

# **On the Edge**

A Mystery in Modern Dramatic Verse

S D Anugyan

## **Foreword for the Online Extract**

As with its predecessor ‘Pilot’, ‘On the Edge’ was performed only a few times in the 1990s. Again, the actors and production team were mostly courageous and creative teenagers supported by adults.

As a writer, I had learned from previous mistakes, and managed to be my own fierce editor despite the necessarily wordy exposition at the start. This worked dramatically, so that even very young children could enjoy the play, and did. Design-wise – as in the language – it was very different from ‘Pilot’. Whereas the latter’s stage was dark and heavy with camouflage-netting draped over looming skyscrapers, ‘Edge’ was almost Zen, most of the scene-changes relying on lighting: playful bright colours for most, stark uplighters (‘shin-busters’) for the ‘agent-angel’ scenes.

There is also a lot of music in the play, which is not in evidence in this extract, and may never be heard again, including the prologue (omitted here). Yet now, I find myself living near the cliff-top Minack Theatre in Cornwall, and keep thinking how it would be the perfect setting for the final act...

S D Anugyan      2018

## Act One Scene 1 – Isle of Glass

*Enter Jason, Andrea and Catherine*

ANDREA            Jason, allow my warm comfort of loneliness  
                         To sustain your words in their hesitant escape.  
                         Your body shakes, a prison of some subtle fit.

JASON             I am all right. Just leave me a breath to say more.

ANDREA            We will stand back. Look. But distance lessens not  
                         Any closeness nor true proximity of love;  
                         Only power to hurt, which we do not have.

JASON             Andrea, to persuade the persuaded, or, more,  
                         A persuader, is a bizarre strategy  
                         Hatched from the idle dreams of a divine clown  
                         To induce laughter, both mine and humanity's.  
                         I feel better, to whiten teeth at destiny  
                         Herself. So, I will tell you more. I love you  
                         Both, and will not grant a reciprocated pain.  
                         To short, you know the session I have just received.

ANDREA            Only of it. The matter is wholly missing.

JASON             Seven years back a beast was disposed at this doorstep,  
                         Obsequiously human, enraged with nature  
                         Whether kind or cruel, ripped from imaginations  
                         Of a healthy past; which I never had.

CATHERINE        Yet you contained respect for form denied yourself  
                         That led the authorities to bring you here. Rage  
                         Permitted within, heart-eating, but outwardly  
                         Stilled. You often forget, Jay, each of your battles  
                         Lost, dissipated, powerless with good will.

JASON             Okay, so helplessness proved the most fit,  
                         Spitting in the eye of red survival to bring  
                         Me here. Now listen to my recent odyssey  
                         Of the mind and know, grateful as I remain to  
                         You and this world of light, my heart cannot retain  
                         More, and is shattered to emerald, ruby, quartz,

Opaque, shards, lacerating unreal clarity  
And visual arrangements of lies contributing  
To wholeness; picking up pieces, forever, caught  
In space between cliffs, balanced and opposed, falling;  
It is like death; it has to be. This is the risk  
And the thrill because I am alive and I exist.  
Before, all country fortunes were governed by  
Furnished bias and neutrality of angels;  
I now know myself a character out of time,  
Bewildered by radiance and puppet kisses,  
My life a series of jokes, misplaced entrances  
And, however beseeched, just one exit.  
Your brimming eyes do not speak to me of madness,  
A trust that only this oasis can offer,  
And, again, thank you. Still there is a pearl within  
The core of my sadness and rage possessing me.

ANDREA                    Old news is that who you are is not yourself.

JASON                    Yes, and my life an orphaned mystery,  
Adrenalin not yet loose. I need to leave quickly  
To solve a vicious puzzle long since completed  
By those same unknown hands who carefully built  
A cage around my heart.

CATHERINE            The session you had with Simon – it told you all this?  
Was it pure hypnosis or chemically induced?

JASON                    I am no longer a patient! This is my job,  
And pharmaceuticals are not permitted here,  
In this case; it was the alchemy of my mind,  
His the apprentice, that revealed the hidden mists  
That have confused my steps in a landscape of years.  
I'll state every letter to spell out the meaning:  
My life was sabotaged before birth. I do not know  
By whom, or why, only that it occurred before  
Conceptual touchdown of my discarnate spirit  
Nine months plus eternity by the first breath.  
Now you may think me mad, but listen: Our research  
Of ourselves has shown life as the razor edge  
Of death, that between our last gasping moments and  
The first lies an existence beyond puny sense  
And understanding. In that realm apart from nature

Is my story. What you see here is a façade.

ANDREA            We are a collection of idiot mystics  
Perhaps, but still I'd prefer to see stone-proof.

JASON            Hear it instead. Within moments Simon had me  
Gibbering in baby sounds, recalling the start  
Of my life, and its rehearsal. I could detect  
The presence of a companion, a girl,  
Lover and friend, born, time and place intimate  
To mine, twin destinies woven as one where we would meet  
In later years with eyes to speak volumes of love, space  
Coming together in a singular lifetime of moments.  
Remembrance reports her beauty above all sense.

CATHERINE        So is this girl, woman, inspired dream-fabric, or true?

JASON            As true as love is not, except to herself.

CATHERINE        Why, in two years, has there been no mention of this?  
Such relationship, whether past or not, could  
Have remedied much conflict, making therapy poor.

JASON            Because there was no relationship. That is the  
Cut of it. Nine years ago I met and loved  
Her in a glimpse. Reciprocation was even  
Deeper, still, and waits in languid eternity,  
Endless silence nicely veiled from life's refractions.

CATHERINE        Andrea, please give me some air in this sad tale.  
Your silence provokes but far, white oceans of dust.

ANDREA            I need to know if the conclusion is an onion  
Or a union. Go on, Jay, I can hold my breath.

JASON:            Her name is Lydia, saved from 'Cordelia'  
To spite her birthright in righteous rebellion  
Against the alien affectations of ice-  
Minded parents who have a university  
As a home. To further her reactionary cause  
She married a psychotic ape disguised as a  
Businessman, twice her number in years. She was flung  
From father to father in silent desperation.

Her inward anguish I know, maybe only I  
Know. Hidden from herself, she lives in a box-like death,  
Chained by a ring. Once I wished that ring to be mine,  
Giving freedom and not pain. Now I have gone  
So far from myself I no longer know that  
To be true. In my travels I have sown as much  
Tears as bliss in a spell of dark ignorance  
Along grey, wintry roads under leaded skies,  
Betrayed by quick steel threads of rain, yet rejoiced  
Anyhow all life's wonder in a selfish cry  
Despite what I may have done. But I still wander,  
Having come to the tall tower of wealth, to be  
Kept out, resigned to singing songs in grim, tone deaf  
Mockery. I am the artist denied expression,  
The serious fool, the wolf with a cat's meow.

ANDREA           The living with a death's head, idiot with mine.  
I cannot bear birth-pangs of supposed history  
And manly yarns where the very subtlety  
Is too subtle. Give me space enough for that. Has  
Claire learnt of this? Your intention to go and find  
A mythical grail of lost beginnings in a  
World that doesn't care, leaving behind that which does?  
Has she heard? Do you imagine this poor tale  
Will sell copies through its complications by  
Making me feel stupid? Many fortunes are wooed  
This way, I believe. Shall we insult Claire for you?

JASON            I will tell her myself. Now has never been the time,  
Till now.

ANDREA           I don't think she will scorn. It is only me.

JASON            I read the words too well, Andrea. I know you.

*Exit Jason*

ANDREA           I don't know you, nor understand. Not anymore.

CATHERINE       Fireworks and starry skies, when those two meet.

ANDREA           Always. They wake up laughing, fallen on mossy rooves,

After building thoughts of silence upon silence  
In cloudy reverie, debating the gentlest  
Humour, touched by passion of sibling strangeness.

CATHERINE      And does the eternally unfair demon of  
Comparison lurk there for you in jealous glow?

ANDREA          How can it when such clear light emanates between  
Brother and sister? And Jason and Claire are that.

CATHERINE      Well, their appearances hold that to be true, but  
Their blood does not, and at times I question their spirit.  
For me, I wish he would see me in the same light as  
He does her.

ANDREA          I'll admit to that too. However, solitude  
Cures ailments; Jason's even, and I'll trust  
In that above all. It can make sense from nonsense.

CATHERINE      I am not recognised as the woman I am.

ANDREA          Do you think Claire is, or whether the game is  
As heavenly as proclaimed?

CATHERINE      Help me prepare dinner and we can talk some more.

ANDREA          Okay. Let's keep it simple.

CATHERINE      It's a deal.

*Exeunt*

## **Act Two Scene 2 – Outside ‘The Isle of Glass Institute’**

*Enter Lucy, Mike and Raphael*

LUCY             The cows are in the fields.

MIKE             And the owls are in the sky.

LUCY                   Hello. I'm glad we met correctly.

MIKE:                   Directions are precise. I trust your calling  
The emergency code is justified, Lucy.

LUCY                   It is. First, who is the shadow  
Lurking in your moonlit path?

MIKE                   He goes by 'Raphael' to oversee  
Our movements and due actions.  
A lot is invested in this operation,  
As I'm sure your dormant presence  
In the Institute has told you.

LUCY                   It has been a long time, Mike.

MIKE                   To immerse yourself in a squalid sea  
Of addiction and abuse, I'm sure it has.

LUCY                   No. The principle behind it all is the  
Intelligent use of consciousness-altering  
Drugs, to induce states of awareness  
Where psychiatry and previous science fail,  
Not to wallow in indulgent, exaggerated seas  
Desperately to better reality; here, our desire  
Is to confront the truth, not evade it.

RAPHAEL               It is best to organise it, as we shall.

LUCY                   Am I alive, dead or dreaming?  
This is as those bitter sweet days when,  
Relaxed by the stimulating sense of coffee,  
I fall asleep, thinking of sun-blessed storm-clouds  
And of my one final terror, beyond reason,  
Which is to kill someone and to feel good about it;  
Really good, not with the shining glee of a psychopath,  
Who lives separate from the larger fields of the heart  
In a dirty shack, calling it his home,  
But to feel content with deepest innocence:  
That contains contradiction enough to torment me  
Beyond reason.



MIKE I don't see why. You may be called upon to  
Terminate a situation.

RAPHAEL You were trained in that necessity.

LUCY But I never reached your high standing.  
Here is an oasis either of madness in a world  
All too sane, or of sanity where dry oceans  
Of depravity prevail all around.  
Like possible sanctuaries of old, they permit  
All to drink from the divine nectar of solitude,  
Granting space to measure oneself, to get to know  
That masked by ceaseless clamour of day.  
If there is a panacea, it is that of aloneness,  
A miracle most fine. The person you deposited here is  
Tainted. Nonetheless, I am committed to the past,  
And in that remembrance have watched also  
That man you have been so concerned about.  
Though he seems more of a boy.

MIKE What has happened for you to alert us?

LUCY Something with all the tangibility of ghosts;  
Here, that is reality enough, and soon  
His departure will be plain for even you to see.

MIKE So he is leaving. What has caused this?

LUCY Strange murmurings. He is as much, if not more,  
Loved as one can be; gentleness, wisdom and  
Passion each add to his attributes; his  
Popularity knows no bounds, yet there is a story  
Of unknown interference in his past, and a mystery,  
He claims, which yet has to be solved.

MIKE Did he say anything else?

LUCY I don't know. He talked only to those most  
Intimate to him, which I am not.

MIKE You were charged to be.

LUCY This is not kindergarten! There is sophistication

In relating here the agency has not dreamt of. I have found  
What I could, and even that is gleaned  
From half-statements, whispered comments and  
Secret jokes. I can tell you, though, where  
He first goes. To Kent. To stay with some friends.

MIKE                   Excellent. That is all we need.

LUCY                   You will follow him from here?

MIKE                   We will wait for him there. As will you.

LUCY                   But...

MIKE                   Your task is terminated here. Provide yourself  
With suitable reason for a rapid departure,  
And proclaim it loudly. Meet us at  
Paradise Café tomorrow at 0700.

LUCY                   I don't know...

MIKE                   Your mother's dead. There! An excuse.  
What are you waiting for? See you tomorrow.

*Exeunt*

### **Act One Scene 3 – Isle of Glass**

*Enter Catherine and Andrea*

ANDREA               Never have I seen Claire this way.  
Always she has something to say,  
Always she can juggle with events,  
Always laugh at the meanest temper;  
Now she says nothing, does less,  
But goes for long, quiet walks in her mind,  
A book unturned on her lap, her sewing idle,  
Her music asleep, and television dead;  
She hears not what I have to say,

Yet drinks in every word, eyes speechless,  
Wide open, and saying far too much. *(Pause.)*  
I suppose she's taking it better than I expected.

CATHERINE Andrea...

ANDREA And now Lucy leaving as well.

CATHERINE Shhh.

*Enter Jason and Claire*

JASON Claire,  
What kind of friendship is this strangeness?

ANDREA She has said what she feels, Jay.

JASON Is this all?

CATHERINE Jay...

JASON Real compassion does not compromise:  
Its pure detachment may not even reach us,  
But in that silence, what words,  
In such distance, what closeness!  
Claire, don't make friendship a curse  
With tentacles of the imprisoned mind;  
Our feelings for each other were wrought  
In the smithy of the sky, and birds say  
Life is an open door.

CLAIRE You can fly, Jay. What's stopping you?

JASON Make me a knife for my throat.

ANDREA I hope, Jason, where you are going  
There is no call for a knife.

JASON Who can say? Trust me in my adventure. *(Exit Jason.)*

ANDREA Departure should never be like this.

CLAIRE I hate him! I hate him!

CATHERINE      Andrea, help me, hold her. She is lashing emptiness  
With such frenzy the air may do her harm. That's it,  
Claire.

CLAIRE            I hate him.

ANDREA          It is a pity you say it so late.  
Your target has gone, child.

*Exeunt*

End of 'On the Edge' extract.

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