

NOSTRADAMUS
THE PRINCE OF PROPHECIES

A PLAY BY

DOC COMPARATO

(SAMPLE)

Notes

- 'Nostradamus' was written in Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in the summer of 1983.

- This play received the Italian Award for theatre 'Ana Magnani' / Stazione 2003/2004, Rome, Italy.

- This play is part of the author's 'Trilogy of Time' which includes 'Miguel Angelo' as the prisoner of the present and 'The Circle of Lights – Molière and Racine' as the prisoner of the Past. 'Nostradamus' is the first part of this trilogy and which represents the prisoner of the future. The other two plays are also available in English.

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SGAE – Site: <http://www.sgae.es>
E-mail: raraujo@sgae.com.br

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ALTHOUGH THIS PLAY IS BASED ON KNOWN HISTORIC
FACTS AND EXTENSIVE BIBLIOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IT IS,
NEVERTHELESS, ENTIRELY A WORK OF FICTION.

LEGIS CAUTIO CONTRA INEPTOS CRITICOS

Qui legent hos versus, mature censunto;

Prophanum vulgus & inscium ne attrectato.

Omnesque Astrologi, Blenni, Barbari procul sunt,

Qui aliter faxit, is rite sacer esto.

INVOCATION OF THE LAW AGAINST INEPT CRITICS

**“Those who read these verses, let them consider with
mature mind.**

**Let not the profane, vulgar and ignorant be
attracted to their study.**

**All Astrologers, Fools & Barbarians draw not near,
He who acts otherwise, is cursed according to rite.”**

THE BOOK OF PROPHECIES VI / 100

Reading Doc Comparato's Plays

Publishers used to avoid certain types of books because they were considered bad sellers: plays, poetry, short stories, biographies... With the e-book everything has changed. All genres are welcome. And we decided to invest in drama, in the theatrical work of dramatist Doc Comparato.

The author lived in many different countries and for so his work is very diversified. His book on scriptwriting has been translated into many different languages. What about his plays?

His work is divided into three trilogies: **Tomorrow's Trilogy**, composed by plays written in the 1980's and 1990's: *Plêiades*, *O Beijo da Louca*, for which he won the National Theatre Award, and *O Despertar dos Desatinados (The Rainforest)*, not yet staged.

After that came the **Trilogy of Time**, with plays written until the year 2000: *Nostradamus*, *Michelangelo* and *O Círculo das Luzes* – all of which have been staged in Brazil and Italy. *Nostradamus* won the Anna Magnani Award.

And the last **Trilogy of Imagination** which is comprised of his most recent work, plays that had not been published up until now and still not staged.

And it is precisely with his new work that we are going to start. The plays are: *Sempre, Jamais* and *Eterno (The Secret Days of Orson Welles In Brazil)*. With a very powerful imagetic capacity, he brings to life a writer of children's books, Calabar a traitor and the secret days of Orson Welles in Brazil, in texts apparently simple but full of hidden meanings.

It is worth reading and imagining the plays.

Apart from the trilogies, Doc also has other plays that we are going to include in the second wave of digital editions. The children's play *A Incrível Viagem, Lição N.º 18* and *A*

Misteriosa Morte do Supremo Imperador da China e Outras Histórias.

Before we end, it is worth reminding that this material is only licensed for reading.

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SGAE – Site: <http://www.sgae.es>

E-mail: raraujo@sgae.com.br

For my daughter Bianca, who was conceived after the play was written but born before it was staged.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

1. **NOSTRADAMUS**
2. **SABINA**
3. **JULIUS**
4. **CARDINAL NARBONNE**
5. **MONSIGNOR FELICE**
6. **CAESAR**
7. **CATHERINE DE MEDICIS**
8. **DUC ANTOINE DE BOURBON**
9. **COMTE DE LEPAN**
10. **MADAME ANNE**
11. **MONKS, PAJE AND SHADOWS**
12. **ARABS, COURT NOBLES, PONTIFICAL SWISS GUARD AND ACROBATS**

SETS

NOSTRADAMUS' CONSULTING ROOM

NOSTRADAMUS' STUDY

THE DUNGEON OF CARDINAL NARBONNE'S PALACE

THE DISPENSARY AT AGEN

INSIDE A PYRAMID

VATICAN MAP ROOM

THE FRENCH COURT

NOSTRADAMUS' HOUSE (SALON)

THE ROYAL APARTMENTS

HALL OF MIRRORS

Note: The music references in the text are only a way to indicate the passing of time. It is up to the director the use of this rubric. We suggest the song TE DEUM by Z. KODALY as base soundtrack.

NOSTRADAMUS

**BLACKOUT.
THE CURTAIN RISES.**

SCENE 1. NOSTRADAMUS STUDY

Avignon 1525.
Night.

MICHEL DE NOSTREDAME (NOSTRADAMUS) and his colleague **JULIUS** are in conversation in a candled room. Spread out on a huge table are cheese, fruit and wine. Julius helps himself to a piece of fruit and bites into it. Pause. Nostradamus, his back to us, watches the sun rise through a window.

JULIUS

No, really. Just think of it. Standing up and sitting down with that! ... Presiding over the council of ministers. They say the unfortunate man hasn't seen a saddle in six months. He doesn't dare leave the palace. They've tried everything! I heard a rumour that a monk was sent from Rome!

Nostradamus turns around.

NOSTRADAMUS

A monk? ... A monk? Whatever for? ... Ah, doubtless to sprinkle the royal arsehole with holy water.

JULIUS

Michel! ... (PAUSE) ... I trust no one can hear. God preserve His Majesty.

NOSTRADAMUS

Tch! I've had it up to the ears with this business. It's nothing but the king's arse here and the king's arse there. (PAUSE) JULIUS, you must have fathomed things by now. Don't you understand? The king is quite content with his anal fistula otherwise he wouldn't surround himself with those incompetent quacks from Paris, raising his arse aloft all the time like it was some precious trophy. My God! How many years now have we been hearing about this blessed bum? It has been a constant topic of learned conversation since at least my first years at medicine school. And I graduated four years ago! ... Do you know what Doctor Camile, my tutor, whispered in my ear? ... He said, "We shall be looking at this fistula in ten years' time and still be scratching our heads." Well, I've had my certificate these last four years.

JULIUS

Michel! ... The only reason you go on about this is because, as you well know, your own methods are not universally accepted. And certainly not accepted in Paris.

Silence.

NOSTRADAMUS

All I'm saying is they should stop dunking the royal posterior in pails of oils and creams. That's all I said.

JULIUS

Not said, Michel. Wrote.

NOSTRADAMUS

What's the difference Julius?

JULIUS

A great deal. Your thesis was denied.

NOSTRADAMUS

Nonsense. If someone had two arseholes stich one up. It's plain common sense logic.

JULIUS

In reality, however, logic counts for little, Doctor de Nostredame.

NOSTRADAMUS

And not only in reality. The most learned convocation of medical practitioners of the esteemed Faculty of Avignon of which your most noble person is a dynamic member, (NOSTRADAMUS bows gracefully) ... also has its logic which, as far as I can see, is neither sound medicine nor sound biology.

JULIUS

Michel, don't be impertinent. I am your friend. I did not come here to listen to heresies.

NOSTRADAMUS

You are very... odd, Julius. You invariably agree with me in private yet withhold your endorsement ion these learned meetings. You keep your mouth shut tight. (PAUSE) You disappoint me, Julius. You sadden me.

Slow light change; dawn breaks.

JULIUS

You ignore the future consequences of what you say, Michel. (SERIOUS) You just say whatever comes into your head; it's as though thoughts came in lightning flashes. This is not good. You must think before you speak. (PAUSE) You have quite a brilliant mind as a doctor with a not impressive list of wealthy

patients. You have a delightful family. Now, why do you persist in ...
jeopardizing all this?

NOSTRADAMUS

Because the liver is definitely not the site of the intellect, even less the
tabernacle of the soul and I don't believe that a good bleeding is the universal
cure for all man's illness.

JULIUS

Ha! ... Ha! ... Ha! ... Well, you just prove it isn't!

Silence.

Nostradamus places his hand over his heart.

NOSTRADAMUS

I feel it here. My heart beats faster. This must mean something. The heart
speaks with rhythm – surely this must have significance? The liver is totally
dumb. Or, rather, the liver's mouth is nothing other than king's arse. (HE
LAUGHS).

JULIUS

The heart is... empty. (HE HOLDS OUT THE WINE BOTTLE) A hollow
vessel. Or have you forgotten? But the liver! The liver is an eternal fountain of
humours and bile and plasma and, consequently, of far greater importance.
Your anatomy is wanting, my dear Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

I'm tired of all this, Julius. You are boring me. Besides, it's morning already
and I've a full day of work ahead. I think we should no longer be friends.

A beat.
A cock crows.

JULIUS

Well, I don't agree.

Silence.

JULIUS takes a drink.

NOSTRADAMUS

No! ... Don't tell me after all this you've finally managed it?

JULIUS

I have it here. With me.

NOSTRADAMUS

Well, show it to me! Why on earth didn't you say so before? ... You could have told you had it hours ago.

JULIUS

I have my own peculiar ways. (PAUSE) I don't know if I should, Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

Listen. I've already told you. I only want a loan, just to copy the most important chapters. You'll have it back in two days at the most. I shan't breathe a word to a living soul.

Julius bends over a bag and withdraws a book wrapped in a cloth.

NOSTRADAMUS

Julius, my dear friend Julius, by the grace of the king's three assholes, you did it! And, what's more unbelievable, you had the balls.

Julius places the book on the table. The intensifying dawn light produces a strange luminosity.

JULIUS

It's so strange... when you asked me to get it I thought I'd have to be out of my mind. But ... I just walked in, asked the Council's permission to enter the Secret Library and ... It was the most mysterious place I've ever seen.

NOSTRADAMUS

Incredible.

Nostradamus strokes the cloth and slowly uncovers the book.

JULIUS

I've been there thousands of times. And never once have I experienced a similar dread. Never! At least, not after the first time ... As soon as I ...

NOSTRADAMUS

Magnificent. The first time.

JULIUS

Papyrus. Floor to ceiling. Ancient books. Every nook and cranny ... My finger were itching, I was sweating all over, my heart thumping...

NOSTRADAMUS

With passion, Julius.

JULIUS

Yes It was as if I was inside a woman... The same intoxication... And fear... and thrill.

Nostradamus opens the book and reads the title page.

NOSTRADAMUS

De Mysteriis Egyptorum.

JULIUS

It was no easy matter; let me tell you, Michel. No easy matter at all. First of all to find the book... and then to exit with it concealed under my gown. And against all those odds... I succeeded.

NOSTRADAMUS

You took a great risk, Julius. A risk for both of us.

JULIUS

No. I took the risk for you. (PAUSE) I have no wish to read this book. I don't even want you to mention anything about it to me. (PAUSE) No. A thousand times no, Michel. I'm quite certain that if the book has been forgotten – has deliberately languished – in the labyrinthine corridors of the library then it is for a good reason.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah! De Mysteriis Egyptorum! Let me tell you the reason why. It was my grandfather who reared me from an infant. All I have today – what I am today – I owe to this man. It was from his lips that I occult. The Veda. The Kabala. The writings of the Hebrews. (PAUSE) I tasted a little of every one. (PAUSE) My grandfather taught me about the planets and the stars and thus the world of astrology opened to me. (PAUSE) It was his breath which uttered the word “eternity” to me. (PAUSE) But even he had never heard mention of De Mysteriis Egyptorum. However, his intuition told him the book had to exist somewhere in the universe. (PAUSE) Therefore, I set off to scour the world, travelling from St. Remy de Provence to Montpellier, from Paris to Toulouse, then on into Italy. My journey took me as far even as the frontiers of Spain.

Ah! What an appetite I have for travel! But, one day, without warning, the appetite waned and vanished, and I settled here in Avignon. And I – like my grandfather before me – had the same intuition. Buried somewhere in the depths of the distinguished Council which shows me only contempt and a stone ear, there lay something in wait for me. (PAUSE) I approached Clavius. Through my probing he revealed the existence of the Secret Library. And, of course, where else should I expect to find the book than here, right under my very nose?

Nostradamus moves closer to the book. A bell is rung.

JULIUS

The bell for matins. It's getting light.

NOSTRADAMUS

Light. The light. Why is there a secret library at all? The shadows. I want light, Julius. The sharp morning light.

JULIUS

Michel, I beg you, do not read this book.

NOSTRADAMUS

We went to such trouble. Why shouldn't I?

JULIUS

I fear it might change you. You could be transformed by it. And I want my friend to continue himself; the man I know, have always known.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ridiculous. Of course it shan't change me. How foolish you are to fear such a thing. It's nothing more than a book. It contains nothing more dangerous than words. Words and more words.

JULIUS

And the Holy Inquisition at your heels for all your days.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah! Have no fear. (PAUSE) After all, the Inquisition's representative in Avignon is one of my best patients.

The light dwindles.
Music.

SCENE 2
NOSTRADAMUS'S CONSULTING ROOM

Avignon, 1525.
Day.

A spotlight picks out a page. The page approaches the apron of the stage; he strikes the floor with his ceremonial stick.

PAGE

Representative of the Holy Inquisition! His Eminence Cardinal Narbonne!

The Consulting room is lit gradually revealing, in a distant corner, an astrolabe.

Nostradamus enters wrapped in a cape holding a small rod in one hand.

Cardinal Narbonne is followed by two youthful monks and a Monsignor.

NOSTRADAMUS

Your Eminence!

Nostradamus bows and crosses to kiss the Cardinal's ring.

CARDINAL

Doctor Michel!

The Cardinal makes his way to a wood bench in the centre of the room.
Nostradamus remains standing.

NOSTRADAMUS

Such a noble visitor bestows unwonted prestige on my humble practice.
(PAUSE) I hope indeed that the ailment presently afflicting your Eminence is
of a minor nature and that the light of the Holy Spirit will illuminate his servant
and assist me in banishing it from your body. Eminence!

Nostradamus bows one more time.

CARDINAL

The Lord hears your prayer, Michel. The Lord hears.

Silence.

NOSTRADAMUS

Well, then? How may I help you?

The Cardinal casts his eyes about the room.

CARDINAL

Aha! I observe an astrolabe!

He points to it.

Almost hidden behind yards, books and scroll we can now see the astrolabe.

NOSTRADAMUS

Quite, Eminence. It is my duty to comb the heavens, the kingdoms of the sea
and the plants, to burrow in the seams of the earth itself in search of anything
to dispel the sufferings of the ill.

CARDINAL

Most eloquently presented, Michel. (PAUSE) But between us, what do you
make of this fellow Copernicus and his theories?

NOSTRADAMUS

Well, nothing has yet been proved, Eminence. And his hypothesis has already
been dismissed by the Holy See.

CARDINAL

Thank you. I am aware of that already. (PAUSE) What interest me is to hear from the lips of my most cherished physician his own opinion of this defeat for modern science.

NOSTRADAMUS

If my memory doesn't fail me it is Copernicus's contention that our earth is not the centre of the universe. Rather, that – as he would have seemed to prove mathematically – the earth, on the contrary, circles the sun. (PAUSE) Eminence. Forgive me; I am unfortunately no expert in these matters, but... Consider my own situation, if you will: ask around and many will tell you I am not renowned for my orthodoxy in medical matters. Of course, this in no way suggests that I do not rigorously observe the stated views of the Holy See in so far as they hold jurisdiction over my field of practice. Of course.

CARDINAL

Naturally.

NOSTRADAMUS

Nevertheless, neither should this imply that I, personally, have no qualms whatsoever about the present accepted methods of medical science and some of their applications. (PAUSE) For I do in some number.

CARDINAL

Michel. I advise you to measure your words carefully.

NOSTRADAMUS

I have the greatest reservations regarding the medical efficacy of leeches, for example. Similarly with blood-letting. (PAUSE) But should your Eminence request such a treatment I shall oblige instantly and effect a swift bleeding and gladly daub your body with quantities of vampire beasts. It could well happen that your ailment be relieved by the action of blood suckers hacking at your flesh and gorging themselves on the banquet table of your veins.

The cardinal goes pale with nausea, fear and horror.

CARDINAL

What. Bleed me. Never. The thought of it even makes me faint.

NOSTRADAMUS

It is normal medical procedure, Eminence.

A beat. The Cardinal wipes his brow and throat with a handkerchief.

NOSTRADAMUS

However, it is self-evident that such an august person as you clearly requires a more subtle medication. In my opinion. (PAUSE) Eminence, may I inquire as to the symptoms of your ailment?

The cardinal regains his composure a little. With his hand he summons Nostradamus closer to him.

CARDINAL

It's... Ahem... How can I describe it? Er. I feel tired.

NOSTRADAMUS

Tired? Is that the major symptom?

CARDINAL

Ahem. A particular part of my body feels tired.

NOSTRADAMUS

Eminence is suffering from a swelling in the feet?

CARDINAL

No, it's not my feet. It's higher up.

NOSTRADAMUS

Eminence finds his knees stiff?

The Cardinal motions with his hand.

CARDINAL

A little higher.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah. Then it's stiffness in the arms, perhaps?

CARDINAL

No, Michel. Now you've gone up too high.

NOSTRADAMUS

Eminence. I would ask you to be candid otherwise we shall spend all our time circumnavigating the entire human anatomy and I shall be so tired as to be of no use by the time we land on the offending organ.

CARDINAL

Very well, Michel. Let's not beat about the bush. (PAUSE) I can't get it up.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah. It doesn't. It won't stand up? You mean... It no longer soars like a proud bird of prey?

CARDINAL

No.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah. It doesn't even sing like a canary?

CARDINAL

Not a peep. And not for ages.

NOSTRADAMUS

Eminence. Has the retired organ been at all wounded or cut in recent weeks?

CARDINAL

No.

NOSTRADAMUS

Are there any strong-smelling emissions, burning sensations or other feelings of discomfort?

CARDINAL

No. He seems quite healthy otherwise, Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

Your complaint reminds me of an illness I once encountered in the orient, Eminence.

CARDINAL

Will I recover?

NOSTRADAMUS

Eminence. Subsequent to making water are you ever aware of little ants in the region of your micturations?

CARDINAL

Never.

NOSTRADAMUS

In that case it cannot be sugar in the blood. We may pass into another possibility.

Nostradamus moves in closer with his little stick.

NOSTRADAMUS

Please concentrate on the point of this stick.

Nostradamus manipulates the stick up, down and sideways.

NOSTRADAMUS

Now look up towards heaven. Now towards hell. Now to the sunrise. And now sunset. (PAUSE) Now don't look at the stick.

CARDINAL

How am I to do that, Michel?

NOSTRADAMUS

By closing your eyes, Eminence.

CARDINAL
But of course.

The cardinal closes his eyes.

NOSTRADAMUS
Do you see little stars now?

CARDINAL
No.

NOSTRADAMUS
Does your neck hurt?

CARDINAL
No.

NOSTRADAMUS
Then there's no constriction of the blood. (PAUSE) But your eyelids are quivering.

CARDINAL
It must be nerves.

NOSTRADAMUS
Ah. (PAUSE) Eminence, on awakening in the morning have you had the occasion to notice whether the resting organ is ever upright?

CARDINAL
I have.

NOSTRADAMUS
Ah. But should some lascivious and perverted hand seize him or some foreign orifice officer to shelter him, nothing happens; is this correct?

CARDINAL
You have hit the nail on the head, Michel.

Nostradamus runs over to a table and begins to write with a quill pen. The cardinal, meanwhile, still has his eyes shut.

NOSTRADAMUS
I think we have a positive diagnosis, Eminence. It is indeed tiredness, after all. But not serious in the least.

CARDINAL
What welcome news.

Nostradamus writes. A beat.

CARDINAL

Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

Just a moment, Eminence.

A beat.

CARDINAL

Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

Yes, Eminence?

CARDINAL

What are you writing that is taking so long?

NOSTRADAMUS

Your prescription.

CARDINAL

What is it?

NOSTRADAMUS

A recipe for quince jam.

CARDINAL

And is this the recommended medication for my condition?

NOSTRADAMUS

Highly recommended.

CARDINAL

What should I do with it?

NOSTRADAMUS

It's quite straightforward. First, apply the jam generously to the affected part. Next, rub it in gently. Then ask someone in whom you have complete and total trust – an intimate friend – to suck the ailing part but delicately, not like a leech for example. The ointment may be applied as frequently as the patient requires and the same procedure adopted. Recovery should be virtually instantaneous.

CARDINAL

A very sound remedy, if I may say so.

NOSTRADAMUS

I thought you would appreciate it, Eminence. I'm most grateful to you.

CARDINAL
Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS
Yes, Eminence.

CARDINAL
Do you think I could open my eyes now?

NOSTRADAMUS
Ah. Forgive my forgetfulness, Eminence. Please.

A beat.

CARDINAL
I can't, Michel. They're stuck. They won't open.

The two monks cross to the Cardinal.

NOSTRADAMUS
(Shouts) Open your eyes.

Nostradamus beats his stick on the table. A bell is heard. Silence. The Cardinal opens his eyes.

CARDINAL
Blessed be Thy name. I was afraid I had lost my sight forever. What an awful shock. For a moment there I thought I was lost to the world of darkness.

Nostradamus is pale. He begins to beat the table with the stick, but almost mechanically. He appears at once both alienated and aggressive.

A beat.

The cardinal stands up, troubled. The monks flank the Cardinal and the Monsignor takes a few steps back.

CARDINAL
What is going on, Michel? Michel. Michel. For the love of God, please tell me what is going on. I demand to know. What is all this? (SHOUTS) Doctor Nostradame please take a grip of yourself.

Nostradamus stops. A beat. He walks towards the Monsignor.

NOSTRADAMUS
Monsignor! A light burns within you. (PAUSE) I have seen it.

Everyone shifts uncomfortably.

CARDINAL

Might it not be some ailment, Michel?

The Monsignor is transfixed with fear.

NOSTRADAMUS

No.

Silence.

NOSTRADAMUS

Would you confirm, Monsignor, that your name is Felice Peretti?

CARDINAL

How did you know that?

NOSTRADAMUS

If you'd be so kind Monsignor.

CARDINAL

He is not allowed to speak, Michel. He has journeyed here as a penitent. And what a penance!

Nostradamus, with great emotion, kneels before the Monsignor.

NOSTRADAMUS

Monsignor Felice Peretti, I beg you to forgive me my outburst, but I am not accustomed to receive truly holy men. Your Holiness will, I'm sure, pardon my impetuosity.

CARDINAL

Michel, have you lost your reason? He is not the Pope, Michel. It is singularly inappropriate to address him as Holiness.

Nostradamus draws closer to the Monsignor.

NOSTRADAMUS

But one day he shall be the Pope. Your Holiness will take his place on Peter's throne with the name Sixtus V and be renowned for justice and wisdom.
(PAUSE) May the Lord protect you, Holiness.

The Monsignor is petrified with fear. Nostradamus takes hold of his garment and kisses the hem.

CARDINAL

Blasphemy. In all my time as a servant of the Holy Inquisition I have never witnessed such an outrage. This is the work of the devil. Get thee behind me, Satan.

The Cardinal shoves the Monsignor and marches out leaving Nostradamus on his knees.
The light fades.
Music.

SCENE 3
NOSTRADAMUS' STUDY AND BEDROOM

Avignon, 1525.
Night.

A transparent canopy descends and transforms part of the stage into a huge bed.
Nostradamus lies on the bed strewn with sheepskins and covers. His back is naked.
Meanwhile, **SABINA** moves about the stage lighting candles, humming a song. She is wrapped in a shawl.
A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina. (PAUSE) I can smell your perfume from here.

SABINA

It's musk. (PAUSE) The children are off to sleep.

NOSTRADAMUS

Without tantrums or tears?

A beat.

SABINA

Like two cherubs.

NOSTRADAMUS

Ah. What a blessing our children are. The other day Jean came up to me and asked: Father, how was I born? (PAUSE) So I looked him straight in the eye and said: my dear Jean, you and your sister were born just like lilies are, between the morning dew and the morning mist, between day and night. One of nature's little miracles. (PAUSE) The fruit of passion.

Sabina lifts the canopy and enters the bedroom.

SABINA

And what happened then, Michel?

Nostradamus lowers her shawl revealing her bust.

NOSTRADAMUS

Lilies and musk. (PUASE) Passion has both odour and form.

Nostradamus touches her bust and nuzzles his head between her breasts.

NOSTRADAMUS

Promise me something, Sabina. Promise to protect me with your warmth and with the frenzy of your heart. Help me to lift this cursed weight, which presses on my soul. Will you do this for me, Sabina?

SABINA

It's too late for regrets, Michel. What's done is done.

Nostradamus pulls away from Sabina.

NOSTRADAMUS

Why in the Lord's name did I do such a thing? Why? What demon stole my judgment, Sabina?

SABINA

Perhaps it was yourself who summoned the demon. Or perhaps, there is demon at all.

NOSTRADAMUS

Then what else could it be? (PAUSE) Oh my God. Right in front of the most powerful of them all! Cardinal Narbone. (PAUSE) He thirsts after my blood but faints if he sees a drop of his own. Oh, he going to want mine all right; cold or hot, weak or thick, he wants my blood. He'll have me hung, drawn and quartered.

Sabina draws Nostradamus close to her breast.

SABINA

I want you to love me. To love only me. And not to hide anything from me (PAUSE) But because I love you I do not wish you to feel a prisoner. You may do whatever you like. You may have your little secrets. (PAUSE) You see? I can't even reach agreement with myself.

A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

What do you wish to know?

SABINA

You know. Where can we flee to?

NOSTRADAMUS

To the only place beyond the reach of the Inquisition. (PAUSE) Agen.

Sabina shudders.

SABINA
Agen. But...

NOSTRADAMUS
To the small and dull city of Agen. It's the lesser of two evils.

A beat.

SABINA
What if...

Nostradamus interrupts.

NOSTRADAMUS
No. Don't even think that. (PAUSE) I am, or am I not, the best doctor in France?

SABINA
Yes, if you think you are.

NOSTRADAMUS
Then I say to you: nothing. Nothing will happen to us. I promise. I know it, I can feel it.

Sabina hums again the same tune as at the beginning of the scene.

NOSTRADAMUS
Please, my love, don't let yourself become unhappy. They say the nights in Agen are long and clear. I shall have all the stars in the heavens to contemplate and much quince jam to enjoy.

Sabina slowly, gently, abandons her humming as her head seeks and finds Nostradamus' genitals. After a few seconds, he begins to sigh deeply.

A beat.

The light above the couple diminishes gradually.

Nostradamus trembles and moans with pleasure.

In the meantime, another light illuminates the astrolabe and the book DE MYSTERIS EGYPTORUM.

It seems as though the objects are glowing. Nostradamus climaxes.

The light on the bed is lost.

Music.

Nostradamus, in a shawl, stands beside the astrolabe and the book.

He spreads his open hand across the book and then picks it up and begins to read. (IN LATIN)

NOSTRADAMUS
Quo legent hoxe mature censunto. (PAUSE)
Profanum vulgus et inscium ne attretato.

A light change.

NOSTRADAMUS

Omnesq; astrology blenni, barbari. (HIS VOICE WAVERS) Que alter facit, is rite, sacer esto. (PAUSE) I need a table with three legs. Now where. Ah. The stool.

Nostradamus places the candelabra on the stool.

NOSTRADAMUS

Now a bowl of water and a stick.

He chooses a tureen from among the various pots and splashes a little water into it from a pitcher.

Next, he sits on the floor with his collection.

Now, he sprinkles himself from head to toe with the water.

NOSTRADAMUS

A Deo. A Natura. (HE REPEATS THESE WORDS)

Nostradamus fixes his gaze on the water and concentrates. The stick in his hand is absolutely still. The ritual begins.

The light diminishes.

A choir of voice is heard.

The stick in his hand begins to sway slowly.

A shadow is seen upstage. The stage fill with mist.

The stick sways from side to side.

The choir grows louder.

The shadow becomes clearly visible – it is a vision. It is an old man, bending over a three-legged table. There is a crystal bowl with water on the table plus a candle and a book.

The old man mirrors Nostradamus and two sticks begin to oscillate simultaneously. Their motion accelerates. All the OLD MAN'S objects now begin to grow brightly.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. (SOFT) No. Enough, enough. No, no. (LOUD) Stop. Stop.

The choir and the vision disappear together.

The light returns to normal.

On the bed we see Sabina sleeping, half-naked.

With a sudden movement Nostradamus empties the bowl. He is very tense.

The water makes a pool on the floor.

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina. Sabina. I saw my own future. I saw myself, Sabina. I saw me. My God, my God. I saw myself in the future.

Sabina stirs.

SABINA

Nostradamus. Nostradamus.

Nostradamus pulls himself together.

NOSTRADAMUS

Where did you hear that name? (PAUSE) Where? Sabina?

Silence.

NOSTRADAMUS

Only my grandfather used to call me by that name. Nostradamus.

Music.

A choir of voices.

Blackout.

SCENE 4**NOSTRADAMUS' STUDY**

1525. Day.

Sabina and the page are clearing out the study in preparation for their journey. They clear the stage.

Julius takes a position stage centre and speaks.

JULIUS

It's all happened so fast. I don't mind admitting I'm absolutely flabbergasted. There's only one topic of conversation in the whole of Avignon; everyone has been swept up in some sort of collective madness. They're accusing Michel of all kinds of things – necromancy, blasphemy, black magic, witchcraft and Satanism. (PAUSE) Madame Sabina. I should be profoundly grateful if Madame could favour me with just a little of her attention.

Sabina carries on with her work.

A beat.

SABINA

I'm rather busy at the moment, Dr. Julius.

JULIUS

This is rather more pressing than the housework, Madame.

SABINA

It is also rather more my business than your, doctor.

A beat.

JULIUS

I don't see the need for tartness, Madame. (PAUSE) I am fully capable of appreciating your preoccupation. But you are not alone. I merely ask you for some acknowledgement of my position. I have exposed myself by coming here to lend my support to Michel. How could I do otherwise? My loyalty to my friends is renowned. And, in return, I am the object of discourtesy. I am risking my life. Death at the stake, Madame. And all because of your husband.

SABINA

No. All because of you Monsieur. If the heavens have opened and threaten to swallow us all, it is because of you and that book you brought.

JULIUS

Book. What book?

SABINA

Ah. Not only is Monsieur spineless, he is also deceitful. Permit me to be blunt, Dr. Julius. I have never approved of your nocturnal visits. And I find your manner quite as affected as your dress. And, besides your arrogance I deplore your habit of sneering at everything. In short, I find you trying in the extreme. And what an extreme. And you know why doctor? You are a charlatan. A fraud.

Nostradamus enters. He seems crushed by the weight of some disaster. He carries a book wrapped in a cloth.

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina.

A beat.

SABINA

It had to come out. It was now or never. I cannot stifle my feelings any longer. We are done for. All of us. (EMOTIONAL) Our children. Our marriage. Everything will end in ruin.

NOSTRADAMUS

That's enough.

Sabina and the page exit.

A beat.

JULIUS

I came to collect the...

NOSTRADAMUS

I have it here as I promised.

Julius looks around him. Nostradamus shows him the book.

JULIUS

Leave it on the table. I'll slip it under my cloak as I leave.

Nostradamus places the book on a table.

JULIUS

I had no realized Sabina so disliked me.

NOSTRADAMUS

That's how woman are: temperamental. I wish to apologise for her behaviour.

JULIUS

I have a suggestion, Michel. I think it might be wise to ask the Council to let you sign an article of...

NOSTRADAMUS

No. I've already made my decision. We shall go to Agen.

JULIUS

Agen. Have you lost your mind?

NOSTRADAMUS

Not at all. There comes a time in life when we must relinquish those certainties which are our ballast. Sometimes we must obey the summons of a mystery which beckons us. Either we shall be broken by it, or we shall be renewed by it.

A beat.

JULIUS

I don't pretend to understand your words. This whole place confuses me. You've changed, Michel, too. And if I'm not mistaken there's something strange in your eyes.

A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

Yesterday I saw myself. I was looking at me from outside my own body. Was this madness or was it real? I don't know. A discovery which fills me with terror.

A beat.

JULIUS

The book. It's the entire book's fault. And here I have what accounts for Sabina's rude outburst against me. That book.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. For the thousandth time. The book was simply the instrument which drew out this thing that already existed in my body. De Mysteriis Egyptorum is just an innocent tool.

A beat.

JULIUS

What does the book say, Michel?

NOSTRADAMUS

I thought you didn't want to know.

JULIUS

Yes, well. After everything that's happened I've had a change of mind.

NOSTRADAMUS

Indeed. Well, it talks about time. Time: days, months, years and hours. Seasons and calendars. Satisfied?

Julius moves closer to the book.

JULIUS

But no one would prohibit a book just for that.

NOSTRADAMUS

It speaks also of the firmament. Centaur, Lupus, Hydra, Scorpius and Serpentarius.

Julius flicks through the book.

JULIUS

Is that all?

NOSTRADAMUS

Don't touch it. I think it would be better if you were just to return it immediately to the secret library. Don't waste anytime, Julius. The Inquisition might also want to question you about it.

Julius wavers.

JULIUS

Yes. You're right. But I have every right to read this book. I am a member of the Council.

NOSTRADAMUS

It's written in really the most atrocious style. I really shouldn't bother if I were you.

JULIUS

Why? What makes you more able to understand it than me? I'm held in high esteem by my colleagues. My own behaviour and orthodoxy has never been questioned. I scrupulously observe the Catechism.

NOSTRADAMUS

Quite. It is best not to disturb the still waters of your mediocrity.

A beat.

Julius lifts off the cover shrouding the book and opens it.

JULIUS

But this book is blank. There's nothing here. You've taken all the pages and just left the covers. Michel. You have betrayed me. This will mean the stake for me. Give me back the original this instant. If someone notices the substitution I'm done for. Please, Michel. I beseech you. In God's name.

A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

Mediocrity is a very unstable element; the slightest shake unbalances it. You're getting worked up for nothing, Julius.

JULIUS

I shall denounce you to the Council. You do not have one decent scruple. I shall tell them you made me take the book from...

NOSTRADAMUS

You'll do nothing of the sort. You are going to sit tight in your little corner while I take my leave from Avignon.

JULIUS

I'd sooner see you perish in Hell. And may the worms rot your insides and take the rest of your family with them.

NOSTRADAMUS

Thank you, my friend.

Julius exits with the book under his cape.

Voices can be heard: wailing and crying.

Blackout.

Music.

SCENE 5
THE DUNGEON OF CARDINAL NARBONNE'S PALACE

1525, Night.

Several men enter with lighted torches.
 We see iron chains and rings.
 Julius is being fastened to an iron wheel which now enters centre stage.
 The atmosphere is sinister and dark.
 Cardinal Narbonne appears at the top of a set of stone steps.
 A beat.
 The Cardinal brandishes his arm and makes a fist, highlighting his ring of office.

CARDINAL

Look at this ring. Do you understand its significance? It is the symbol of the authority vested in me as a Cardinal. But also of the duty I bear. I abhor these things. But I do as the Church demands.

The Cardinal descends the steps.

CARDINAL

See my ring. What a splendid ornament. A present from the Lord. I am the guardian of the word of Christ. The Inquisition is the most powerful arm of Christianity.

A beat.

CARDINAL

Turn the wheel.

One of the men activates the gears and the wheels turns.
 Julius is now upside down.
 Julius yells.

JULIUS

I beg you, Cardinal. For the love of the saints, of Christ, of the Blessed Virgin. Release from this torment. Release me from this torture. I know nothing more. I have told you everything I know. Everything.

A beat.

CARDINAL

I am very fond of the stone in my ring. A ruby. They say rubies are a token of patience. I am blessed with patience. I have all the time in the world to listen to you. And a turquoise is a token of happiness. I am curious to know where he has fled to.

JULIUS

I have told you already. He went to Agen.

CARDINAL

No one goes to Agen.

JULIUS

But he did. Michel went.

CARDINAL

Turn the wheel.

The wheel turns and Julius goes through another 180 degrees.
He cries out.

JULIUS

Thank you, Eminence. Thank you.

CARDINAL

Tell me, Dr. Julius, how does the world look upside down?

JULIUS

No, never. It is a sign of Satanism to worship the inverted crucifix.

CARDINAL

And tell me how Dr. Michel managed that?

JULIUS

What?

CARDINAL

To see the world upside down, of course. To see time from behind and above.
If that isn't Satanism, then I'm sure I don't know what is.

JULIUS

He. He. He. He. It was a book, Eminence.

The Cardinal opens a book. Blank pages flutter to the ground.

CARDINAL

A book written in invisible ink. As invisible as the cherub, the seraph, as
invisible as an angel.

JULIUS

I don't know what become of the pages, Eminence.

CARDINAL

But you know what they contained.

JULIUS

No.

CARDINAL

Yes. You do know. If there's one thing which stimulates one of God's creatures more than pleasure it's pain. And with pain all that has been felt, touched, learned floods back into memory. And torture is the instrument of pain, and pain is the tool of the Holy Inquisition which has the power to bring to light those heretics who spread their heresies through the world and seek the destruction of the Holy Catholic Church.

JULIUS

No. I am not a heretic. I lack the courage to be other than a true believer.

CARDINAL

Very well, then. Talk. Tell me everything. I want to hear about the thousand devils who infest your soul. I want to hear all the details of Michel's covenant with the serpent in its pit and how he proposes to make Monsignor Felice a Pope. Tell me.

JULIUS

Oh. He's not going to make anybody a Pope, Eminence.

CARDINAL

An anti-Pope then. Whatever. Only tell me. Confess. And the ritual? How does he perform the ritual?

JULIUS

Well now. I was never present during the ceremony itself.

CARDINAL

But there's a ceremony, you say. Some macabre rite to invoke the anti-Christ?

JULIUS

I believe that is so, Eminence.

CARDINAL

I suspected as much. I could never get him to give me a straight answer when I questioned him on the articles of faith. Still, he was always a sly fox, always clever. He is a beast. His intuition. Is he a pervert?

JULIUS

No. I mean, he... Yes, he is.

CARDINAL

Ah. Superb. Then without the slightest doubt, he also traffics in goat's blood, rabid dogs and scorching sulphurs and magic potions.

JULIUS

Quite possible, yes.

CARDINAL

Now answer me this carefully: what are the constituents of his magic potions?

JULIUS

The constituents?

CARDINAL

Yes. The substance he is going to use to make Felice a Pope.

JULIUS

But, Eminence. Monsignor Felice has not been anointed as Pope by anyone.

A beat.

CARDINAL

Are you trying to play games with me, Julius?

JULIUS

No, Eminence. Certainly not. I swear in God's name.

CARDINAL

You are, aren't you? I suppose you think that I shall never be elected to the great office myself. You think that I am unworthy of shouldering the greatest task that befalls a man, the greatest power over man's kingdom. Isn't that so?

JULIUS

No, Eminence.

CARDINAL

Don't interrupt me. I am more deserving than anyone. I have suffered most by descending into these filthy dungeons correcting the perversions of faith. Perfecting men so that they still yet be called unto the Lord. (LONG PAUSE) I want this magic substance. I want to be Pope. I want Michel de Nostredame here. Now. Dead or alive.

The man starts the gear and the wheel turns again, lifting Julius into the air. Julius screams.

The Cardinal and the men leave.

A beat.

The wheel stops.

Silence.

Suddenly a trap door opens and Monsignor Felice appears with two monks at either side.

MONSIGNOR

Quickly. The chains. Oh, Our Saviour, in whose hands has your Church fallen.

The monks unleash Julius from his chains.
He falls, crumpled, on the floor.
The Monsignor covers his half-naked body with a cape.

MONSIGNOR

Wine.

One of the monks offers the wine. The Monsignor makes Julius drink from the glass.
Julius coughs and chokes.

MONSIGNOR

We must be swift. We have only a little time. Come, Dr. Julius. Gather yourself. Just one last effort.

Julius regains a semblance of consciousness and nears Felice.

JULIUS

Michel is a heretic. I am a heretic. We are both evil. Michel was conceived in a pact with evil, he told me. He was marked from birth.

MONSIGNOR

Be quiet.

JULIUS

I confess that I have witnessed what the common folk call the devil. I have seen the devil and he is the future. Only God knows the future. Therefore, the devil is God.

The Monsignor shakes Julius forcefully. He slaps him across the face twice.

MONSIGNOR

Wake up, man. Rouse yourself. The torture is finished.

Julius starts to cry.

JULIUS

Forgive me, my friend. Forgive me, Michel. I have betrayed you.

MONSIGNOR

I am not Michel.

A beat.

JULIUS

Monsignor...

MONSIGNOR

Go. Go down to the lower dungeon. A cart is waiting at the gate.

JULIUS

But if I go down this passage. I shall be a fugitive from the Holy Inquisition. I shall be excommunicated.

MONSIGNOR

Would you prefer to go back on the wheel then?

Julius is in a total panic.

JULIUS

No. I don't want to return to the wheel. But I am frightened to leave here. Ay. Oh Lord. Protect me, O Lord. Help me in my hour of need. Tell the Cardinal. Tell him it's all like a dream to me. Tell him life is a dream.

MONSIGNOR

Life is a nightmare.

JULIUS

But my life was a dream. I was happy.

MONSIGNOR

And who told you we are brought to the world to be happy, doctor? (LONG PAUSE) Now, leave.

A beat. Julius makes his way over to the trap door.

JULIUS

MONSIGNOR. You are speaking. You have broken your vow of silence.

Felice smiles.

MONSIGNOR

For something important.

A beat.

JULIUS

Why are you helping me?

MONSIGNOR

Because I believe you are innocent.

JULIUS

What about Michel? Do you believe in him? In his prophecies?

A beat.

MONSIGNOR

Tell Michel he must never set foot in France hereafter. And take this to him.

Felice takes a small silver cross from under his garment and hands it to Julius.

JULIUS

A crucifix? What for?

MONSIGNOR

Go now. Quickly. The Cardinal may return at any moment.

JULIUS

But. If the Monsignor believes in Michel then you also believe you will one day be Pope. Isn't that true?

MONSIGNOR

No. I don't believe in the prophecy. But neither do I believe you find the truth on a Catherine wheel. The light of true comes from another wheel.

JULIUS

What wheel?

MONSIGNOR

Ask Michel. Perhaps only he know. Go.

Julius disappears down the trap door.
The Monsignor stands stage centre.
The cardinal appears at the top of the steps.

CARDINAL

What are the monks waiting for? Follow Julius and see if he leads you to Michel. Go.

The monks also disappear down the trap.

CARDINAL

You were most eloquent, Monsignor.

MONSIGNOR

I try my best, Eminence.

CARDINAL

I shall remember this when I am Pope.

MONSIGNOR

I hope you do, Eminence. (PAUSE) With your permission.

The MONSIGNOR turns to leave.

CARDINAL

I beg your pardon.

MONSIGNOR

What is it, Eminence?

CARDINAL

Please repeat what you just said.

MONSIGNOR

But.

CARDINAL

It gives me a certain pleasure. Repeat your oath.

A beat.

MONSIGNOR

I, Monsignor Felice Peretti, swear before God and the Holy Inquisition that if I should ever be elected Pope I will refuse that honour.

The Monsignor lowers his head.

CARDINAL

Unforgettable. The Monsignor will not doubt reach high office in the Holy Church. (PAUSE) And simply because you have the gift of obliging your superiors. (PAUSE) Now come and kiss my ring.

Loud music.

The lights dwindle to total blackout.

SCENE 6**THE DISPENSARY AT AGEN**

1526, Day.

Coloured lights play across the stage. White cloths with washes of colour descend from the flies. They sweep to and fro.

The setting is disturbing, absurd, and vivid.

Four bandaged Valetudinarians enter. They behave like zombies, shrieking.

Music.

VALETUDINARIAN 1

Ay. Ay. The plague. The plague.

VALETUDINARIAN 2

Agen is stricken. Everyone is stricken. There is not one priest left to give extreme unction.

VALETUDINARIAN 3

There's no salvation. We are all doomed.

VALETUDINARIAN 2

Ay. Ay. Death is slow and merciless.

VALETUDINARIAN 1

I'm shivering. My mind is bursting with terrifying visions.

VALETUDINARIAN 3

What kind of God is it that makes us suffer so.

VALETUDINARIAN 2

Blood, fever and delirium. Ay Ay.

ALL

Agen is stricken. Everyone is stricken. Ay. Ay. We are all doomed. Agen. Agen.

Each Valetudinarian takes up a position at each corner of the stage next to a cloth.

Nostradamus enters and positions a three legged table and a bench in the middle of the dispensary. He sits down and begins to write with a goose quill.

NOSTRADAMUS

(AS HE WRITES) I have closely observed the manifestations of the plague these three months. I have developed in that time a certain treatment which appears to staunch the hitherto ineluctable spread of the plague. (PAUSE) the tincture is a compound of ground fungi with Herbas Azulis and Mageronis Compostus. (PAUSE) The wounds themselves should be cleaned each day with running water and Fibrus Talicus. (PAUSE) Ah. And as I have now evidence which leads me to believe that the plague is disseminated through the air I have given instruction to the citizens that a harness be fitted about the mouth. The harness should have about it a cushion filled with rose petals to cover the mouth. All dwellings should likewise be smoked thoroughly seven times per diem. It is of the absolute essence that all vermin and cats and dogs be incinerated as their odours and emissions are sources of transmissions of the plague. (PAUSE) The afflicted are advised to bathe two times a week and consume raw liver. The liver of the following is highly recommended: chickens, geese, sheep and cows. Pig's liver should never be taken in any circumstances.

One of the Valetudinarians approaches Nostradamus.

Nostradamus raises a wadding of cloth to his mouth.

NOSTRADAMUS
Are you feeling better?

VALETUDINARIAN 1
Pardon?

NOSTRADAMUS
I asked if you were feeling better.

VALETUDINARIAN 1
I am in the Lord's hands. I had a fever last night.

NOSTRADAMUS
With vomiting?

VALETUDINARIAN 1
Er. Yes, doctor. But only after I drunk my...

NOSTRADAMUS
Drank what?

VALETUDINARIAN 1
I can't hear you.

NOSTRADAMUS
I asked what made you vomit.

VALETUDINARIAN 1
I know you're not going to like this. I drank my urine.

NOSTRADAMUS
Ah. People never listen. How many times have I told you not to drink your urine. And not to rub excrement on your wounds. (PAUSE) Now go and have a bath and eat four raw eggs. Go.

Valetudinarian 1 withdraws with a bow.

NOSTRADAMUS
(STARTS WRITING) The plague could ask for no two finer bulwarks than human stupidity and negligence.

Julius enters – swathed from head to toe – in a cloak and hood.

NOSTRADAMUS
Not another patient. What's your problem?

JULIUS

I... I... I can't stop quivering.

NOSTRADAMUS

What have you done? You haven't been rubbing faces on your sores, have you?

JULIUS

No. It's. This plague chills me with fear. I don't want to die, Michel.

Julius lifts his hood.

NOSTRADAMUS

Julius.

Smiling, Nostradamus crosses to hold Julius in his arms.

NOSTRADAMUS

My old friend, come, I'm delighted to see you again.

Julius suddenly lashes violently at Nostradamus and recoils from his embrace.

JULIUS

Don't come near me. You're not a friend of mine. A pervert. That's what you are. A deviant. Your madness caused me to be taken prisoner and tortured. And now I'm banished from Avignon.

NOSTRADAMUS

Then each has repaired the friendship of the other. We are quits.

JULIUS

Quits?

NOSTRADAMUS

Correct. I'm more than sure that your won prodigious mind found itself in utter agreement with the Cardinal's fantasies. For example, I have never been condemned for practicing unmentionably lewd and indecent rites involving a one-eyed man with six fingers on one hand and scales down to his navel and the breast of a maiden, the belly of an ass and the legs of an ox and the hump of a camel, who appears on the dead of night for the gross pleasure of sucking the blood of innocent children who, of course, have previously had their heads bitten off by myself while I decry the inadequacy of God and denounce the heinous extravagances of the Holy Church.

A beat.

JULIUS

How did you know?

NOSTRADAMUS

Oh, a wild guess. So just as I tricked you with the book you have repaid my by libelling me to the Inquisition. Are we even or not?

JULIUS

Oh, I think so, yes. Your analysis is flawless.

NOSTRADAMUS

Friendship. You know, Julius, whenever I contemplate friendship I come to the conclusion that you can't beat a dumb animal. Disillusion is rare and loyalty guaranteed.

JULIUS

Are you saying you look upon me as a pet. A dog for instance?

NOSTRADAMUS

Well, let's say an ass, rather. An ass is considerably more intelligent than a donkey, and undeniably more talented than a horse.

JULIUS

Son of a bitch. Cynic. You insult and humiliate me because you know I am in an impossible position. Either I follow you around the world or I end up split from arse to elbow on that monstrous wheel.

Nostradamus starts laughing.

JULIUS

I fail to find any humour in my dilemma.

Nostradamus makes his way across to Julius with his arms outstretched.

NOSTRADAMUS

Come, my friend. Let us embrace one another. Life here in Agen will be considerably more tolerable with a fellow outcast.

Again Julius recoils.

JULIUS

Go away. Don't come near me. I don't want to be contaminated.

NOSTRADAMUS

Contaminated?

JULIUS

The plague, of course. It's an appalling death and I have not the least intention of catching it. I am going to live like a recluse in a house on the other side of the river.

NOSTRADAMUS

I want you to be my associate, Julius. My associate. Oh, I've got thousands of ideas, I've carried out a couple of experiments and the two of us together. Who knows? Maybe.

JULIUS

Maybe you think you're God. Is that it? No one has ever found a way to cure the plague, Michel. And neither your impudence nor your pride is going to defeat the impossible.

A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

Well. But if we worked together, I'm sure. We'd discover. Please, Julius, say you'll work with me.

JULIUS

No. I can't. I can't.

Julius exits.

A pause.

Crestfallen, Nostradamus returns to his desk.

Sabina enters and crosses to him. She, too, is downcast and dejected.

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina. (PAUSE) What are you doing here? I expressly forbid you ever to set foot in here.

SABINA

Jean is weakening.

A beat.

NOSTRADAMUS

Weaker? Even after he had that bath?

A beat.

SABINA

I don't understand you. How can someone with your ability, your gifts, be so blind? (PAUSE) Our children have the plague, Michel. They're contaminated.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. I know my treatment is correct. I can see patients getting better. I will not allow my own family to succumb. I am the greatest authority on the plague. Do you hear? Do you hear me? (PAUSE) Why aren't you using your mask?

A beat.

SABINA

I shiver too, Michel. And I bleed. What good is smelling rose petals going to do to me?

Sabina takes the face mask from the table and hands it to Nostradamus.

SABINA

You'd better wear this when we speak with one another. When you come home. When you hold your children.

Nostradamus holds his wife by her arm.

SABINA

Let go, Michel.

NOSTRADAMUS

I cannot live without you and our children. I am like a wolf; there's only one love in my life. One passion (PAUSE) I am faithful with my body and my mind. (PAUSE) I have never strayed. There is no other temptation but you. (PAUSE) Don't leave me, Sabina. Don't leave.

SABINA

We followed your will.

She shakes his hand free of her arm.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. Destiny brought us to Agen. My destiny told me that we would be safe here and that the Cardinal would forgive me and I would find recognition as a great doctor.

SABINA

If Destiny spoke to you it must have had its tongue in its cheek. (PAUSE) Wake up. There is no destiny, Michel. All there is what each of us has inside. Nothing else. The only path is the one we cut ourselves. (PAUSE)

Sabina holds her hand over her stomach.

SABINA

I'm bleeding. I can feel it. I'm bleeding. I'm bleeding.

Sabina jerks and falls.

Nostradamus rushes across to her and holds her in his arms.

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina. Sabina. Tell me is all a lie. I can't see any blood. Tell me is not happening.

Julius enters with the silver crucifix in his hands.

JULIUS

I forgot to give you the crucifix.

Sabina looks at Julius.

SABINA

Ah. Doctor Julius.

JULIUS

Madame Sabina.

Nostradamus helps Sabina to her feet. He points to Julius.

NOSTRADAMUS

He arrived today, Sabina. Julius is going to help me develop my new treatment. You understand? Everyone believes in me, Sabina.

Sabina stands on her feet.

SABINA

Ah. Now the plague is complete.

JULIUS

Your loathing is groundless, Madame.

SABINA

But it is deep, doctor. As deep as the effect those books of your have had on my husband.

NOSTRADAMUS

I beg you, Sabina. Don't become poisoned by hatred.

SABINA

Why not? Why not?

NOSTRADAMUS

It puts down roots, my love.

SABINA

Then now is the time to harvest the fruit.

Sabina spits in Julius' face.

Julius cleans his face.

JULIUS

You might care to remind yourself that I, too, Madame, am also a victim of your husband's cunning. As much as you and your children seem to be.

SABINA

No. You're the liar. Why have you come here?

NOSTRADAMUS

Sabina. Be quiet. I've told you a thousand times Julius is not to blame. Why can't you heed what I tell you? Or do you only listen to the voices of your own obsession?

A beat.

SABINA

No. He also must know what it's like to be tossed about on the waters of despair.

Sabina slides her hand under her clothes. When she pulls it out it is covered with blood. She holds it up for both to see.

SABINA

Blood. Blood.

Nostradamus recoils and begins weeping.

Julius is transfixed, stunned.

Sabina turns to Julius.

SABINA

Now the doctor already has a little of my infected saliva, perhaps he'd like a little blood to go with it?

Julius hysterically begins to wipe himself.

JULIUS

Oh my God. Oh God. She's trying to kill me. She's got the plague. It's the plague. I can feel it already. Little creatures gnawing away at my flesh. Her saliva is contaminated with the plague.

Julius wanders around the stage in frenzy.

SABINA

Welcome to Agen, Doctor Julius.

Sabina leaves.

Nostradamus is still weeping.

Julius pulls a bowl towards himself and tries to wash desperately.

JULIUS

Water. Water. Cleanse me. Please. What harm did I do that the Lord punishes me so? That vile book.

A beat.

The Valetudinarians begin, quietly, to moan.

NOSTRADAMUS

Help. Someone please help me.

Nostradamus lifts his hands to his head.

NOSTRADAMUS

Lord. I can't take anymore of this. Please take me away from this. Take me to another time.

The light changes.

A violent wind whips across the stage.

The cloths are stirred and dance on the stage.

As suddenly as the wind began it ceases.

Silence.

Nostradamus stands.

NOSTRADAMUS

Julius. Fetch me the bowl of water.

Julius is stopped in his tracks.

NOSTRADAMUS

The water Julius. (SHOUTS) Give me the water.

Julius races across to Nostradamus with the pitcher of water. One of the Valetudinarians arrives with the book DE MYSTERIIS EGYPTORUM while another hands Nostradamus his stick.

Another light change.

Nostradamus clenches his stick in one hand and with the other sprinkles himself with the water and begins his rite.

NOSTRADAMUS

Oh Lord of Nature. (LOUDER) Oh Lord of Nature.

We hear thunder and see lightning.

The Valetudinarians re-commence their wailing with more conviction.

Julius kneels, frozen in his awe.

NOSTRADAMUS

Lamblichus. Dies Manibus. Triangulum Majus. Dies Manibus. Dies Manibus. Give me a sign that my family will be spared. Now. Immediately. This instant.

The stick begins to oscillate.

At the rear of the stage Sabina appears, bloodstained, with the bodies of two children wrapped in bloody shrouds at her side. She holds a candelabrum.

SABINA

Nostradamus. My journey ends here. Your children and I will burn to death. It is what I wish. This is the end that I want. And I don't care if your destiny doesn't like it.

NOSTRADAMUS

No. No. No. I don't want to see. Sabina, please, don't do it.

Sabina lowers the candelabra and brings it close to the bodies of the children. Sparks and thick reddish smoke devour them.

The smoke spreads across the stage.

It is like Dante's Inferno.

Sabina cries out – and disappears.

Nostradamus comes stage centre. He becomes increasingly distraught during his speech until – by the end – he is sobbing and gasping.

NOSTRADAMUS

Everything has finished for me. They perish in the fire. (LONG PAUSE) No. They have yet to die. How much longer do I have to hold my children in my arms and hug them? (SOFTLY) They are going to die at the hands of my wife Sabina. But the truth is their death is inevitable, even though Sabina imagines she will be responsible. She's doing no more than what is set down, determined. (PAUSE) She will not be able to bear their suffering, nor yet her own. Through her own free will she will carry out what is written. Ah. So that is the way it happens. And I can do nothing to intervene; because this is my destiny. (PAUSE) So, destiny does indeed exist. Everything is written down already. (PAUSE) So who then directs events? God? Providence? (PAUSE) Then does it follow that a man's life, the history of a people, of humanity itself, is already determined in advance?

Suddenly the stick flares and lights up. It begins to shake.
Nostradamus holds the book.
The Valetudinarians shriek for all they are worth.
Julius cries.

NOSTRADAMUS

I don't want to suffer any more surprises in my life. I don't want to feel anything anymore. (PAUSE) I want to subjugate time, Dies minibus. (PAUSE) Dies Manibus. Dies Manibus. I want to discover all there is to know about time to come. I want to know what destiny holds in store for me. I want to read the page written in God's hand where all is set out for time everlasting. (PAUSE) Dies minibus. Show me the book of life. I want to understand infinity, to know the course of every minute of time to come and see the divine plan that determines all existence.

Nostradamus looks at the bowl. The water has taken on a strange luminosity. The stick is being violently agitated and glows brightly. At the rear of the stage a giant wheel appears. It begins to spin and as it does it gives off extraordinary sparks and lights. It is the wheel of time in all its opulent splendour. A beat. Another light change.

NOSTRADAMUS

Oh, God Almighty. I can see the wheel of time in all its wonder. It's spinning and spinning. I can see the future. But why can't it stop turning? (WAILING) Ay. I am lost to the present. Present time has disintegrated. Oh God. Lord, please. Dies Manibus. Why do you want to make me a prisoner of the future? Why? (HE CRIES) I am captive. I am forever a victim of the future.

The wheel glows – the cloth whirl – the stick pulsates – the water phosphoresces – smoke billows.

Nostradamus grips the book tightly. A choir sings.

Music.

The curtain falls.

END OF ACT ONE.