round.

Henry: The only reason they ever changed from round to box was so as they could get more honey out of 'em.

Veronica: That's not true, you know that. It was to keep the colonies going. They killed more than was good for the industry, with the boxes they could be less... hands on. Not everyone has your talents.

*Beat.*

Veronica: I came straight from the airport, got a taxi.

Henry: That'll cost.

Veronica: Yes, well. (*Beat*). Where is she then?

Henry: Inside. Safe.

Veronica: You said there'd been an accident, nothing too serious but to get home where I was needed? A nice way to put it, by the way. Made me feel quite the

neglectful mother.

Henry: I lied.

Veronica: You lied?

Henry: Couldn't have you fretting on the 'plane could I? Marching up to the cockpit demanding them drive the plane faster.

*Henry moves the hive off the table revealing a teapot and mug. He pours a cup.*

Henry: I'm sorry; I didn't know what to do. I thought I was doing what was right, I mean...

*He offers the cup to Veronica who declines.*

Veronica: Tell me from the beginning.

Henry: She was getting these headaches. Bad headaches, migraines the doc said.

Veronica: Henry, what...?

Henry: She wasn't well. Dizzy like, couldn't see straight.

Veronica: Henry you're scaring me, what...? You never called, why didn't you call?

Henry: You left us!

*A beat.*

Henry: My fault... If I hadn't... I wanted her to feel at home here, I wanted her to... I was being the cool Granddad.

Veronica: What the hell did you do?

Henry: I, I, let her charm the bees...

Veronica: Didn't I expressly tell you, I said don't let her see/ you charming...

Henry: ...and I'd give anything if I hadn't... but you know something? She was good, she was really good.

Veronica: After what happened when Mum.... (*Beat*). She was good?

Henry: ...she got inside the hive mind she could see the pattern, the complex weave she... but then...

Veronica: The headaches, like you have...

Henry: You know we've talked about this, about the gift and it skipping generations but never so strongly.

Veronica: My little honeybee can charm the bees?

*Veronica hunts in her briefcase for a notebook and starts making notes.*

Henry: That's not all she's been charming either but we'll get to that.

Veronica: What?

Henry: Oh, you should have seen her V, she was fearless. I told her she has to have a swarm song, something that'll come every time in case she gets the fear. You remember the old spiel... about fear?

Veronica: You're unbelievable.

Henry: Started out with Oranges and Lemons...

Veronica: That wouldn't be strong enough...I can't believe you let her...

Henry: ...that's what I told her, they like a nice hymn so she starts again with Kum By Ya My Lord...

Veronica: That might work.

Henry: It did, by God it... but Veronica the headaches... she's a lot calmer now but we've had some nights, good job we're so isolated here if we'd been in town neighbours would've called the authorities thinking there was murder being done. She was screaming and crying and blaspheming – and of course they don't like that do they?

Veronica: Don't be on about the source again. Where can that stand up to scientific fact?

Henry: Scientific fact? If it comes to that where does bee charming come into your scientific fact?

Veronica: My colleagues put you down to an anomaly, that's how they deal with it.

Henry: Colleagues again are they?

Veronica: Tell me the rest.

Henry: She was begging me, begging me to make it stop. The pain in her head and the dizziness, oh my poor girl. She... she said she couldn't see straight, there was something wrong with her vision, like looking at the world through a hall of mirrors, too many eyes, do you see Veronica? Do you see? Too many mirrors? She was looking at the world like...like they do? (*Beat*). She was hooked up to the hive mind... that's more deeply into it than I've ever been... I tried to tell her it was normal, that's what to expect but I didn't know... I was making it up as I was going along... frightened me so much... that's why I called you.

Veronica: Foolish old man, dabbling in what he doesn't understand and you put my daughter in the middle of it! After what happened before...I'll never forgive you if she's...damaged, never.

Henry: There's something else.

Veronica: Let's have it then.

Henry: I think I'm losing, have lost...lost my gift.

Veronica: You're not serious?

Henry: It's like a wall coming down. And they're disappearing.

Veronica: How many?

Henry: Nine colonies so far. But it's here. I know it. I can feel it.

Veronica: This is a bit much to take in. I mean I know it happens, is happening, but here?

Henry: Listen.

*Beat.*

Veronica: The quiet.

Henry: Yes.

*A pause.*

Veronica: But no varroa?

Henry: Varroa's not the problem. You're obsessed, always looking in one direction when it's the other you should be... No. Not varroa. (*Beat*). They're just vanishing.

*A pause.*

Henry: She's much better at the moment.

Veronica: What did I say to you before I left? Can you even remember?

Henry: Then there's the gardener.

Veronica: Gardener? Don't change the subject.

Henry: They've become...close.

Veronica: Close?

Henry: Too close...she's stayed out all night with him.

Veronica: She's not even...

Henry: I know, I know... the little tyke snuck out when I was sleeping.

Veronica: Did he know she was...?

Henry: Underage? No, she lied.

Veronica: She lied?!

Henry: I know. I've not reported him, I've sacked him but...you know teenagers. I

lock her in now, at night. Safe. (*Beat*). Sure she gets out though... just that strange feeling you get with her... when something's gone on. You know how to handle her.

*Beat.*

Henry: (*Anguish*). You weren't here!

*A pause.*

Henry: The vanishings here right enough. It's gobbling them all up, all of them. One morning you wake up, it's a bit quiet. Then you check the hives. Two down. That's a sorry sight. But two you can live with. Next thing you know they're not back from the morning forage. So you wait. And you wait. And then there's another couple empty. And there's nothing you can do. You put sugar feed out. Entice 'em back, keep those in as hasn't gone out yet. No need to forage, get your feed right here. And then one day I'll wake up to silence. (*Beat*). All gone. Listen. So quiet...

*Henry does the rounds of the hives, knowing the ones on the ground are empty but trying them anyway, banging on them as usual to wake the familiar drone song response, which comes eventually as a quiet grumble and fades quickly.*

SC 2/

*Later. Honey is standing in the middle of the garden of beehives, several more on their sides in the grass. She wears a cotton shirt and shorts. Veronica tends one of the hives, wearing bee suit.*

Honey: I've had no cards, no presents.

Veronica: But are you feeling more responsible? This is the question.

Honey: Is that supposed to be funny?

*Beat.*

Veronica: I put your cards from us on the kitchen table.

*Honey turns to go.*

Veronica: Honey? Happy Birthday.

Honey: Yeah, thanks. I meant from my mates.

Veronica: Perhaps they might have sent them to the flat?

*Veronica takes a seat and inspects her suit before taking off her veil.*

Veronica: Come and sit with me for a minute. *(Beat)*. You used to leave me notes, in the city. Gone to Emma's, back for tea. Always knew where you were. Ring Granddad. Buy pasta. Sometimes it seemed like you were the Mum.

*A pause.*

Veronica: Look at all these bits in your hair, I don't know, twigs and grass and... look at the tangle, that'll take some getting out.

Honey: You used to say it was good to go native on holiday. You used to say...

Veronica: I used to say a lot of things. Would it kill you to take a bath? We could have a dress up tea tonight, for your birthday?

Honey: If you want.

*A pause.*

Veronica: I understand you've become very close. With Paul.

Honey: Someone to talk to.

Veronica: You had your Granddad.

Honey: He'd rather talk to bees.

Veronica: If it was just talking we wouldn't be having this chat.

Honey: Oh God! It's a bit late for The Talk.

Veronica: Well I just...

Honey: You don't know him.

Veronica: Is he a teenage boy? (*Beat*). Then I know all I need to know about him.

You won't repeat my mistakes.

Honey: Your mistakes? Oh I see, you mean me! I'm your biggest mistake, I ruined your life. That's right, it was nothing to do with you. (*Beat*). I didn't ask for this life.

Veronica: Do you know how much of a spoiled brat you sound right now?

Honey: He said I was beautiful.

Veronica: (*Sighs*). Of course he did.

Honey: Granddad said you were full of fear. I didn't know what he meant. I thought it was just one of those Granddad things... but you know what? He's right. Paul's not just after one thing and then he's gone. He's not like that, he's funny, and lonely and bored. Oh yeah and his Mum's in the hospital and he's really worried about her.

*(Beat)*. You don't even care do you? His mother is in hospital!

Veronica: But it's not life threatening is it?

Honey: Bloody scientist! If you're not dying you're not interesting.

Veronica: Don't be this way with me.

*Beat.*

Veronica: You should be wearing a veil.

Honey: Did you not hear Granddad say?

Veronica: Yes, you're a bee charmer. Forgive me if I don't offer congratulations.

Honey: Because of the headaches?

Veronica: Headaches we can live with.

Honey: Sorry to be such a burden.

Veronica: This hasn't been an easy summer. Poor Granddad. We'll have to help him out more.

*A beat.*

Honey: I keep trying to remember, when I was sick there was something I was supposed to tell you about a message in the bees' flight pattern, they've got a plan, there is a plan... but it's so hard to remember anything when I'm in that state, I almost get hold of it and then it just... vanishes.

Veronica: Frightening. *(Beat)*. You need to rest, that's what you need, a good rest. Like the bees. Same principles apply. They get carried about on massive lorries to the next place that needs pollinating. We carry on with the next thing that takes our attention and if neither of us get any sleep we become ... yes go ahead, fine, don't listen. *(Beat)*. Bad bee practice is rife. The American Almond Board say so, in the

country where the pollination contract is king... the Chinese... pollinating by hand...the thing is global... a whole species immune system collapsing...

Honey: And she's back with the bees... happy birthday Honey...

*Beat.*

*Honey puts her ear to a hive.*

Honey: I can't hear them. In the hive, I can't hear them.

Veronica: They're free from disease.

Honey: Have you tried their honey?

Veronica: I'm trying not to interfere.

Honey: Taking the honey's not interfering...

Veronica: What?

Honey: Or stealing...

Veronica: What is it?

Honey: What if I gave them the varroa somehow?

Veronica: Gave them the varroa?

Honey: Put my filthy little mitt inside their nice clean hive to take the honey and gave them the varroa... what if it was on me ...

Veronica: It doesn't work like that. And it wasn't varroa, they vanished.

Honey: That's how colds pass on and flu and that...

Veronica: But only among our own species.

Honey: You don't know that. You should start testing them.

Veronica: Right.

Honey: Oh go ahead, ignore me, what do I know?

Veronica: I didn't say that.

Honey: You had the face.

Veronica: What face?

Honey: That face when you're just gonna agree and then ignore me.

Veronica: I'm glad you're feeling better.

Honey: Will I ever charm bees again?

*A pause.*

*Henry enters carrying three steaming mugs of tea.*

*Veronica wanders off with hers, checks on a hive and makes a quick note in her file.*

Honey: You didn't have to say anything.

Henry: About your friend?

Honey: We weren't doing any harm.

Henry: You've no idea.

Honey: I'm practically a grown up.

Henry: Just hearing you plead that reminds me that it isn't so. I should get my shotgun.

Honey: Granddad! You don't have a shotgun!

Henry: Don't I?

Honey: Why would you have a shotgun?

Henry: Case I need to encourage a wedding.

Honey: I'm not marrying him!

Henry: Might not have any choice, I tell you a few years back and that's what would have happened young lady if you'd been found carrying on...

Honey: A hundred years ago I s'pose I'd be married by now.

Henry: We calls that progress.

Honey: Very funny.

Henry: It's the truth.

*Enter Paul pushing the mower.*

Henry: I wish I'd brought it now.

Honey: You missed a bit.

Paul: I am returning your personal effects Mr White. Since I'm to be sacked.

Honey: Granddad! You didn't.

Henry: Come to think of it probably needs a damn good clean. Hasn't fired a round in a good while.

Paul: Never mind him, I need to talk to you. Alone.

Henry: Bloody great big gun it is and all.

Honey: Granddad!

Henry: I'm going nowhere, you two needs to be supervised.

Honey: What do you want?

Paul: You know I could be prosecuted?

Honey: I don't understand.

Paul: Mr White, could you give us a minute?

Henry: Oh no, whatever you've to say can be said in front of me.

Paul: But she is actually sixteen now, isn't she?

Honey: Carry on, talk about me as if I'm not here, why should I mind?

Paul: You've proved you can't be trusted.

Henry: Something we can agree on.

Paul: Honey?

Honey: Oh no that's fine, you talk to Granddad, I'm sure he's got all the answers.

Paul: I'm in trouble.

Henry: Aren't we all.

Paul: Things work differently here.

Honey: You'd better go.

Paul : You're shivering!

Henry: Here, have my jacket love.

*Henry gives Honey his jacket.*

Honey: Hello... what's this?

*Honey takes the Zippo out of the jacket pocket.*

Paul: You had it!

Henry: That really shouldn't have been in there.

Paul: You're right, it really shouldn't.

Henry: Honey, give it to me.

Honey: Finders keepers.

Paul: Please give it to me.

Honey: (*Sparking the Zippo*). This isn't yours isn't it?

Paul: It's what you might call on permanent borrow.

Honey: Another way of saying you stole it. First love?

Henry: Oh bloody hell!

Paul: None of your business. Now give it back.

Honey: Don't much mind your manners do you?

Paul: Honey would you please give me the lighter?

Henry: Now Paul, don't upset the girl...

*A pause.*

Honey: It would be so easy.

Paul: No.

Honey: I could do it.

Henry: No, you mustn't.

Paul: You wouldn't.

Honey: It would be so pretty. They're going anyway.

Paul: You're still ill, that's what it is, you don't know what you're saying, do you?

Henry: He's right love.

Honey: Orange flame, once held a flame caught bee a dying bee, a monster bee, must be the queen, she knows what's going on, she knows it's an exodus, the land, the land is poison tell them, tell them...

Henry: Tell them what Honeybee?

Honey: Something. Although she never listens to me.

Henry: She doesn't listen to me much either.

Paul: Honey, can I have my lighter back please?

*A pause.*

Honey: She'd better listen now. There's a storm coming.

*Honey walks towards her mother. Paul goes after her.*

Paul: She's got my spark.

Henry: She's got your number.

*Honey approaches Veronica inspecting a hive.*

Veronica: What have I told you about wearing a veil?

Honey: They won't sting me.

Veronica: And they can't change their minds? Mind? The collective mind?

Honey: There's a storm coming. I can feel it.

Veronica: Did they tell you that?

Honey: They've left messages, you only have to listen.

Veronica: Hat please, Honey.

Honey: Doesn't matter anyway. They're going.

Veronica: Sometimes I just don't understand you at all.

Honey: It won't be long. They think the storm will help, I understand it all perfectly now.

Henry: Going? Now?

Honey: They'll find a way, clever bees.

Henry: To fulfil their destiny?

Veronica: Destiny?

Henry: It's happening? Here?

Paul: (*To Henry*). Does she mean the vanishing act?

Henry: She does.

Honey: You should learn to listen.

Veronica: I do listen. I listen, I weigh up the evidence and... for God's sake put this on.

Paul: (*Going*). Something I need to check on.

*Veronica jams a veil on Honey's head.*

Veronica: Look at you, the reluctant bride. And Granddad said he was going to clean the shotgun.

*The bees background hum becomes more muted and fades away during this next.*

Honey: It's starting.

Veronica: What is?

Henry: The storm. We should go inside.

Honey: But you'll miss it!

Henry: Do you hear that?

Veronica: What?

Honey: Waking up.

Henry: I don't want them to go. / I don't want them to go...

*Henry sits suddenly, head in hands.*

Veronica: What's going on? Dad?

Honey: The message was there, for anyone to read. Just like a post-it I might leave on the fridge for you, popped out for milk, back in five. Don't worry. Except this time, this time the note is for everyone and we should be worried. They won't be back in five Mum, they're not coming back at all, do you see?

Henry: No... no only five jars left and no more to take the place of them...

Veronica: Will someone please explain?

*A beat.*

Honey: You never listen. You're going to miss it, miss it all.

Henry: Don't let them go...stop them, please?

Honey: I don't have that kind of power.

Veronica: Power? I don't...

*The storm breaks overhead.*

Veronica: We could do with a good downpour, it's been so muggy.

Honey: That's how I knew a storm was coming.

Veronica: Clever girl.

Honey: Its not just any storm though, Mum.

Veronica: You two love your mysteries.

Honey: Our last chance. You thought you sealed them in. *(Beat)*. Foolish little bees, they think rapture will happen faster, riding out on the storm.

Henry: Foolish little creatures, it's not real is it? It's not real?

*Honey takes out the lighter and begins to play with the flame.*

Veronica: Honey! *(Beat)*. The school wrote again. We are going to have to face those charges.

Honey: We?

Veronica: I'm not about to let them ruin you.

Honey: You'll help me?

Veronica: You're my daughter. We'll face it, whatever it is together, that I promise you.

Honey: You're not frightened anymore? About what people will say?

*Beat.*

Honey: *(Testing)*. The storm would put out any fire.

Henry: No Honey, that won't work love.

Veronica: I wish you wouldn't play these games.

Honey: For someone so clever Mum you do miss out on a lot. And you had to do was listen. Look at Granddad, he understands.

Veronica: I'm not following you.

Honey: It's like we're not related at all.

*A long pause. The storm moves away and the hives are silent. Honey takes off her veil. It gets darker during this next.*

Veronica: What are you doing? Put that back on! (*Beat*). I'm sorry you think I don't listen to you. You don't take any interest in what I'm doing... in what we're trying to do here. We're closing in, we'll find out why all the bees keep disappearing, you wouldn't want that lost to the world now would you? All that knowledge up in smoke...

Honey: We don't need it now.

Veronica: Not need it?! No!

*Honey sets light to her mother's file. They all watch it burn, mesmerised for a moment. Then Paul rushes over with the mugs and pours the liquid, putting out the fire. Paul grabs Honey and shakes her.*

Paul: What's the matter with you? (*Looking around*). All of you?

Honey: They're frightened.

Paul: Of what?

*A long pause.*

Veronica: You frighten me.

Honey: There. Finally.

Henry: Oh Veronica, no love.

Veronica: So reckless. And always a little bit odd. Even when you were small. Strange singsong would make the birds go quiet. I took you away from the country, did my best... my mother was the same. We knew what it all meant. We didn't want to lose you... first bees on your pram and that was it. We took off.

Honey: We had to come back. I had to learn, before the end.

Henry: It was time.

Veronica: Is it really true? Are they all gone?

Honey: (*Of Paul*). He's not frightened. (*Beat*). You were frightened of me?!

Henry: (*Gentle*). Frightened for you, love.

*Pause.*

Paul: There's wild hives... at the back, they're doing all right.

Honey: They didn't go out on the storm? They should have. They were meant to.

Veronica: The wild hives? Maybe Honey's got it wrong, maybe...Dad? Are you all right?

*Henry's speech is whispered over the continuing conversation between Honey and Veronica.*

Henry: (*Whispers*). Falling colonies,  
failing crops, no more honey, five  
more jars,

food stores depleted, resources scarce,  
hand pollination, five more jars,  
orchard fruits, nine meals from the  
breadline

first to feel the pinch, juice carton  
orders not fulfilled, world wide  
shortage, cotton stocks down...  
almond prices rocketing US chaos  
food prices soaring, empty shelves

prices up, cupboards emptying, people  
looting, riots breaking out, people  
desperate

just five more jars... five more jars...

...five more jars...

*Black out/*

Honey: Why don't you ever listen?

Veronica: I'm listening!

Honey: Then listen!

*A pause. Absolute silence.*

Honey: Can you hear them?

*A pause.*

Honey: Can you feel them?

*In the gathering dark, Honey sparks  
the lighter, the only light source,  
barely illuminating her face.*

Veronica: (*Whispers*). No. (*Beat*).

Where are they?

Honey: (*Whispers*). Gone.

## APPENDIX A

Full text of *High Flight* by John Gillespie Magee

Oh! I have slipped the surly bonds of earth  
And danced the skies on laughter-silvered wings;  
Sunward I've climbed, and joined the tumbling mirth  
Of sun-split clouds - and done a hundred things  
You have not dreamed of - wheeled and soared and swung  
High in the sunlit silence. Hov'ring there  
I've chased the shouting wind along, and flung  
My eager craft through footless halls of air.  
Up, up the long delirious, burning blue,  
I've topped the windswept heights with easy grace  
Where never lark, or even eagle flew -  
And, while with silent lifting mind I've trod  
The high untresspassed sanctity of space,  
Put out my hand and touched the face of God.

*Pilot Officer Gillespie Magee  
No 412 squadron, RCAF  
Killed 11 December 1941*

Magee, John Gillespie (1941) *High Flight*, in Warwick, Alex (ed.) (2000) *The Nation's Favourite Poems of Journeys*, London: BBC Worldwide Ltd.

## APPENDIX B

*Meditations in a Time of Civil War pt Six* by William Butler Yeats.

### VI. *The Stare's Nest by My Window*

The bees build in the crevices  
Of loosening masonry, and there  
The mother birds bring grubs and flies.  
My wall is loosening; honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the state.

We are closed in, and the key is turned  
On our uncertainty; somewhere  
A man is killed, or a house burned,  
Yet no clear fact to be discerned:  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

A barricade of stone or of wood;  
Some fourteen days of civil war;  
Last night they trundled down the road  
That dead young soldier in his blood:  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

We had fed the heart on fantasies,  
The heart's grown brutal from the fare;  
More Substance in our enmities  
Than in our love; O honey-bees,  
Come build in the empty house of the stare.

Yeats, William Butler (1991) *Selected Poetry*, London: Penguin.