

# THE SPACE BETWEEN STARS

By

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An adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince*

DRAFT

Small Matters Productions

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### Production history

A 25-minute workshop version of this work was performed April 20-24, 2016 as one element of a site-specific performance installation at the University of Alberta's Astronomical Observatory, titled *The Object of Constellations*. Presented in partial fulfillment of Christine Lesiak's Master of Fine Arts Theatre Practice thesis, The University of Alberta, supervised by Dr. Piet Defraeye and Michael Kennard.

Concept, writer & performer: Christine Lesiak  
Director & dramaturge: Suzanne Martin  
Stage management: Andrea Murphy  
Mechanical design & installation build: Ian Walker  
Design consultant: Marissa Kochanski  
Sound & co-projection design: Michael Caron  
Lighting & co-projection design: Jeff Osterlin  
Science consultant: Dr. Sharon Morsink

### The original performance environment

The University of Alberta astronomical observatory consisted of an indoor classroom and large outdoor patio with three metal dome structures. Each dome houses a telescope, and the dome walls are magnetic. The classroom and two domes housed interactive art installation works related to the text. The third (centre) dome housed the live performance. The character was restricted to the live performance dome and the patio, never entering the art installation spaces.

Audience entered and exited the observatory facility as they wished, so long as the facility's maximum capacity (60) was not exceeded. They were encouraged to visit and revisit the art installation spaces in their own time.

Twenty audience members were admitted into the live performance space at the beginning of each loop. The loop ran four times nightly, on the half-hour.

### The 2018 workshop version – *The Space Between Stars*

A significantly expanded version of the script, called *In the Place of Stars*, emerged thanks to a script workshop with SkirtsAFire Festival's Peepshow! program in collaboration with the Alberta Playwright's Network. The workshop was facilitated by dramaturge Tracy Carroll, with actors Jordan Sabo, Laura Raboud, Stephanie Wolfe and Venassa Sabourin. It concluded with a public reading on March 11, 2018. After this workshop, the play was renamed to its current title, *The Space Between Stars*.

## Characters

### ASTRONOMER

A researcher. Woman in her forties. Exceptionally intelligent, introverted, socially awkward, but passionate when speaking about her work and the stars. She becomes easily lost in the wonder and beauty of numbers and facts, and does not necessarily have a good understanding of what the general public does and does not understand.

### SON

Her son. Equally intelligent. Even-tempered, precocious and curious. 6 years old.

## Playwright's Notes

This play is a radical adaptation of Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's 1943 novella, *The Little Prince*, intended for adult audiences. Although the story in this script differs significantly from that of its primary source, it is intended to be performed with the lightness, wonder, and playfulness that sits at the heart of the original novella. Reading (or re-reading) Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* before going into the rehearsal process is very strongly recommended.

The astronomer is aware of and often speaks directly to the audience. The actor may improvise off-script, within character, if needed. At times, she speaks directly to the audience in the present, at times to the memory (or ghost) of her son in the present, and at times directly to her son in the past.

The son exists only in her memory. He does not see the audience.

I suggest the projections appear in two distinct styles. The first style is pragmatic - those the astronomer has prepared for her real-world lecture. She will control these images, be it advancing the slide herself, or cueing someone else to advance them. The second style's images are conjured from her memories and imagination. These are more magical, whimsical even, and she does not control them. As the play progresses, these styles might blur and overlap.

Consider the stage directions for the son's appearance as suggestions. Productions may feel free to play with shadow, voice-over, etc., so long as the idea of the gradual reveal of the son is preserved.

At no point do we ever hear a recorded sound of a child's laugh.

*The evening, April 21<sup>st</sup>, 2016, a public lecture. Behind and around the astronomer is a large, hemispherical projection screen that arcs over the audience, or ideally a full hemispherical tent, like a planetarium dome.*

### PRESHOW

#### PROJECTION

*Title: "Navigating the Northern Night Sky, April 2016,  
Dr. Mary Jean Baptiste*

*As audience enters, Mary nervously sets up her for her lecture. At some point, she may bring on and set up a speaker and music device. She may forget something and need to exit and come back. She plays a recording of Holst's The Planets – Jupiter. The music is more to help her calm her nerves than for the audience's enjoyment. She may review her lecture notes, occasionally glancing at the audience members as they find their place in the space. She will possibly acknowledge and greet audience, but is most likely to see them and quickly avert her eyes.*

*When it is time to begin, the astronomer turns off the music and pockets or sets aside her notes. She speaks directly to the audience, at first quite nervously, but quickly becomes comfortable as she gets into the material she has prepared, then more and more excited to share her passion.*

### ASTRONOMER

Hello and welcome to our monthly public lecture series, "The Sky Tonight". I will discuss some dominant astronomical features in the sky tonight, as seen from here in Edmonton, looking toward the South. (*beat*) As I saw so many familiar faces filter in, I realized that it has been six years since I last gave this lecture here. Some of you know I have been at the Mauna Kea Observatory in Hawaii for the last five years, where I have, of course, been lecturing on a different set of constellations (*nervous laugh*). But, I am very happy to be back with you and to revisit some old friends (*gestures to the sky*).

Here we go.

*She advances the slide*

#### PROJECTION

*The hand drawn outline of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant – it roughly resembles the outline of a fedora hat.*

### ASTRONOMER

When I was six years old, I was somewhat obsessed with snakes. I drew this and showed it to the grown-ups. They did not recognize it as a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. So... (*advances image*)

*PROJECTION*

*The same outline as before, but with an outline of an elephant drawn inside.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Just because it is unexpected, and just because our eyes do not perceive it does not mean it is not there. Think of a pregnant woman's belly...

*PROJECTION*

*The elephant image from the last slide, but turned 90 degrees with the outline the shape of a pregnant belly, so that it appears that the woman is pregnant with the elephant.*

If we did not know better, we would never guess there are one or more small humans inside. We can see the contour, but we can not see the hidden complexity. Not without special instruments. Our universe is like this. To see an unborn child, we use an ultrasound. To see the universe, we use a telescope. And there is much to see.

*PROJECTION*

*A single dot appears on the screen.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Consider a single grain of sand.

*PROJECTION*

*A hundred dots appear on the screen in a single row*

**ASTRONOMER**

This is what a hundred grains would look like, if we took the time to spread them all out nicely...

*PROJECTION*

*A thousand dots appear on the screen, in 10 rows of one hundred.*

**ASTRONOMER**

... and this is what a thousand looks like. These are numbers, we can understand. After this it begins to get a bit trickier...

*PROJECTION*

*Ten-thousand dots appear on the screen, in 100 rows of one hundred.*

**ASTRONOMER**

... ten-thousand...

*PROJECTION*

*One-hundred-thousand dots appear on the screen.*

**ASTRONOMER**

... one-hundred-thousand. It is beginning to become more difficult to understand the quantity we see.

*PROJECTION*

*One-million dots appear on the screen, filling it completely.*

**ASTRONOMER**

... one-million. Around this point, it becomes physically impossible to visually illustrate the sheer size of the number. So, to continue, we are required to change our scale.

*PROJECTION*

*A sand-filled cup appears on the screen.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Let us say our sand is quite fine, like the sand in the Sahara Desert. And then, this one cup contains our one million grains...

*PROJECTION*

*A thousand sand-filled cups appear on the screen.*

**ASTRONOMER**

This is one billion grains of sand, and...

*PROJECTION*

*One-thousand times more cups, 1 million sand-filled cups appear on the screen.*

**ASTRONOMER**

... this represents one trillion grains of fine desert sand.

*PROJECTION*

*The cups fade out, and the screen fills with the stars of the northern hemisphere, like a cloudless night in a desert.*

**ASTRONOMER**

There are 100 billion galaxies in the visible universe. 100 billion. And each one of those galaxies has on average 400 billion stars. And those are just the ones within thirteen-point-seven billion light years from us - the ones whose light has had time to reach us since the Big Bang. That is 40 billion trillion unique stars. Conservatively.

And the time it takes light to travel across this inky vastness means some the light we see tonight left its star before our Earth was born. And some of the light arrives from stars that no longer exist at all. The sky is filled with the ghosts of stars. A telescope is a time machine - it reveals glimpses of the past.

*PROJECTION*

*Image of the solar system, Earth and the Sun.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Our closest star is the Sun. It takes eight minutes for light to travel from the Sun to the Earth. In that time, two-thousand and forty people will be born and eight-hundred-and-fifty-six will die. On average.

*PROJECTION*

*Zoom out, to include Alpha Centuri, then the entire Milky Way galaxy.*

Our next nearest star system is Alpha Centuri... now we cannot actually see it from here, it is best visible in the southern hemisphere... but if we were in Australia right now, the light we would see from Alpha Centuri would be four years and five months old. A snapshot from November 2011, when NASA launched the Mars Rover Curiosity. And that is our closest stellar neighbour. Both our sun and Alpha Centuri are in just a tiny section of The Milky Way galaxy, our home, one hundred thousand light years across. We are twenty-six thousand light years from our galactic centre. Those photons left home around the time our Palaeolithic ancestors were carving the first fertility goddess.

These are unfathomable distances. Our terrestrial minds did not evolve to understand celestial scales. But still, we try. For over three thousand years we have struggled to make sense of the skies. We cannot resist, we are born pattern-makers. Children instinctively seek familiar shapes in the stars.

(*Straying off her script*) For example, one night, my son said he found a sheep constellation – when *he* was six, he was somewhat obsessed with sheep. He pointed to the eastern section of Draco. I told him that is a dragon, and there is already a sheep constellation, and I pointed to Aries, and he...

**SON** (*appears in silhouette, interrupts*) That is not a sheep. That is a ram. It has horns.

*Astronomer looks around the room but does not see him.*

**ASTRONOMER**

(*Refers to her lecture notes*) Stars are constant. We use them for navigation and to preserve our mythologies. They are our calendar. They told our nomadic ancestors when to move on to a more hospitable climate. They are predictable. Dependable.

**PROJECTION**

*Zoom into our solar system, planets in orbit.*

**ASTRONOMER**

But planets are transient bodies. It is their inconstancy that caused chaos. The word ‘disaster’ comes from the Greeks, it means ‘bad star’, and a planet’s unfavourable position in the sky was a portent of war, of famine, or of plague. Medieval doctors measured the planets motions to prophesy the next pandemic of the pox. Terrestrial minds have always yearned to predict the unpredictable, to swindle probability.

*(looking at the projection) These are not to scale.*

*Son appears in silhouette, playing with a sheep toy.*

**PROJECTION**

*Zoom in on Jupiter.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Jupiter reigns over the sky tonight. Named after the king of the Roman gods, the protector of mortals, it is the fifth planet from the Sun and the largest planet in our solar system. It is two and half times as massive as all the other planets in our solar system combined. Two and a half times. Its Great Red Spot is mass of swirling gas that has raged for over three-hundred years. At one time, three Earths would have fit inside this watchful eye, but it is shrinking, its storm is breaking, and may soon be gone completely. Jupiter’s light takes on average forty-four minutes to arrive into a telescope... Five minutes fewer than the time it takes to listen to Holst’s The Planets.

**PROJECTION**

*Add the moons orbiting Jupiter, with a highlight on Ganymede*

**ASTRONOMER**

Jupiter changed the way our ancestors understood the universe. When Galileo focused his telescope on the great giant, he perceived its four circling moons. This was the first-time celestial bodies were observed to orbit anything other than the Earth - direct evidence that we are not, in fact, the centre of the universe (*laughs*). And a heresy for which he was imprisoned for nearly a decade.

Ganymede is Jupiter’s largest moon, larger than the planet Mercury. So large, we can sometimes see its shadow on Jupiter’s face. If Ganymede orbited a star we would call it a planet, but a quirk of gravity relegates him to the status of a satellite. (*as an excited afterthought*) However, Ganymede is the only known moon with a magnetosphere...

SON

(Appears in silhouette) What is a magnetosphere?

*She perhaps catches a glimpse of him before he dissolves.*

PROJECTION

*As she speaks the stars fade into view. First the stars of the Big Dipper, one by one, then the stars of Ursa Major, then eventually the stars of all the constellations visible in the northern hemisphere, the constellation's major stars connected to form the classic shapes, like dot-to-dots in the sky.*

ASTRONOMER

Our ancestors organized the stars into constellations. Different cultures made up their own sign systems. What we call the Big Dipper is an asterism of seven stars that falls within the larger constellation of Ursa Major, the Great Bear. In Hinduism, the Big Dipper's stars are the Seven Saptarshi Sages. And the Burmese called them Pucwan Tārā (*bazun taja*), which roughly translates as 'shrimp'.

*Still in silhouette, the son runs across the screen.*

SON

Shrimp!

*He disappears, laughing. She is determined to ignore the intrusion.*

ASTRONOMER

The stars hold an infinite number of stories. We must pick which ones to tell. And we have.

PROJECTION

*The boundaries of each constellation region appear.*

ASTRONOMER

Today, all visible stars are officially mapped into one of the eighty-eight modern constellations.

PROJECTION

*The boundaries of each constellation region disappear. Polaris and the stars of Ursa Minor are highlighted. As she speaks, the image spins to show the circumpolar rotation of the sky.*

ASTRONOMER

Not far from Ursa Major we find Polaris. Polaris is the brightest in the constellation of Ursa Minor, the Little Bear. It, in fact, consists of two stars in

orbit, dancing with one another, yet to our naked eye, they appear as a single stationary point of light. It is our northern pole star, so each night, all the other stars in the sky appear to orbit around it. The Polaris twins are about four-hundred-and-thirty-three light-years away, so the light we see from them tonight left home not long after Queen Elizabeth the First knighted Sir Francis Drake. The sea captain used these little points of light to circumnavigate the world, and launch the British empire.

#### *PROJECTION*

*Image returns to the still starry sky, and the stars of Hercules are highlighted and the connected outline of the constellation appears.*

#### *ASTRONOMER*

The Greeks painted their myths onto the night, and Hercules was the greatest of their heroes. Hercules was the bastard son of Zeus, the king of the Gods, and a mortal woman named Alcmene. Of course, Zeus' lawful wife, Hera, was incensed to hear of the affair, and saw Hercules as a constant reminder of her husband's inconstancy. Over and over again she sought to end Hercules' life. She tried to prevent his birth by tying the labouring Alcmene's legs in knots. When that plot failed, she sent snakes to kill the child in his cot. But the boy was half-god. Difficult to kill. His nurse found the snakes crushed in his infant hands, limp as ribbons. Once he reached adulthood, Hera assigned him twelve seemingly impossible, death-defying labours.

Hercules is the fifth largest of the modern constellations, and lies to the east of Ursa Major.

*The son runs on-stage with a stuffed toy sheep and paper. She is unable to completely ignore him now.*

#### *PROJECTION*

*The star Beta Herculis is highlighted,*

#### *ASTRONOMER*

His brightest star is Beta Herculis, or Kornephoros meaning 'club-bearer'. Like Polaris, it is a system of two stars, gravitationally bound to each other until one burns out. It forms the base of his striking arm at the shoulder. Or the ankle of his right leg (*this alternate outline drawing of Hercules appears*), depending on which story you choose.

#### *SON*

*(looking through paper rolled into a tube, like a telescope)* It looks so close...

#### *ASTRONOMER*

It was my son's favorite star. He looked for it every night.

#### *SON*

... but it is so far away.

*He and his sheep run off.*

ASTRONOMER

... It is 140 light-years away. It takes two human lifetimes for its photons to reach us.

PROJECTION

*The constellation of Leo grows brighter.*

*The son runs on again, playing out the action as described by his mother.*

ASTRONOMER

Tonight, right under Jupiter, Leo the Lion prowls the sky. Mythologically, Leo terrorized the Greeks.

SON

But swords, and clubs and spears could not hurt Leo. So, Hera sent Hercules to protect the people.

ASTRONOMER

When Leo pounced, Hercules snatched him midair,

SON

Broke his back!

ASTRONOMER

... and threw him into the night. Zeus caught Leo and placed him into his starry afterlife.

(laughs) I told my son he stole his golden curls from Leo's mane. I loved the way they bounced when he laughed.

PROJECTION

*Shift back to the full night sky. The sky rotates around the celestial sphere through time and stops at the winter stars (sky of January 2009).*

*A memory from just over seven years earlier. She is preparing for her lecture. He interrupts her work.*

SON

What do you do with the stars?

ASTRONOMER

What do I do with them? Nothing.

SON  
Then what do you do?

ASTRONOMER  
I map them.

SON  
And what good does it do to map the stars?

ASTRONOMER  
It does the good of making me admired.

SON  
And what good does it do you to be admired?

ASTRONOMER  
(*A beat*) Go play with your sheep.

*He runs off.*

*(to herself, as she writes)* Leo's head forms the group we call "The Sickle". It is shaped like a backwards question mark, dotted by Regulus. Regulus is seventy-seven-point-six-three light-years away...

*He returns, holding his sheep.*

*(calculating)* ... so round that to seventy-seven years and eight months...

SON  
What good does it do for the stars to be mapped?

ASTRONOMER  
... so the light left Regulus in... nineteen-thirty-two... No. Thirty-one.  
August...

SON  
What good does it do for the stars to be mapped?

ASTRONOMER  
Please. I am trying to concentrate...

SON  
What good does it do for the stars to be mapped?

ASTRONOMER  
Could you for once let go of a question?...

SON

What good does it do for the stars to be mapped?

ASTRONOMER  
I can monitor them.

SON  
But you cannot pluck the stars from the sky . . .

ASTRONOMER  
No...

SON  
...you cannot make them shine brighter...

ASTRONOMER  
No...

SON  
...or wear them like a diamond.

ASTRONOMER  
No.... but I can put them on my chart. I can analyze them.

SON  
What does that mean?

ASTRONOMER  
It means I can write about my star in a paper.

SON  
And then what?

ASTRONOMER  
And then it can be published. And that is a matter of consequence.

SON  
Why?

ASTRONOMER  
Because then I can study my star some more.

SON  
And then what?

ASTRONOMER  
I can write another paper.

(A beat)  
SON  
Is that all?

ASTRONOMER  
That is enough.

SON  
It is clever. But it is of no great consequence.

*Son runs off laughing, sheep in tow.*

ASTRONOMER  
*(Calling after him)* On matters of consequence, your ideas are very different from those of grownups.

*She returns to her lecture in present.*

*PROJECTION*

*Returns to tonight's sky, and Caffau's star is highlighted in the constellation of Leo.*

*The son returns to his paper with crayons. He draws his own constellations.*

ASTRONOMER  
Within Leo we find Caffau's star. It does not look particularly remarkable from here, very small and dim, but at 13 billion years old, it is one of the oldest stars in the Milky Way. Born shortly after the Big Bang, 8.5 billion years before our Earth was even a twinkle in the Universe's eye. Caffau gives us a glimpse into time when the universe was still young. Her light left home in two-thousand-and-twenty-four B.C., not long after Noah's apocryphal ark found land. Most incredibly, it has the lowest metallicity of any known star...

SON  
*(interrupts without looking up from his drawing)* What's metallicity?

ASTRONOMER  
... the fraction of mass that is not hydrogen or helium.

SON  
Why is that a matter of consequence?

ASTRONOMER  
*(to son)* It means it is one of the first-born stars, and its origin is quite mysterious. Our current theories dictate it should not exist. But there it is.

*PROJECTION*  
*The 4 stars of Cancer grow brighter.*

ASTRONOMER

Just west of Leo lies Cancer the Crab. Cancer is shaped like an upside down "Y". It is the dimmest of the constellations, rarely seen with the naked eye...

SON

(*still drawing*) But just because it is unexpected, and just because we do not see it, does not mean it is not there.

ASTRONOMER

...one needs to use an instrument to see it properly.  
Cancer's mythology is inextricably linked to Hydra...

*PROJECTION*

*The stars of Hydra grow brighter, heading from east to west as they speak.*

SON

(*interrupts*) ... the sea serpent. It has nine heads, and a poison bite and poison blood.

ASTRONOMER

Its tail starts in the east. The largest of the constellations, it passes over 100 degrees of the celestial hemisphere. Its head sits just under Cancer.

*Son acts out his story of the following battle.*

SON

After he kills Leo, Hera sends Hercules to kill Hydra. It seems to be impossible, because every time he cuts off one head, two regrow. And its blood is so poisonous he could die just from the smell.

ASTRONOMER

His chance of survival is excellent. 95%...

SON

Hercules must cover his mouth while he burns the stumps with fire to stop the heads from growing back. He fights hard. He is winning the battle! Then Hera sends Cancer to bite at him, but Hercules steps on the crab and crushes it!

ASTRONOMER

...because his body can tolerate a much higher toxicity than yours or mine.

*He runs around, celebrating the victory.*

SON

Hercules dipped the head of his arrows in Hydra's poison blood. He used them for his next tasks.

*PROJECTION*

*The constellation of Draco grows brighter.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Draco the Dragon coils around the North star, just above Hercules, between the Great and Little Bears. It is the eighth-largest constellation, and it never sets below the northern horizon.

**SON**

Draco never sleeps!

*PROJECTION*

*The star Thuban in the constellation of Draco grows brighter.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Its brightest star is Thuban. Five-thousand years ago, Thuban was the northern pole star, and in nineteen-thousand years, it will be once again.

**SON**

Draco guarded a tree of golden apples. If you ate one you would become immortal.

**ASTRONOMER**

It is three-hundred-and-three light years away.

**SON**

Hercules had to steal golden apples from the garden, so he used his poison arrows with the Hydra's blood to shoot Draco. Then Hera put Draco in stars too. Hera made Hercules' life very difficult. The gods are not always nice.

*PROJECTION*

*Images of the son's invented constellations appear superimposed on the night sky, a flower over the Big Dipper, a cup, a stethoscope and a sheep over Draco, and an IV bag and tubing over Hydra. His drawings are reminiscent of her elephant-boa constrictor hand-drawn images. The son shows his mother a stack of drawings.*

**ASTRONOMER**

What are these?

**SON**

These are my constellations.

ASTRONOMER

(*looking at his drawings*) You are very clever, they remind me of real constellations.

SON

The universe is infinite. Somewhere, these *are* real constellations.

ASTRONOMER

Ah of course! How foolish of me.

I see you have stolen from Draco to make your sheep. (*pointing*) Is this section a rope? To tie him?

SON

Tie him? What a funny idea.

ASTRONOMER

But if you don't tie him he might wander off and get lost.

SON

(*laughs*) Where would he go?

ASTRONOMER

Anywhere. Straight ahead of him. The universe is infinite.

SON

(*considers a moment*) Perhaps. It is a risk. But I need him to wander so he can eat the bad planets.

ASTRONOMER

The bad planets?

SON

There are good planets and bad planets. If you let a bad planet grow it will take over the good planets and destroy them. My sheep will eat the bad planets.

ASTRONOMER

And how does your sheep know which planets are good and which ones are bad?

SON

(*thinks a moment*) It is true that good planets and bad planets look the same when they are very new. We will have to teach him. We must hope the bad ones do not grow too much before he learns the difference.

ASTRONOMER

A universe where sheep ate planets? But, I suppose there was a time when boa constrictors digested elephants. In infinite space, who can say what is possible?

*PROJECTION*

*Jupiter appears, low in the southern horizon (the sky of Aug 2008).*

SON

Perhaps he is blinking.

ASTRONOMER

Who is blinking?

SON

Jupiter.

ASTRONOMER

Jupiter is blinking?

SON

Yes.

ASTRONOMER

What do you mean?

SON

I think if my eye was open for over three hundred years, I would need to blink.

ASTRONOMER

You are telling me Jupiter's Great Red Spot is blinking, not shrinking?

SON

Yes. It is tiresome to be always explaining things to you.

... although I suppose he might be *winking*...

*PROJECTION*

*Jupiter fades away. Tonight's sky returns.*

ASTRONOMER

(*to audience*) I did not know how to position myself in a reality where planets might wink, yet, I could not help but consider my role in the celestial conspiracy.

In the days when boa constrictors digested elephants, I would slide out of bed at night. I would take my black construction paper, poke little holes, hold it up

to the moon, and squint galaxies into existence. My Earth-bound body birthed stars for my celestial heart.

Of course, years later, I learned the facts. The stars are not our children, we are theirs. Just as humanity was born of the Earth, the Earth was born of the stars. Supergiants explode into supernova and create a dust of new atoms. From that dust new stars and planets form as the universe composts itself. Everything in our bodies and everything we touch, the oxygen we breathe, and the hearts in our chests. Everything that is and ever has been was born in the belly of a star. We are literally made of stardust.

When the fabric of reality is woven of miracles, why bother with fictions?

*PROJECTION*

*Animation of Leo, the sheep, the bears, and Orion leaving their spots in the celestial dome, playing out the son's stories.*

(*to son*) In your mind, the old myths and new coalesced. Leo protected your sheep from a hungry Ursa Major, and you recruited Orion, to help Hercules, because...

SON

...his labours will be easier if he has a friend to help him!

*PROJECTION*

*The sky rotates around the celestial sphere through time and stops at the early-spring stars (sky of April 2009). As they point, each named star pulses brighter for a heartbeat.*

SON

(*pointing*) What is that one?

ASTRONOMER

That is Vega, part of the constellation of Lyra.

SON

And that one?

ASTRONOMER

Deneb, part of Cygnus. And that one is Altair, part of Aquila. Together they form the...

SON

(*interrupting*) What is the brightest star in the sky?

ASTRONOMER

After our Sun? Sirius, the Dog Star.

SON

A dog!

ASTRONOMER

Yes. Orion's dog.

SON

Orion has a dog? Where is he?

ASTRONOMER

Ah! He is with his master. He will not be visible until winter.

SON

I will tell Hercules to call them now. I would like to meet Sirius.

*PROJECTION*

*The sky rotates around the celestial sphere through time and settles on the winter sky (the sky of June 2009)*

SON

The stars are beautiful.

ASTRONOMER

Yes. They are.

SON

But only because of the empty space between them.

ASTRONOMER

Ah! Space is not as empty as it appears. Most of the universe is stuff we cannot see, even with a telescope.

SON

What do you mean?

ASTRONOMER

The visible matter... the stars, the planets, you, me, the atoms born from the Supernova. What we can *see* makes up only 5% of the universe. The other 95% is invisible.

SON

What is it?

ASTRONOMER

We do not rightly know. Most of it is something we call Dark Energy. We cannot see or detect Dark Energy, but we know it must exist because the universe is expanding.

SON

The stars are getting farther apart?

ASTRONOMER

Yes. They are.

SON

(realization) That is why my sheep might get lost!

ASTRONOMER

Oh...! I am certain he will always find the North Star to guide him.

A beat.

SON

Then, do all the stars shine so that one day, we can all find our way home?

ASTRONOMER

More and more I did not know how to respond to your questions. But more and more you did not require a response. You understood far better than I could that truth and fact are not so tightly bound.

PROJECTION

*The sky rotates to late summer, the stars of Vulpecula brighten (August 2009 sky)*

ASTRONOMER

Then one summer night, Vulpecula, the faint constellation of the Little Fox came into view.

SON

A fox? Did Zeus also place him in the sky?

ASTRONOMER

Vulpecula? He is not associated with any particular myths.

SON

Ah. So, he is all alone too.

ASTRONOMER

It can be a little lonely in space.

SON

He says he is sad. I want to play with him.

ASTRONOMER

Oh! He cannot play with you... He is not tamed.

SON

What does that mean, 'tame'?

ASTRONOMER

It means... 'to establish ties'.

SON

How do I tame him?

ASTRONOMER

Well, you must be very patient. You must look for him at the same time every night, and you must sit down at a little distance from him.

SON

Why?

ASTRONOMER

To let him grow accustomed to you. If you approach too quickly you will frighten him away. Everyday sit a little bit closer, then eventually he will want to play with you.

SON

If I tame him, I will be special to him...

ASTRONOMER

Yes.

SON

...and he will be special to me... To him, I am still just a little boy, like a hundred million other little boys. And to me, he is still just fox like a hundred million other foxes. But if I tame him, then we will understand each other. To him, I will be unique in all the universe. To me, he will be unique in all the universe...

ASTRONOMER

Yes.

SON

...do you think he wants to be tamed?

ASTRONOMER

I think everyone wants to be tamed, but we are afraid.

SON

Afraid of what?

ASTRONOMER

(*a beat*) One runs the risk of weeping a little when one lets them self be tamed.

Every night you insisted I focus a telescope on the Little Fox. You told me how you tamed him, how he chased your sheep. How you helped him evade Orion, the Hunter, and how he and Hercules became inseparable.

*PROJECTION*

*The sky rotates to the early winter stars (November 2009). Orion and Sirius are visible.*

*The son plays with a plush toy fox.*

SON

How did Hercules end up in the sky?

ASTRONOMER

Years after he completed his labours, he accidentally wore a tunic soaked in Hydra's blood.

SON

It poisoned him?

ASTRONOMER

Yes. Then Zeus placed him in the heavens.

SON

So, Hydra killed him after all.

ASTRONOMER

Yes. I suppose so.

*After a pause.*

SON

What about Orion?

ASTRONOMER

Ah! Zeus placed him there, but how that happened is unclear. In one version, Artemis shot him with her bow, in another Scorpio stung him.

SON

Then he can choose how he dies. That is a good thing.

ASTRONOMER

I shared my days with Hercules, but after you slipped to sleep, I sought comfort from his half-brother, Bacchus, the god of wine. I required only a small taste of his tonic, to help ease me into Morpheus' embrace.

PROJECTION

*The sky rotates to winter (December 2009), the stars of Vulpecula are barely visible.*

Eventually, I had to tell you that it was the last night Vulpecula would be visible, that you needed to say goodbye to your friend.

SON

Did you hear what he said?

ASTRONOMER

No...

SON

You are not listening!

ASTRONOMER

I am sorry. Please tell me what he said.

SON

He says you can only understand a thing you tame. But to tame something, you must be tamed too.

ASTRONOMER

Must I?

SON

You want to understand the stars, so you must let the stars tame you. Then you will rightly see them, then you will rightly hear them.

ASTRONOMER

*(to audience) I looked up, and heard nothing, yet through the silence something throbbed. Change is like gravity, it pulls from the centre.*

PROJECTION

*The sky rotates to the early winter stars (January 2010).*

SON

(pointing) See there... there is the rose...

ASTRONOMER

The Big Dipper?

SON

No. It is a rose. There are the petals, and that is the stem. Now do you see?

PROJECTION

*His drawing of a rose is superimposed on the Big Dipper.*

ASTRONOMER

Oh yes. I see.

SON

That is your constellation.

ASTRONOMER

Mine? Why?

SON

Because roses are beautiful and strong...

ASTRONOMER

(laughs)

SON

... and they believe their thorns will keep them safe.

PROJECTION

*The rose fades away.*

ASTRONOMER

(to audience) We are drawn to the stars because they are mythic. They are unconquerable and unattainable. We can stab a flag in a moon, we can shoot an asteroid from the atmosphere and find its corpse on the Earth. We can ravage the landscape of a planet, land a rover on Mars, but the Sun, the stars, are untouchable.

We should all be so lucky.

PROJECTION

*The sky rotates forward in time (late January 2010)*

ASTRONOMER

A rose is a curious choice for a cluster of stars so important for navigation.

SON

Why?

ASTRONOMER

Navigation relies on constancy and predictability, and a flower is ephemeral.

SON

What does that mean, 'ephemeral'?

ASTRONOMER

It means... 'that which is in danger of speedy disappearance'.

SON

Am I in danger of speedy disappearance?

*A beat.*

ASTRONOMER

It is a matter of great consequence to answer a child's question, even if that question is unanswerable. Some questions can only be answered with another question.

SON

Am I in danger of speedy disappearance?

ASTRONOMER

Are you one of the unlucky 5%? We cannot possibly know until the probability wave collapses.

SON

Am I in danger of speedy disappearance?

ASTRONOMER

(to son) Compared to the age of the universe, even the stars are ephemeral.

For the first time, you let go of a question.

*PROJECTION*

*The sky rotates forward in time (February 2010)*

SON

I have a riddle for you...

ASTRONOMER

What is it?

SON

What is as thin as my finger, has no feet, but can carry me farther than any ship.

ASTRONOMER

What?

SON

A snake.

ASTRONOMER

A snake?

SON

Yes. He is a funny animal. He might bite you just for fun, but he has good poison, so one does not suffer for too long.

*A long beat.*

ASTRONOMER

Pensiveness overtook you. Your laughs became less frequent. Secretly, Bacchus and I became much better acquainted.

Two weeks later, you ask...

SON

Is there an elephant constellation?

ASTRONOMER

Not officially. Would you like to draw me one?

SON

I would not do that! It is good there is no elephant constellation!

ASTRONOMER

Why is that?

SON

Hydra would want to digest him too. (*a beat*) But then perhaps I would have someone to talk with.

*PROJECTION*

*The vastness of space become smaller and smaller to a claustrophobic tightness. A spotlight.*

ASTRONOMER

During the third round of treatment I plunged into my deepest dejection.

SON

What are you doing?

ASTRONOMER

(*No response*)

SON

What are you doing?

ASTRONOMER

I am drinking.

SON

Why are you drinking?

ASTRONOMER

So that I may forget.

SON

Forget what?

ASTRONOMER

Forget that I am ashamed.

SON

Ashamed of what?

ASTRONOMER

Ashamed of drinking.

(*to audience*) What use are thorns when they do not protect us?

*PROJECTION*

*The sky rotates forward in time (March 2010)*

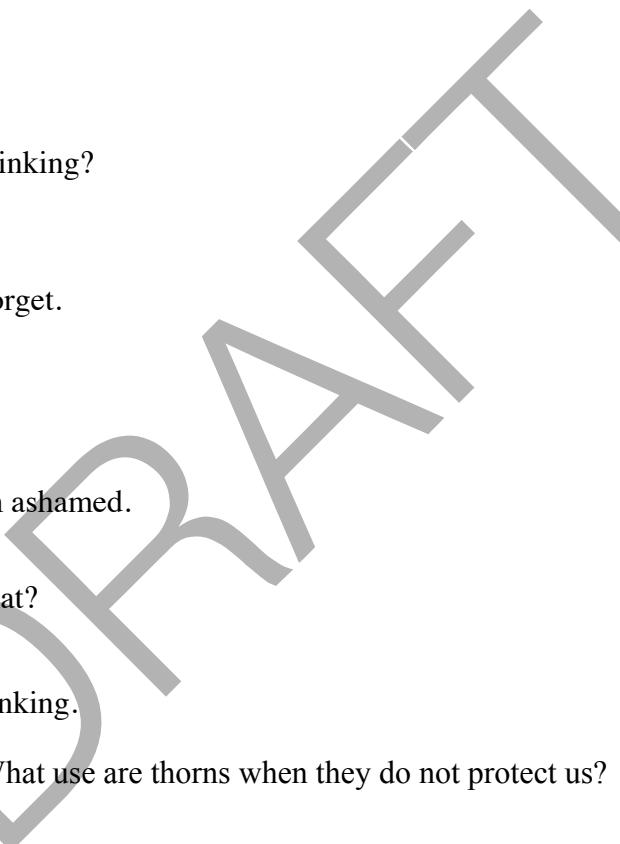
ASTRONOMER

Your Little Fox's absence in the sky, was no impediment to your friendship.  
You lit bright as Sirius as you told me of your nightly adventures.

Why is it that you play with your Fox, although he is no longer visible?

SON

Even though I cannot see him, I am still responsible for him, because I tamed him. And if I find the star Deneb, I know he will be very near.



ASTRONOMER

It is good to have a friend who is always near.

SON

Yes. It is.

*A beat.*

He has told me a secret.

ASTRONOMER

Oh? What secret is that?

SON

I did not understand it at first. But my Fox was patient with me, so I will be patient with you.

ASTRONOMER

What is it?

SON

It is a very simple secret: it is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.

ASTRONOMER

What is essential is invisible to the eye.

PROJECTION

*Tonight's sky settles into place.*

(to audience) Our ancestors saw these stars as constant. But this is not entirely correct. All stars wander in an eons-long dance. In hundreds of thousands of years, these constellations will no longer be recognisable. The points of light will persist, go on living and dying and birthing the stuff of our bones and blood, but the invisible Dark Energy that hurls galaxies at unimaginable speeds, unimaginable distances will force new patterns. The shapes they form, the stories they tell will be altered. Change is like dark energy. Invisible. Essential. Irresistible. Stars rush away from us, not because we choose to, but because they must.

PROJECTION

*A silent supernova. A blinding light explodes, then fades back to tonight's sky.*

ASTRONOMER

My son was not Hercules. He did not crush Cancer under his foot, and he did not slay the Hydra.

(to son) You told me you wanted to be an astronaut when you grew up, but you knew you would not grow up. You knew before I did. My forbearers

would have railed against Hera, but where do you direct your anger when probability is to blame? And there is no timeline for grief. Nothing to methodize or mythologize. Unlike the celestial sphere, there are no discernable patterns. There is no way to predict where you will be positioned in a month, in a year, in a millennium. How do you measure how far you have travelled through the darkness?

*PROJECTION*

*Fades into the night sky of exactly six years earlier (April 21, 2010). The same as tonight's sky, except Jupiter is absent.*

**ASTRONOMER**

Six years ago, we were under this sky, but Jupiter was not there to watch over us that night. I feel your heart beating like a dying bird. You look up.

**SON**

I am going back home today...

**ASTRONOMER**

I freeze. I hold you close in my arms; but I know that you are rushing headlong toward a blackness from which I can do nothing to restrain you.

What do you mean?

**SON**

Tonight... my star, it is right above us, like when I was born...

**ASTRONOMER**

Yes, I know...

**SON**

And you know the thing that is important is the thing that is not seen...

**ASTRONOMER**

Yes, I know . . .

**SON**

...and at night you will look up at the stars as you always do. My star will be just one of the stars, but you love to watch all the stars in the heavens, they are all your children. So I am going to make you a present...

**ASTRONOMER**

You laughed.

*Silence. She listens for a moment to a sound only she can hear.*

*She smiles.*

And that was your present.

*PROJECTION*

*Shift back to the style of her prepared lecture slides. She is back in the world of her public lecture.*

*Pauses. Looks directly at the audience.*

Grown-ups feel compelled to offer comfort, so for the first months I tolerated excruciating kindnesses. In later months, although I was sad, I simply said ‘I am tired’. Because it is a secret place, the land of tears. I fled south to query the Southern Cross, but the answers I sought were just as likely to be found in the palm of my hand. And eventually gravity always wins, so I find myself returned here, under this loveliest landscape in the universe.

Yes. It is a little lonely in space. But it is also lonely among people. And when I look into the sky, I remember we are all alone. We are *all* alone. And there is a comfort in that. And eventually, you grow weary of grieving. And weary of sensing others are bored with your grief.

*PROJECTION*

*Slow shift back to tonight’s night sky.*

All people have the stars, but they are different things for different people. For travellers, the stars are guides. For storytellers, they are myths. For scholars, they are problems. All these stars are silent. But I have the stars as no one else has them, because in his star he is living. In his star he is laughing. And when I look at the sky at night it is as if all the stars are laughing. I... only I have stars that laugh!

*PROJECTION*

*Slow shift as the night sky expands to fill the entire space around the audience, 360 degrees in all directions, including the floor. We are floating in space together.*

I study them. I pull them apart and piece them together. I learn the mechanics of how they are born and how they live and how they die, and I know these are matters of great consequence. We are in the universe. But the universe is in us.

The sky is filled with ghosts. Sometimes, light comes from a star that no longer exists.

*Fade to black.*