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The Aurora project

Michelle Bella D. Poynton
University of Iowa

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THE AURORA PROJECT

by

Michelle Bella D. Poynton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the
Master of Fine Arts degree in Theatre Arts
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

May 2014

Thesis Supervisor: Associate Professor Art Borreca

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

MASTER'S THESIS

This is to certify that the Master's thesis of

Michelle Bella D. Poynton

has been approved by the Examining Committee
for the thesis requirement for the Master of Fine Arts
degree in Theatre Arts at the May 2014 graduation.

Thesis Committee: _____
Art Borreca, Thesis Supervisor

Dare Clubb

Kim Marra

To my Mother and Father, Paula C. Poynton, and Dr. Frederick G. Poynton.

The flesh surrenders itself, he thought. Eternity takes back its own. Our bodies stirred these waters briefly, danced with certain intoxication before the love of life and self, dealt with a few strange ideas, then submitted to the instruments of Time. What can we say of this? I occurred. I am not... yet, I occurred.

Frank Herbert
Dune Messiah

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This play was first imagined by director Rachel Howell, and enthusiastically developed by a company of actors that included Melina Neves, Ben TeBockhorst, Frankie Rose III, Nate Jeffrey Sullivan, and Allyson Malandra for the Iowa NewPlay Festival in May 2013.

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HISTORY OF THE PLAY

The Aurora Project was first workshopped as part of the Iowa New Play Festival in May, 2013. Direction by Rachel Korach Howell. The cast was as follows:

CONSTANTINE	Ben TeBockhorst
NORA	Melina Neves
THE DESIGNER	Nate Jeffrey Sullivan
QUESTRY	Frankie Rose III
THE GATEKEEPER	Allyson Malandra

The Aurora Project was then given a fully staged workshop production in the Science Fiction Theatre Company in September, 2013. Direction by A. Vincent Ularich. The cast was as follows:

CONSTANTINE	Brian McCarthy
NORA	Melissa Jesser
THE DEISGNER	Dan Grund
QUESTRY	Jim Remmes
THE GATEKEEPER	Christie Lee Gibson

SPACE AND TIME

Space

The scenes alternate between the interior of The Aurora, an advanced spaceship, and a laboratory on Earth where the Designer is preparing Constantine and Nora for their imminent departure.

Time

The play begins 1000 years in the future, and then proceeds to take place over the course of many millions of years. The eventual heat death of the universe is discussed in the play, but the idea that this slow death will begin as quickly as 20 million years in the future is, of course, entirely false. The play gives a fictional, poetic explanation (Nora's strange disease) as the source for the decay of the universe.

NOTES ON THE PLAY

On Constantine

Constantine, although a robot, should never, ever, be outwardly played as such. He is fundamentally complex, like any human, and even more so in his naiveté about certain aspects of humanity he does not yet understand.

On the Designer

There are a number of times where the Designer “appears” on stage. Do not let this generate worry from a technical stand point. The actor may enter from behind a scrim in darkness, and then be lit from below or above, so he looks to be in soft focus.

On Aliens

The aliens in the play should not be portrayed like “aliens” in the generally accepted use of the term. This does not, however, mean not to have fun with acting style, or character development. Still, the aliens should not be treated as anything but complex human beings from another place, beyond our imagination.

On Stature

At certain points in the play, the script calls for Constantine to carry Nora and Quesry from the medical table, to the cyro-units and back again. This action is imperative to the show. Constantine is a creature of great empathy and love, and his choice to carry his loved ones is deliberate. The pieta effect of seeing him carry those he loves is important to the tone of the piece. This, of course, calls for the actor playing the

role to be of some physical stature and capability. Note that at one point, Constantine holds Questry in his arms while reciting a monologue that lasts about one minute.

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Constantine

Male. Appearing to be in his mid-20's, He is referred to as an intelligent, or what we might call a piece of Artificial Intelligence. Constantine was created as a counterpart and assistant to Nora, a genetically engineered human female.

Nora

Female. Appearing to be in her early 20's. She is a strong, intelligent, a human explorer, created in a laboratory by scientists who were tampering with human genetics in order to create a better human being.

The Designer

Male. Late 40's. One of Constantine's makers, and the Aurora's hologram program. He is a kind father figure who can sometimes be harsh, but also loving. This actor will play both the living designer, and the holographic projection of the same man many thousands of years later.

The Gatekeeper

Female. Any age. She is eerie, and timeless. The Gatekeeper is an unknown force from a distant planet with abilities and knowledge far beyond the comprehension of simple humans.

Questry

Male. 20's or 30's. Questry is an alien traveler. He is kind, innocent, compassionate, and extremely smart. Questry wanders the universe alone, since the death of his lover, Sola.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Beyond the Sitting Room

When I first came to the Playwrights' Workshop in 2011, I was very excited at the prospect of becoming a better writer—the kind of writer I imagined when attending an Off-Broadway show at Playwrights' Horizons or Manhattan Theatre Club in New York. I wanted to be a part of the trendy, fast paced kind of theater I had seen produced in major cities, and believed that if I could somehow achieve this, I would be well equipped to make it as a professional writer of drama. The only problem was my taste. I tend to find more epic, sweeping stories interesting—most specifically, stories that employ some kind of element of fantasy. Still, I believed with great vehemence that attending a well-respected graduate institution would somehow suppress this impulse, and mold me into a trendier ready-to-produce playwright who was equipped to navigate the landscape of the American theater “correctly”. I wanted to become a better writer, yes, but at the time, my definition of “better” was something along the lines of: less like my writing, and more like the writing of others.

My first year was a whirlwind of learning, and a plethora of new ideas designed to challenge the way I was thinking about plays, but not the subject matter of the writing itself. I slowly came to the realization that no one in the Playwrights' Workshop was actually going to *teach* me to become a better writer. Instead, the faculty, playwrights, and dramaturgs were only interested in helping me find and hone the unique voice I already had. My taste wasn't going to change at all. In fact, most of the feedback I received was encouraging me to delve deeper into my interests, no matter how untrendy,

and push the envelope even further. Initially, I was upset about this, and struggled against the encouragement in my first semester. The play I wrote during this time, *The Stellification*, while being somewhat an exploration of my interests, was still purposefully toned down. I was still avoiding what I wanted to write about out of fear that my material would be too childish, too silly, and too frivolous to be considered workshop material. I felt the need to write about current issues and contemporary problems in our society, but this was difficult considering I had little interest in writing plays that took place in the present day. My passions lied elsewhere—in other times and places. I had no interest in plays that took place in traditional settings. I was uninterested in kitchens, bedrooms, diners, and sitting rooms. What I really wanted was to write a play that took place in an alien locale. A place yet unbeknownst to audiences. I wanted to write a play that literally took place in another world.

I was a science fiction writer. It has taken me almost as long (but not quite as long) to understand this, as it took me to realize I was a writer in the first place, having studied acting for 5 years before coming to graduate school for playwriting. The idea of building a world entirely from my own imagination, creating its rules, and determining its functionality is like candy to me. Still, I was concerned with the relative credibility of writing within such a genre. My excitement, however, was quickly starting to overshadow my concern for integrity. Finally, I had to give into the gnawing feeling that told me not to worry—that if I allowed myself to write about aliens, robots, and spaceships, the work would be inspired by joy, and therefore, of a better quality than anything else I had written.

This was how *The Aurora Project* was born.

From the Sitting Room to the Stars: The Realization of Genre.

The Aurora Project began with a single image: a robot, or piece of AI, sitting alone, holding a dead loved one in his arms. The image haunted me not only because of its obvious sadness, but also because I was fascinated with the passage of time as experienced by a robot, over many millions of years. I was interested in the idea of the post-human, and how his or her experience would be different than our own. This image, however, was not yet enough for the play to really be considered science fiction (SF). I wanted to make sure the story was true to the genre, and not just a play set on a space ship. As Philip K. Dick discusses in his short piece *My Definition of Science Fiction*, a good piece of SF must contain a "...distinct new idea."¹ Dick suggests that "The world must differ from the given in at least one way, and this one way must be sufficient to give rise to events that could not occur in our society."² This means that within an SF story, there must be some kind of new invention, discovery, or development that has profoundly influenced how society functions, thus creating a new kind of world. I kept this idea in mind when writing *The Aurora Project*, and believe there are two distinct new ideas functioning in the play: One being Constantine himself, and the presence of Artificial Intelligence, and the other being the cryogenic freeze tanks that Constantine uses to keep Nora alive. These two new ideas create a society vastly different than our own, and give the story a jumping off place for exploring new dramatic ideas and concepts not yet part of our reality. The emotional complexity of the relationships in the play are also

¹ Philip K. Dick, *The Collected Stories of Philip K. Dick*, Carol Publishing, 1999, xviii-xiv.

² Dick, xviii-xiv.

deepened with the presence of this new technology. I was able to write dialogue that dealt with concepts yet unfathomable to us today, such as the recreation of memories within a clone, and the potential for real communication with an alien race. This, I believe, makes the play true to the genre.

I am extremely lucky to have found my voice as a playwright during graduate school. Not only does SF interest me, but it is where my creative voice wants to live. SF is a superb way to discuss important social and political subject matter without ostracizing or alienating any one group. I find myself able to address issues most important to me, such as gender, feminism, class, and technology with the biggest bang. All of this being said, I humbly ask anyone skeptical of science fiction in the theater to read this play with an open mind, and consider the idea that by imagining other worlds, we are sometimes better able to reflect on our own.

THE AURORA PROJECT

(AT RISE: LIGHTS COME UP ON, NORA, A YOUNG WOMAN, STRONG AND FULL OF LIFE. SHE IS ON A SHIP, STANDING AT ITS HELM, HANDS WELL TRAINED AND KNOWLEDGEABLE. SHE WATCHES A SCREEN ABOVE HER. UPSTAGE, THERE ARE TWO GLASS BOXES CONNECTED TO THE REST OF THE SHIP WITH A THOUSANDS CORDS AND WIRES. NORA PAYS ATTENTION ONLY TO THE SCREEN.)

NORA:

Enhance sector one. Stop.
 Turn lens 25 degrees. Stop.
 Give me a luminosity reading.
 No, wait. Rewind. Track back.
 Sharpen image. Once more.
 Now rotate 20 degrees. Now 30. Now 40.
 Now Speed through past 8 hours of recorded imagery.
 3 minutes per second. Go. Faster. Keep going. Go back.
 Frame by frame now.
 There! That's it.
 We found it.
 We found it!

(CONSTANTINE, WHO APPEARS TO BE A YOUNG MAN, AND A SIMILAR AGE TO NORA, HAS BEEN SITTING ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE ROOM, MANIPULATING THE SCREEN FROM THE SHIP'S CONSOLE.)

CONSTANTINE:

The concept of infinity was invented to account for the possibility that in a never-ending universe, anything can happen.

Constantine, Come here!

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:
Life on other planets, for example, is possible in an infinite universe—

NORA:
Stop staring at that screen and come look!

CONSTANTINE:
But not at all probable.

(NORA STARES AT THE SCREEN ABOVE THEM.)

NORA:
Life, see? A shining city like they used to write about in books with bindings from ancient times.

CONSTANTINE:
We've suspected life before and nothing has come of it. The chances are slim as they say. Slim to none.

NORA:
It's a city.

CONSTANTINE:
Or a guiding beacon.

NORA:
Or a city.

CONSTANTINE:
Or an abandoned mining facility.

NORA:
Or a city. Even if it is abandoned, it's far more interesting than anything we've found before.

CONSTANTINE:

I will suit up, if you wish, and explore the surroundings for you.

NORA:

We'll both go.

CONSTANTINE:

Nora, you are not permitted present on any initial explorations.

NORA:

You need me. We'll go together.

CONSTANTINE:

It's my job to make sure the environment is suitable.

NORA:

I said we would go together. I am the Captain.

CONSTANTINE:

Would you like me to send a radio transmission?

NORA:

I already did.

CONSTANTINE:

Without consulting me?

NORA:

I don't need to ask your permission to send radio transmissions.

CONSTANTINE:

But you always do.

NORA:

Which in no way means I always must.

(SUDDENLY, A SOUND, A CRACK AND A POP. A RADIO TRANSACTION GONE

WRONG. THE TERRIBLE SOUND WHEN YOU DIAL A FAX NUMBER BY MISTAKE.)

CONSTANTINE:

Incoming message downloading.

NORA:

...It's taking too long.

CONSTANTINE:

Fear has no useful byproducts except flight, which is not possible now. Let's call it excitement. Download complete.

NORA:

Translate it.

CONSTANTINE:

That doesn't appear to be necessary.

NORA:

What?

(WE HEAR THE GATEKEEPER. WE CANNOT SEE HER CLEARLY, JUST A PRESENCE IN THE SHADOWS, AN OUTLINE, PERHAPS A SILHOUETTE, HIGH ABOVE NORA AND CONSTANTINE. HER PRESENCE IS EERIE AND TIMELESS, HER VOICE BOOMS AND ECHOES WITH POWER.)

GATEKEEPER:

A Pilgrim! A pilgrim comes to us from afar!

NORA:

I'm not a pilgrim.

GATEKEEPER:

Of course you are.

NORA:

I'm just an outlander.

GATEKEEPER:

What brings you here, pilgrim?

NORA:
(*WHISPERING*)

Constantine—what is a pilgrim?

CONSTANTINE:

One who journeys in foreign lands, a way farer.

GATEKEEPER:

What is it you search for?

NORA:

I want to know—I want to know... How you can possibly speak my language without knowing my kind?

GATEKEEPER:

My kind know every language.

NORA:

That's not possible. The languages of Earth are lost.

GATEKEEPER:

Not all. You bring yours with you.

CONSTANTINE:

They've used some kind of cognitive downloading program.

NORA:

Is that true?

GATEKEEPER:

Yes. What of it?

NORA:

Have you been on the ship without our knowledge?

GATEKEEPER:

No. We do not need to make contact to download your thoughts. We would be honored, however, if you would stay.

CONSTANTINE:

Thank you for the invitation, but we cannot.

NORA:

And why not?

GATEKEEPER:

Yes, why not? We offer you our hospitality. It is not often we have visitors.

CONSTANTINE:

It would be unsafe for Nora to leave the ship. She must not stray from her mission of collecting data, as all humans are compelled to do.

GATEKEEPER:

Who told you such a silly thing? Humans are a simple race, preoccupied with pleasure, power, and procreation.

NORA:

What do you know of humans?

THE GATEKEEPER:

We've watched humans all their existence. Only a sliver of time on our clock.

NORA:

And how did you do it?

GATEKEEPER:

Do what?

NORA:

Last as long as you have?

GATEKEEPER:

I don't understand.

NORA:

My race didn't last very long before they destroyed themselves. How have you survived so long? How is it done?

GATEKEEPER:

I suppose my suggestion would be—do not destroy yourselves?

NORA:

We should stay. It's only right to take documentation and collect as much—

CONSTANTINE:

Absolutely not.

GATEKEEPER:

And who are you—machine—to make such proclamations?

NORA:

Constantine is not a machine!
He is a highly complex and entirely sentient—

(SUDDENLY, THE BEAUTIFUL SUGGESTION OF A SUNSET ON WATER, PURPLE AND SOMETIMES PINK. SKIES, CLOUDS, FOG, SEASCAPES AND LANDSCAPES. MARINE LIFE—ALL VIBRANTLY COLORED. THE COLORS CREATE A KIND OF HYPNOTIC EXPERIENCE. NORA WATCHES, TRANSFIXED. CONSTANTINE TRIES TO PULL HER AWAY.)

CONSTANTINE:

Nora, look away from that.

NORA:

Why?

GATEKEEPER:

Isn't it true, that you've searched for a place to explore on your own?

NORA:

I have.

CONSTANTINE:

Don't listen. They've looked at your thoughts.

GATEKEEPER:

Then we offer you our home. Stay as long as you like.

CONSTANTINE:

Why would you make such an offer?

GATEKEEPER:

We no longer desire to converse with your android.

CONSTANTINE:

Nora has no interest in exploring your surface.

NORA:

Don't speak for me!

CONSTANTINE:

The molecular structure of their atmosphere is wildly different than of our own.

NORA:

I won't be long. I just want a look.

CONSTANTINE:

I will go out first.

NORA:

She requested me. Didn't you hear? I'm human. They're not interested in you.

CONSTANTINE:

The collection of data should not be paramount to Nora's well-being. Regulation numbered 32.4 in my archives.

NORA:

/ Don't talk about me like I'm not here!

CONSTANTINE:

Her personal interests are secondary to her utmost safety and protection / at all times. Regulation number 34.3

NORA:

That is quite enough / of your regulations today.

CONSTANTINE:

If you're planning to override my security system, it won't work. I'm smarter / than you.

NORA:

You merely hold more information than I do, but I can override you anytime.

CONSTANTINE:

You won't.

NORA:

You know I would.

CONSTANTINE:

You're allowing yourself to be seduced by the idea of walking on solid ground—

NORA:

Constantine, Dark!

(IMMEDIATELY, CONSTANTINE STOPS SPEAKING, HIS HEAD FALLS FOREWARD AND HIS EYES CLOSE. HE IS CATATONIC. NORA IS SHOCKED AT WHAT SHE HAS DONE. A MOMENT LATER, THE DESIGNER ENTERS, AND THE SCENE SHIFTS. A KIND OF DREAM. CONSTANTINE COMES BACK TO LIFE

*AT THE SOUND OF THE DESIGNERS
VOICE.)*

DESIGNER:

Your name is Constantine.

CONSTANTINE:

My name is Constantine.

DESIGNER:

You belong to Nora.

CONSTANTINE:

I belong to Nora.

DESIGNER:

Your primary function is to protect her.

CONSTANTINE:

My primary function is to protect her.

DESIGNER:

Your secondary functions will be teaching her everything in your knowledge base, and to act as her friend. I am the Designer.

CONSTANTINE:

You are the Designer.

DESIGNER:

I will teach you everything I know.

CONSTANTINE:

You will teach me everything you know.

DESIGNER:

You are not a human being—

CONSTANTINE:

I'm-not?

DESIGNER:

No. You are AI, a piece of intelligent design. It is, in a way, far greater than being human. You are extraordinary and absolutely unique. The average human brain has 10 to the 10th power of neurons sending individual messages to different pathways at any given moment. You, however, have three times that many.

CONSTANTINE:

Is that good?

DESIGNER:

Yes. Very good. Would you like to know more?

(THE DESIGNER EXITS. CONSTANTINE GOES BACK TO HIS SHUT DOWN STATE. NORA MOVES BACK TO THE PLACE SHE STOOD WHEN SHE SHUT HIM DOWN.)

CONSTANTINE:

Nora DNA Programming - access granted.

NORA:

Constantine shutdown activated. Wake in 9.5 hours with slight software malfunction.

(THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

What exactly should I tell him, if you fail to return?

NORA:

That won't be necessary. I will return.

DESIGNER:

System error. What exactly should I tell him, if you fail to return?

NORA:

That he is not a machine. He's my intelligent design.

(NORA WALKS UPSTAGE. AS SHE DOES, THE LIGHTS BEGIN TO GROW BRIGHTER, WE SEE HER SHADOW AGAINST THE UNBEARABLE BRIGHTNESS OF THE UNKNOWN. CONSTANTINE IS LEFT SITTING THERE IN HIS SHUT-DOWN STATE. BLACKOUT.)

(LIGHTS COME UP ON A STERILE ROOM. SIMILAR TO THE INSIDE OF THE SHIP, BUT NOT EXACTLY THE SAME. CONSTANTINE IS LYING ON A MEDICAL EXAMINATION TABLE. THE DESIGNER ENTERS, NOT THE HOLOGRAM, BUT THE MAN.)

I'm tired.

CONSTANTINE:

Then sleep.

DESIGNER:

But everything starts going away.

CONSTANTINE:

It's supposed to.

DESIGNER:

I don't like it. It feels good, but I would rather not sleep. It is both good and bad at once.

CONSTANTINE:

Constantine, you're going get tired from time to time. You were made that way.

DESIGNER:

Will Nora?

CONSTANTINE:

DESIGNER:

Yes, she will get tired as well. Much more often.

CONSTANTINE:

Is she ready yet? To meet me?

DESIGNER:

Not yet. She's still growing.

CONSTANTINE:

Will she grow forever? Please, let me see her? I would only look. What harm can looking do?

DESIGNER:

Well, I suppose it's not long now. I don't see why not.

CONSTANTINE:

--What?

DESIGNER:

I said I suppose you may see her, yes.

CONSTANTINE:

Well, now that you've said yes I am nervous. After so many years of telling me I have to wait.

DESIGNER:

She's nearly grown, now. Come. We will go meet her.

(THE DESIGNER RUNS HIS FINGERS ALONG HIS PALM PAD, AND A LIGHT ILLUMINATES FROM A GLASS PANEL IN THE FLOOR. CONSTANTINE AND THE DESIGNER STAND STARING DOWN AT IT.)

DESIGNER:

Constantine, this is Nora. Is she as you expected?

CONSTANTINE:

Yes. No. Yes. No.

She is different than you and the others. She is beautiful. Why?

DESIGNER:

I suppose it is because she is a woman. You've never seen a woman before.

CONSTANTINE:

So that's how it works then? Women are beautiful, and men are not?

DESIGNER:

No, no. That is an issue of personal preference. But we have programmed you to find women—to find Nora—beautiful.

CONSTANTINE:

Can you program such things?

DESIGNER:

Don't let the word fool you. Human emotions are programmed as well. Evolution is a slow and steady kind of programming. Yours is nearly the same, but took eons less time.

CONSTANTINE:

Nearly the same? That word. *Nearly*. You use it so often. Is that why I am not allowed to see and know certain things?

DESIGNER:

What things?

CONSTANTINE:

I have only seen pictures--holograms, but nothing real. What would it be like, to look at... a bird? To truly see a bird in front of you, not *nearly* a bird, or a picture of a bird, but a real one. Or to see a cloud, or a flower? Or a perfect summer sunset.

DESIGNER:

These things are commonplace. Anyone could see them anywhere. But you will see the Universe. You will reach out and touch the stars.

CONSTANTINE:

But how can I know if the rest of the Universe will compare to a perfect summer sunset? Perhaps the rest of the Universe is boring?

DESIGNER:

Even if all you saw was just the twinkle of one young nebula, and nothing else, you will still have seen more of the cosmos than any other human ever will.

CONSTANTINE:

But how can you know? From what I have been told, the Universe is far lonelier than it is here.

DESIGNER:

You will have her.

*(HE GESTURES TO THE GLASS PANEL
IN THE FLOOR.)*

CONSTANTINE:

And if she does not like me?

DESIGNER:

She will. She was grown that way.

CONSTANTINE:

So you say. But I'll still miss *you*, Designer.

DESIGNER:

Once Nora wakes, you will forget me—

CONSTANTINE:

I don't want to forget you. You made me.

DESIGNER:

Constantine, we've talked about this. I did not make you. I am not your maker or your creator. You were the product of the work of hundreds of thousands of scientists and engineers working together for many years.

CONSTANTINE:

Then why are you here with me, now?

DESIGNER:

Because I was chosen to be your teacher.

CONSTANTINE:

Why?

DESIGNER:

I was close to you, at the time of your completion.

CONSTANTINE:

Because you worked on me more than the others!

DESIGNER:

No—

CONSTANTINE:

There is a book! A book about a man who created a creature—a doctor who brought flesh to life—

DESIGNER:

Frankenstein? That's fiction. Not like you. You were and are endlessly discussed, not hidden away. Frankenstein hated his creation. We—love you.

CONSTANTINE:

You love me—but you want me to forget you?

DESIGNER:

You will have other more important duties.

CONSTANTINE:

I can remember you, and do my duties, I promise. Please, fix me. So I won't forget.

DESIGNER:

I can't fix you. This isn't the one of the things I can fix.
Once Nora comes into your life, I should, and will, mean less to you. This is the natural order of things. The fading of emotion over time is not artificial. It's human. I can't be here with you forever.

CONSTANTINE:

What is forever? Why I am not allowed to see the sun or the sky? Why can you only divide a prime number by one and itself, and what is death? How did you make me? Why is the world round and not some other shape? How do I shut myself down?

DESIGNER:

Catalogue your questions. I'll answer them some other time.

CONSTANTINE:

Please, just one?

DESIGNER:

All right. Just one.

CONSTANTINE:

Nora is genetically altered to be strong, and smart, and fast, but she is human. So what will happen to me? After Nora dies?

(LIGHTS SHIFT. WE ARE BACK ON THE AURORA. NORA IS LYING ON THE MEDICAL TABLE, SHE SLOWLY WAKES, AND NOTICES HER AILMENT.)

NORA:

What's wrong with my hands?

CONSTANTINE:

I don't know. You've been in and out of consciousness for 2 days.

NORA:

I'm awake now.

CONSTANTINE:

You've said that before, and then fell asleep again. This is the 5th time you've said "I'm awake now." in a 48 hour period.

Why didn't you listen to me?

NORA:

I don't know. I should have. I wasn't myself.
I can't feel the tips of my fingers—they're numb.

(A LOUD BEEPING NOISE. THE SCAN IS COMPLETE.)

NORA:

What is it?

CONSTANTINE:

There are no matches in my archives to cure your ailment.

NORA:

Check again. Run another search.

CONSTANTINE:

There are no more searches left to run.

NORA:

There have to be more. Have you searched the Terra-Merick?

CONSTANTINE:

When have you ever known me to be un-thorough?

NORA:

I'm sorry. I wanted to see it.

CONSTANTINE:

Yes, clearly. You left. You shut me down, even though you know I hate it, and you left!

NORA:

Constantine, don't worry! I'll get better. It's nothing.

CONSTANTINE:

Is that one of those human statements that I am supposed to agree with for the sake of comforting both of us because of the completely immeasurable consequences of the situation?

NORA:

Yes, but you aren't supposed to tell me about it.

(SHE NOTICES HIS DESHEVELED APPEARANCE AND THE CUTS ON HIS SKIN.)

NORA:

Why are there cuts on your face? Your skin is much more durable than mine.

CONSTANTINE:

Leave it. I will fix myself when you are well again.

NORA:

How did you get these?

CONSTANTINE:

I had to go out and find you. They're quite protective of their test subjects. Took me nearly an hour to fend them off.

(CONSTANTINE INSPECTS HER.)

CONSTANTINE:

This—whatever it is--is changing the molecular structure of your skin.

NORA:

It's not as if you'll catch it.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm not worried about myself.

NORA:

This is silly. A little tingling in my fingers. I feel fine. Why don't we try to get our minds off it? Let's play our game! It will make us feel better. Designer!

(THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

Yes, Captain?

CONSTANTINE:

You start. You always start.

NORA:

Designer! I have a question. What is your favorite color?

DESIGNER:

System Error.

NORA:

Ha! One point for me. Your turn.

CONSTANTINE:

Designer... I have a question.

DESIGNER:

Yes, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE:

Tell me why the sky is blue?

DESIGNER:

Which sky, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE:

The sky on Earth.

DESIGNER:

The atmosphere of the earth is the mixture of gas molecules and other materials surrounding—

NORA:

No, you have to ask him questions that he can't answer.

CONSTANTINE:

I know, I know, but I can never think of any!

NORA:

Designer—if I fall down a flight of stairs, will I break my neck?

DESIGNER:

Specificity required.

NORA:

There are 20 stairs in the flight.

DESIGNER:

Further specificity required.

NORA:

Wait, wait, watch this. Blip blop flip flop vip vop clop!

DESIGNER:

System Error. Might you repeat the question, Captain?

(NORA LAUGHS)

CONSTANTINE:

Don't make fun of him like that.

NORA:

Like what?

CONSTANTINE:

Like that! He is our friend. He doesn't understand you—but it's not his fault, he's just a series of advanced programs working together. Like me.

NORA:

That's not true.

CONSTANTINE:

I don't want to play anymore.

NORA:

Constantine, you're nothing like him.

CONSTANTINE:

I am. Of course I am.

The whites of your eyes are red.

NORA:

I'm just tired. And thirsty.

CONSTANTINE:

You're sick.

NORA:

I just need water, and to lie down for a little while.

(AS CONSTANTINE TAKES NORA BACK TO THE MEDICAL TABLE, SHE BEGINS TO FEEL VERY ILL.)

NORA:

I see lights.
It's all gone blurry, now.
Like when we dance, but faster?
My chest is heavy. My throat stings.
I need to sleep--

CONSTANTINE:

Don't—keep talking.

NORA:

--For a little while.

CONSTANTINE:

Keep your eyes open.

NORA:

Just sleep. Don't worry. It's a miracle we stay alive at all though, isn't it? These fragile bodies... Goodnight.

(NORA FALLS ASLEEP.)

CONSTANTINE:

Nora, wake up. Wake up! Designer, help me!

DESIGNER:

What would you like me to do, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE:

Nora's sick.

DESIGNER:

Yes, I am aware. I logged that information some hours ago.

CONSTANTINE:

Help me, please.

DESIGNER:

You know as well as I do that your programming is far more advanced than mine. I'm merely a security system. A kind of comfort if either of you were to get lonely.

CONSTANTINE:

I am lonely now. Cure her.

DESIGNER:

I can't cure her. But perhaps I could read to you? To pass the time? From Asimov? Little Lost Robot? Bicentennial man? Those are your favorites.

CONSTANTINE:

Not mine. Read from Nora's favorite.

(DURING THE DESIGNER'S MONOLOGUE, WE SEE CONSTANTINE CARRY NORA TO THE CRYO UNIT AND GENTLY PLACE HER INSIDE. HE WATCHES FOR A MOMENT, AS IF SAYING GOODBYE, AND THEN CLOSES THE DOOR.)

DESIGNER:

Dune Messiah, by Frank Herbert – The flesh surrenders itself, he thought. Eternity takes back its own. Our bodies stirred these waters briefly, danced with certain intoxication before the love of life and self, dealt with a few strange ideas, then submitted to the instruments of Time. What can we say of this? I occurred. I am not... yet, I occurred.

(THE LIGHTS SHIFT, AND WE SEE CONSTANTINE REPAIRING THE CONSOLE. HE IS HAVING DIFFICULTY, GIVES UP AND THEN TURNS TO SPEAK TO NORA INSIDE HER GLOWING CRYO-UNIT.)

CONSTANTINE:

You're asleep. You've been asleep for 2 years 8 months and 15 days, now. I miss you.

DESIGNER:

"And deaths appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world!"

CONSTANTINE:

Enough from *Frankenstein!*

DESIGNER:

But I thought you said—

CONSTANTINE:

Thought? You had no thought! You can't think! You're a machine! You spit out a programmed response, depending on what I say.

DESIGNER:

Yes. I am. And yes. We do.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm not like you. I am nothing like you.

DESIGNER:

You're only repeating what Nora says. You did not come up with that thought on your own.

(CONSTANTINE KICKS THE GRID UNDERNEATHE THE HOLODECK IN FRUSTRATION.)

DESIGNER:

I apologize for failing to give you satisfaction of successfully hitting me.

CONSTANTINE:

Sometimes I think I'll wake you, for just an hour, to talk, like we used to, about our favorite dust clouds, and where we might go next, or what the Earth was like a thousand years ago, before men could even download an image onto a computer screen. I miss the feel of you next to me in the darkness when you sleep, and I rest. I want so badly to wake you, but I have to wait. For time to pass. For the Universe to grow smarter. The designer would say that I should—

(THE HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

Yes, Constantine?

CONSTANTINE:

Go away. I didn't mean to summon you, hologram.

DESIGNER:

I would like to bring to your attention that is has been more than 2 years without cure or improvement. More than two years without a blip of response to your distress call. Might I suggest cellular harvest and reconfiguration? It is, at this point, the only optio—

CONSTANTINE:

Not the only option! There are others.

DESIGNER:

Like what?

CONSTANTINE:

She is safe in cryo-freeze for now, that's all that should concern you.

DESIGNER:

How long will you wait? And what will you do in the mean time?

CONSTANTINE:

I won't grow another. I don't want another. I will sleep beside her to pass the time. I will sleep like humans do.

DESIGNER:

You don't know how your body will react to the freezing agent.

CONSTANTINE:

It will respond as all bodies do. We are nearly identical.

DESIGNER:

Nearly. Not entirely. I cannot support this decision. Were something to go wrong while you were sleeping, I am not wired to wake you.

CONSTANTINE:

Then I will re-wire you. It's simple.

(CONSTANTINE STARTS TO WORK ON RE-WIRING THE HOLOGRAM. THE LIGHTS FLICKER. THE HOLOGRAM JERKS, HAVING WHAT SEEMS TO BE A KIND OF SPASM.)

DESIGNER:

The weight of water is—unlike any other molecule known to earth—as long as you can remember—the square root of the left side of the equation does not equal the square root of—human faith is an unexplainable phenomenon whose roots go back to the dawn of—Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains, no matter how improbable, must be—another interesting feature of the medical bay are the cryo-sleep units.

CONSTANTINE:

There. See? Simple. Done.

DESIGNER:

How long then?

CONSTANTINE:

For what?

DESIGNER:

How long to set the units for? How long will you sleep?

CONSTANTINE:

You tell me. This was not something you taught me.

DESIGNER:

We couldn't possibly speculate every situation you might encounter. We told you what we knew. We tried to prepare you.

CONSTANTINE:

You never prepared me for this. Tell me how long to set the clock?

DESIGNER:

Long enough for the start and end of a civilization. Enough for an entire race to come into being, become intelligent, and acquire technology superior to your own. A long, long time.

CONSTANTINE:

How long!?

DESIGNER:

Five million standard years.

(CONSTANTINE APPROACHES NORA'S CRYO UNIT. HE RECALIBRATES THE TIME. HE THEN GOES TO THE OTHER UNIT AND STANDS BEFORE IT.)

CONSTANTINE:

Can you feel it? The time passing?

DESIGNER:

Time will pass like it might in the place between sleeping lightly and sleeping deeply. You may not have a thought for one million years running, and you surely won't feel pain. Have I succeeded in alleviating your fears?

CONSTANTINE:

No... I wish you had left that out when you programmed me.

DESIGNER:

System error. Left out what?

Fear. I wish you had left out fear.

CONSTANTINE:

(CONSTANTINE SLOWLY OPENS THE SECOND UNIT, WHICH GLOWS BLUE, AS HE CLIMBS INSIDE. THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK, AND THERE IS THE GENTLE HUMMING OF LIFE BELOW THE SURFACE, BEFORE THEY COME UP AGAIN, A BIRGHT STERILE WHITE. CONSTANTINE IS ALONE IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM. ENTER NORA.)

You're still here.

NORA:

I am always here. But you've been gone for 2 hours 27 minutes and 18 seconds.

CONSTANTINE:

I finished my conditioning for the day.

NORA:

Yes, I can tell. Perspiration on your skin and a slightly elevated heart rate. Your muscles are slightly swollen—3.4 percent bigger than they usually-are at rest. Chin ups. I am guessing 5 or 6 repetitions of 8.

CONSTANTINE:

10.

NORA:

Yes, 10. My mistake.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm going to wash up.

NORA:

I'll set out your things.

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

Constantine, I'm perfectly capable. You're not a servant.

CONSTANTINE:

I know I'm not a servant. No one ever said I was.

NORA:

You weren't made to... Did you just stand there and wait for me to come back the whole time?

CONSTANTINE:

No, of course not.

NORA:

Because it doesn't look like you've moved.

CONSTANTINE:

I did lots of things while you were gone.

NORA:

Like what?

CONSTANTINE

When you first left, I catalogued every object in the room by density of mass, frequency of use, and ease of access. I concluded that the floor is used most often, as it must be used whenever the room is, and therefore, wins the contest overall. After that, I began to graph mathematical equations, in my head of course, for the most commonly used things. Like this.

*(HE PLACES HIS FOOT ON THE
MEDICAL TABLE.)*

NORA:

An equation for the shape of a shoe?

CONSTANTINE:

There are simple math equations for circles and bells, and therefore all things in nature. Something like a glass, per se, is rather simple—but a shoe? See the ridges on the bottom? Slightly more complex.

And how long did that all take you?

NORA:

A few minutes.

CONSTANTINE:

And for the rest of the time?

NORA:

I waited.

CONSTANTINE:

See? You shouldn't do that. You're a commodity. An hour of your time wasted is tragic.

CONSTANTINE:

You're just repeating what the Designer always says. You did not come up with that thought on your own.

NORA:

Things warrant repeating if they're true.

CONSTANTINE:

No matter. I *wanted* to wait. And during my free time, I am permitted to do as I please. I'm happy you're back.

NORA:

I'm not always going to be right back.

CONSTANTINE:

Yes you will. And when you are not, I will wait until you are.

NORA:

Why don't you help the Designer with some of the projects that need finishing before we leave?

CONSTANTINE:

Boring.

NORA:

You used to love to work on the ship. He needs you to help with the hologram program—

CONSTANTINE:

Boring.

NORA:

The navigation systems, then? You like the stars. Looking at them and calculating the distances from one to another?

CONSTANTINE:

Boring!

(SHE LAUGHS.)

CONSTANTINE:

Why did you laugh? Did I make a joke? It wasn't my intention to be funny.

NORA:

But it was funny anyway.

CONSTANTINE:

I don't understand.

NORA:

You will. You're still learning. Would you like to learn something new right now?

CONSTANTINE:

Yes, please.

NORA:

Sit down right here.

CONSTANTINE:

What are you going to teach—

NORA:

Constantine, Dark.

(IMMEDIATELY, CONSTANTINE STOPS SPEAKING, AND SEEMS TO BECOME LIFELESS. HIS HEAD FALLS FORWARD, AND HIS EYES CLOSE.)

NORA:

Constantine... Constantine?
Wake up...

(CONSTANTINE DOES NOTHING.)

NORA:

I said wake up.
Be real!
It's me...

(CONSTANTINE DOES NOTHING. SHE PULLS HIS HEAD UP. SHE HOLDS HIS FACE. SHE OPENS ONE OF HIS EYES. NOTHING. SHE KISSES HIM.)

NORA:

Open your eyes...
Please? Come back to life.
For me!?

(SHE SLAPS HIM FIRST ON THE ARM, AND THEN ON THE FACE. NOTHING.)

NORA:

You're alive! Not a machine. Wake up! Be real!

(THE DESIGNER ENTERS. THIS IS NOT THE HOLOGRAM, BUT THE MAN.)

DESIGNER:

You shut him down.

(HE STARTLES NORA.)

NORA:

--How long have you been there?

DESIGNER:

Not long. Just now. I saw he went offline.

NORA:

You told me I had to do it, so I did.

DESIGNER:

I suggested you practice doing it once or twice, yes.

NORA:

Why?

DESIGNER:

He may malfunction. You may have to repair him at some point, so I wanted you to know what it was like when he was... unresponsive.

NORA:

I could never repair him.

DESIGNER:

You'd be surprised what necessity invents.

NORA:

I'm not doing it again, after this. Once is enough, I don't like it.

DESIGNER:

It must be odd, I know.

NORA:

It's more than odd. He's my best friend. I love him, and to see him like this—reduced to a piece of—

DESIGNER:

Dead humans are no different. Just unanimated flesh.

NORA:

Well, I've never seen a dead human.

DESIGNER:

And you never will.

NORA:

Can I turn him on, now?

DESIGNER:

You can do anything you like. He belongs to you. I'm only trying to help.

*(THE DESIGNER GOES TO LEAVE, BUT
NORA STOPS HIM.)*

NORA:

How human is he? In your opinion?

DESIGNER:

I suppose that answer will be different for every—

NORA:

No, I said in your opinion. Answer me.

DESIGNER:

In all honesty? I see little difference between you and him, emotionally. There are small variations, of course. He has no difficulty sitting without stimuli for long periods of time. Some humans might find that taxing. Sometimes he has trouble with the nuance of language. And... in my personal opinion, when he does feel, it tends to be with great purity. Things are always very black or white. Never in the middle. But, now I am splitting hairs. Might we not call that his personality? Oh!--and of course, he does not bleed red.

NORA:

He doesn't like to be alone.

DESIGNER:

We suspected that would happen.

NORA:

No. You told me he would show attachment to me specifically.

DESIGNER:

Hasn't he?

NORA:

Yes, he prefers me, but that's not what I mean. It doesn't matter who he's with, you, me, the other doctors... he seems to have an aversion to being alone regardless of my presence. Is that... what you programmed? Is that what you intended? Or is it a glitch? A mistake?

(THE DESIGNER DOESN'T RESPOND.)

NORA:

I asked you a question. I want an answer! I'm not a—

(SHE BEGINS TO GESTURE TO CONSTANTINE, BUT STOPS.)

DESIGNER:

Not a what?

NORA:

...You scientists and your secrets! You know exactly what you're going to tell us, and what you're going to leave out, don't you? You've known for years.

DESIGNER:

It's all designed to help you.

NORA:

Maybe for him, but not for me! You can't predict me. I'm human. I can't even predict myself.

DESIGNER:

But we have predicted you!

(PAUSE.)

DESIGNER:

Truthfully, most of the “glitches” as you call them, have been from him. Your rearing and training has gone, well... completely as planned.

(NORA IS MORTIFIED AT THIS. SHE TURNS AWAY FROM THE DESIGNER.)

NORA:

Go. You should go.

DESIGNER:

I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to upset you—

NORA:

You haven’t. You just—you shouldn’t be here when he wakes up.

(THE DESIGNER MOVES TO LEAVE, BUT PAUSES BEFORE EXITING.)

DESIGNER:

A moment ago, you said you loved him. Is that true?

NORA:

Yes.

DESIGNER:

That’s good. That’s very very good.

(THE DESIGNER EXITS. NORA IS LEFT ALONE WITH CONSTANTINE. SHE VERY GENTLY PUTS HER INDEX AND MIDDLE FINGER BEHIND HIS EAR.)

NORA:

Nora DNA, access required.

CONSTANTINE:

Nora DNA, access granted.

NORA:

Wake in 5 seconds with no memory loss or malfunctions of any kind.

(NORA WAITS. THESE 5 SECONDS SHOULD TRULY BE 5 SECONDS. THEN, CONSTANTINE SHUTTERS TO LIFE. HE LOOKS AROUND, CONFUSED AND FRIGHTENED.)

CONSTANTINE:

I think—I may have had a malfunction.

NORA:

You didn't. It was my fault. I shut you down.

CONSTANTINE:

Why?

NORA:

I'm sorry. I had to. The Designer wanted me to practice.

CONSTANTINE:

I didn't like it.

NORA:

I didn't like it either.

CONSTANTINE:

I went away.

NORA:

I won't do it again. Ever. If I don't have to.

CONSTANTINE:

I need to go speak with him. I have to ask him why he would have you--

NORA:

Ask him later. Stay with me now.

CONSTANTINE:

That is the first time you have ever asked me to stay.

NORA:

Well. There's a first time for everything.

CONSTANTINE:

Not everything. But there is certainly a first time for all things that occur more than once.

*(NORA LEANS OVER AND KISSES HIM.
HE IS BOTH TERRIFIED AND ELATED.)*

CONSTANTINE:

That, however, was not something I ever anticipated happening at all.

NORA:

If I'm right, I should have just woken up a number of brand new programs?

CONSTANTINE:

I do believe you did.

NORA:

Do you still want to go talk to the Designer?

CONSTANTINE:

No. No, I think I'd like to stay here and do that again.

NORA:

Are you sure?

CONSTANTINE:

Yes. Yes, please.

*(THEY KISS AGAIN. THE LIGHTS FADE.
A MOMENT LATER, WE ARE BACK ON
THE AURORA. THE HUMMING SOUND
OF A DULL ENGINE CAN BE HEARD.
BOTH CRYO UNITS GLOW AND PULSE*

*WITH LIGHT AND LIFE FROM INSIDE.
CONSTANTINE AND NORA SPEAK FROM
THEIR FROZEN STATE, AS EACH OF
THE UNITS GLOW AND PULSE.)*

I am asleep.

CONSTANTINE:

And I have been dreaming.

NORA:

Mostly good dreams.

CONSTANTINE

Without worry or fear, for Constantine—

NORA:

For Nora.

CONSTANTINE:

And those are wonderful.

NORA:

But then, I remember...

CONSTANTINE:

That it's not real. That I'm dreaming.

NORA:

Well, I call it a dream—

CONSTANTINE:

But it doesn't feel like a one.

NORA:

It is different—

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

And deeper.

This feeling--

Is frightening.

Like everything ends and I cease to be.

If I sleep here too deeply—

Will I somehow remember—

How long I've been gone?

Or wake in a moment—

With no recollection—

Of how long has passed?

The true absence of time.

Where there is no Nora,

No Designer.

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

No Aurora.

NORA:

A world without Constantine.

CONSTANTINE:

So I prefer this.

NORA:

This waking half sleep—

CONSTANTINE:

I think it's far better—

NORA:

Far better.

CONSTANTINE:

Than nothing.

NORA:

Than nothing.

CONSTANTINE:

This strange sensation—

NORA:

My head aching slightly—

CONSTANTINE:

From far too much rest,

NORA:

And a sickly sweet taste in the back of my throat—

CONSTANTINE:

From all the harsh chemicals that flow through my veins.

NORA:

And I exist on the edge—

CONSTANTINE:

Of nothing, and something.

NORA:

But I'm still alive--

CONSTANTINE:

Still so, so alive--

NORA:

While I struggle with wires—

CONSTANTINE:

And dream that I've woken—

NORA:

Just to realize, I haven't—

CONSTANTINE:

Haven't moved in the slightest.

NORA:

And somehow that taste—

CONSTANTINE:

Gets inside of my dreams.

NORA:

And I drown—

CONSTNATINE:

In a pool of its poison.

NORA:

I breathe it in—

CONSTNATINE:

And choke it out.

NORA:

And I wonder—

CONSTANTINE:

If Nora—
Feels what I feel?

NORA:

Well, of course not.

CONSTANTINE:

She is different.

NORA:

He is different than me.

CONSTANTINE:

She is better.

NORA:

He is stronger.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm sure she's asleep.

NORA:

No more for right now.

CONSTANTINE:

I've grown tired again...

NORA:

But how can that be?

CONSTANTINE:

I've only been thinking—

For a moment.

NORA:

(THE LIGHTS PUTTER ON. THERE IS A FLASH, LIKE A TRAIN PASSING, AND THEN THE SOUND OF A CRASH AND SOME LOUD BEEPS. THE DESIGNER FLICKERS AWAKE. WHILE HE SPEAKS, CONSTANTINE ENTERS WITH QUESTRY. QUESTRY IS AN ALIEN. CONSTANTINE SHOWS HIM AROUND THE SHIP.)

DESIGNER:

The half life of a bacterium is equal to—assuming that life is uniform throughout the Universe is completely—Man! He was a man. He wanted to dissolve. Die. With that—The Aurora contains one medical ward, two cryo-units, and—The goddess of the dawn, Aurora, always waiting for the rising—Steven Hawking suggests there may indeed be creatures living at the center of suns But before he faded completely, one last fugitive thought came to him before everything stopped. “Little Miss!” he whispered, too low to be heard.

(AS THE DESIGNER'S MONOLOGUE ENDS, CONSTANTINE GENTLY PRESSES A STRANGE LOOKING CONTRAPTION TO QUESTRY'S FOREHEAD.)

CONSTANTINE:

This may hurt a bit.

QUESTRY:

Oh!—Ah!-Ow!

CONSTANTINE:

I'm sorry!

QUESTRY:

Ahhhhhhhhh!

CONSTANTINE:

There! That's it! It's over. Now we can—

QUESTRY:

Talk! Yes, now we can talk! With words! Oh, I have words! So many of them! And I understand them. A whole new way of thinking. I... you... this ship! Yes. A ship! And stars. Stars! That is what you call them! How absolutely ridiculous that *that* is what you call them.

CONSTANTINE:

Well, what do *you* call them?

QUESTRY:

You would never be able to pronounce it. Hello. I'm Questry.

CONSTANTINE:

Constantine.

QUESTRY:

You downloaded your language into my brain.

CONSTANTINE:

I thought you might like to speak.

QUESTRY:

Thank you.

*(CONSTANTINE DIRECTS HIS SPEECH UPWARDS
TOWARDS THE HOLOGRAM.)*

CONSTANTINE:

How long have I been sleeping?

QUESTRY:

How should I know? I locked and someone dancered. Oh—those aren't the right words, are they? I think it will take a while to get the hang of this...

(THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

4 million, 877 thousand 502 years, 4 months and 7 days.

*(THE HOLOGRAM FRIGHTENS
QUESTRY, WHO HAS NEVER SEEN
ANYTHING LIKE IT BEFORE.)*

CONSTANTINE:

A bit early then. That's all right. I needed a stretch.

QUESTRY:

That's a very long time to sleep, isn't it?

CONSTANTINE:

I've been waiting for the Universe to get smarter. Do you know if it has yet?

QUESTRY:

Has what?

CONSTANTINE:

Gotten smarter.

QUESTRY:

Smarter than what?

CONSTANTINE:

That it was before. I'm looking for the cure to an illness. A cure to my Captain's disease.

QUESTRY:

Ah, a sick passenger aboard. I was a healer back home... I could take a look, if you like.

CONSTANTINE:

Would you?

QUESTRY:

Is she your husband? Oh no. Wait. You are her wife? No! Partner? Lover? Oh! Which one is it? I can't tell.

CONSTANTINE:

No, Nora is not my... wife or... husband. She is the Captain of the Aurora. She is my--

QUESTRY:

Ooooh. I see. I had one of those once. Sola. She was as wild a bag of squirrels.

CONSTANTINE:

What?

QUESTRY:

Oh, I like this language. It makes very little sense and has far too many sounds!

CONSTANTINE:

Sola, is she waiting on your ship?

QUESTRY:

Oh, no. She's gone to be with the stars.

CONSTANTINE:

Which ones?

QUESTRY:

No, no. She's dead? Yes. That is the word. Dead.

CONSTANTINE:

I am sorry.

QUESTRY:

Why would you be?

CONSTANTINE:

It's just something we humans say. When someone else is in grief.

QUESTRY:

I'm not in grief. Not now, at least. I was before and I might be later. But now, I am well—and talking about Sola makes me happy! Except for the times when it makes me sad. She was an artist. A light painter.

CONSTANTINE:

How do you paint with light?

How do you paint without it?
 QUESTRY:

But, where does the light come from?
 CONSTANTINE:

From the nearest star, of course.
 QUESTRY:

I don't understand.
 CONSTANTINE:

I don't understand how you could not understand.
 Where is she? Your Captain?
 QUESTRY:

She's waking up right now.
 CONSTANTINE:

(CONSTANTINE TAKES QUESTRY TO THE CRYO-UNITS. HE UNLATCHES THE DOOR, CAREFULLY TAKES NORA OUT, AND CARRIES HER TO THE MED TABLE.)

See? Now, when she comes to, you have to promise me you won't tell her she's been frozen.
 CONSTANTINE:

She doesn't know? Why keep it from her?
 QUESTRY:

I don't want her to be afraid. I want her to think it's been nothing but a long nights sleep.
 CONSTANTINE:

So you want me to lie?
 QUESTRY:

CONSTANTINE:

I suppose so.

(NORA BEGINS TO WAKE. SHE COUGHS AND SITS UP.)

NORA:

Constantine I had a terrible dream!

CONSTANTINE:

Nora—

NORA:

My fingers sting...

CONSTANTINE:

Nora—

NORA:

And there is a horrible sugary sweet taste in the back of my throat-

CONSTANTINE:

Nora!

(QUESTRY, UNABLE TO CONTAIN HIS EXCITEMENT, STEPS IN FRONT OF NORA. SHE JUMPS BACK, SHOCKED THAT SOMEONE NEW IS ON THE SHIP.)

NORA:

Oh—! Hello!

CONSTANTINE:

This is Questry. He arrived during the night.

NORA:

Can he--?

QUESTRY:

Talk? Yes! It's fantastic.

NORA:

Oh I think it's horrible. The language download, stings, doesn't it?

QUESTRY:

Right there—in the center of your head.

NORA:

But then--!

QUESTRY:

Then, all of a sudden, it's like—

NORA:

A door opens and there's—

QUESTRY:

And there's a brand new world!

NORA:

Yes!

QUESTRY:

Yes!

(AN AWKWARD PAUSE. CONSTANTINE IS PERPLEXED BY THEIR IMMEDIATE CONNECTION.)

QUESTRY:

I heard you weren't feeling well.

NORA:

I'm always thirsty.

QUESTRY:

Will you let me to try to help you? I would like to try.
Constantine, would you bring us some water?

(CONSTANTINE HESITATES, BUT EXITS. QUESTRY AND NORA ARE ALONE.)

NORA:

I'm surprised he let you on the ship.

QUESTRY:

It wasn't without great precaution, believe me. He's very worried about you.

NORA:

He shouldn't be. I'll be better soon. Where are you from?

QUESTRY:

I'm from nowhere. I was born on a mission ship.

NORA:

And what was its mission?

QUESTRY:

It doesn't matter. I never plan on going back.

NORA:

We can't go home either. It's not allowed.

(QUESTRY STARTS TO EXAMINE HER.)

NORA:

You seem to know what you're doing.

QUESTRY:

I used to heal people. A long time ago.

(NORA IS ALL OF A SUDDEN SEEMINGLY PREOCCUPIED. QUESTRY SENSES HER ANXIETY.)

QUESTRY:

Is something wrong?

NORA:

It's just so strange—that you found us today. It was only that I started feeling sick. What are the chances?

QUESTRY:

Heh. What are the chances, indeed.

NORA:

So—what do you see? Am I dying?

QUESTRY:

Of course not.

NORA:

Are you lying? Because I worry about what would happen to Constantine, if he were all alone.

QUESTRY:

I'm going to do my best.

NORA:

Good, because I want to see the Universe. I waited a long time, and now I want to see everything. Have you been traveling long? What have you seen so far?

QUESTRY:

Well—

*(CONSTANTINE ENTERS WITH WATER.
HE SEES QUESTRY TOUCHING NORA.
HE HAS NEVER SEEN HER TOUCHED BY
ANYONE ELSE.)*

NORA:

Are there any beautiful places we should be sure to visit?

QUESTRY:

There isn't as much as you would—

I could keep a log—

NORA:

It's not quite what you—

QUESTRY:

Why are you touching her like that?

CONSTANTINE:

Just a routine examination.

QUESTRY:

Water! Give it here—give it—

NORA:

*(CONSTANTINE GIVES HER WATER,
AND QUESTRY LOOKS INTO HER
MOUTH AND EYES.)*

Why are you looking at her like that?

CONSTANTINE:

I promise this completely standard.

QUESTRY:

More water? I'm still thirsty.

NORA:

Breathe for me. This might hurt a little.

QUESTRY:

I think you should stop.

CONSTANTINE:

You asked me to examine her.

QUESTRY:

Can't you do it from further away?

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

Constantine, you're being ridiculous. You know how examinations go.

CONSTANTINE:

He said it might hurt!

NORA:

Go on, go and get me more water.

CONSTANTINE:

I want to stay and watch.

NORA:

Constantine, you heard me.

CONSTANTINE:

--We don't even know him!

QUESTRY:

I don't mean to upset you—

NORA:

You're being rude!

(CONSTANTINE PAUSES. HE EXITS WITH THE CUP.)

NORA:

I'm sorry about that. He gets—

QUESTRY:

Like everyone gets when they're scared.

NORA:

I'm scared... It's not good, is it?

QUESTRY:

Lie down. Look up at the ceiling. Now, imagine a window. The biggest window you've ever seen. I used to sit on the observation deck of the Mission ship with Sola every night. She was my heart and soul. Like you are to Constantine. We would lay there and look up at what we *thought* was glass, out into the stars. But it was just an image. A picture they put there with little white specks of light. I should have known it wasn't real. The stars don't really look like that, do they? Then I saw them, the real ones. They opened the layers of steel on the ship and I saw the real stars, and they were nothing like the projection we had stared at all our lives. That's when Sola knew she wanted to be a painter.

NORA:

What did she paint?

QUESTRY:

Spiral galaxies. Colorful nebulas. Anything beautiful. But you have never seen light paintings. I'll have to remedy this. They're like sunlight, but from a dream. People think that the cosmos are dark, and perhaps someday they will be. But for now, they're almost like daytime--Red and blue and purple and pink. Like someone spilled a bag of glitter on a dark countertop. Not like the images you see in books from ancient times, taken with telescopes back from far before men could truly fly... Nothing is forever, though. Even paintings fade after long enough. When Sola died, I snuck to a part of the ship where they let the dead float out into forever. When her turn came, I was going to yell and scream and demand that they stop. But when I saw the stars again—the real ones—I couldn't speak. I knew it was where she would have wanted to be. I feel guilty for it, sometimes. I've thought about following her. I still do.

NORA:

Will you show me how to paint with light?

QUESTRY:

I was never very good... We should ask Constantine, first.

NORA:

Constantine won't mind.

QUESTRY:

There we are. All done, now.

(QUESTRY HELPS NORA UP, AND THEY EXIT TOGETHER. AT THE SAME TIME, CONSTANTINE ENTERS. THEY SEEM TO IGNORE HIM. THE LIGHTS FLICKER. AS HE SEES THEM EXIT, HE BEGINS TO TWITCH.)

CONSTANTINE:

I am—suddenly—very— tired.

(THE LIGHTS FLICKER AGAIN AS THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

You are scheduled for updates.

CONSTANTINE

But I slept for 5 million years!

DESIGNER:

Sleeping has nothing to do with your updates.

CONSTANTINE:

What's wrong with me? I can't quite—

DESIGNER:

Intense emotional trauma can trigger the need for software renewal after long periods of inactivity. You will get tired from time to time.

CONSTANTINE:

Will Nora? Wait—no. I've said all that before. I'm having a malfunction! Designer, hurry!

DESIGNER:

I know. I'm working as fast as I can.

CONSTANTINE:

Am I asleep? Or rebooting? Or frozen?

DESIGNER:

Generally speaking, yes.

CONSTANTINE:

Which is it? Generally speaking? What does that mean?

DESIGNER:

You should know what it means, Constantine. Is your software damaged?

CONSTANTINE:

My software is perfectly fine! Stop asking questions and fix me!
Where did she go? Why can't I see her? Where is that spindly alien?

DESIGNER:

You can't see her because she's not ready. She's still growing.

CONSTANTINE

That's a lie! Nora's-been awake for years. This isn't an update—it's a nightmare!

*(CONSTANTINE SEES THE DESIGNER
EMERGE FROM THE HOLO-DECK. THIS
IMPOSSIBLE AND DEEPLY DISTURBING
TO HIM.)*

CONSTANTINE:

What are you doing!?! Go back up to the deck where you belong!

DESIGNER:

I'm not a hologram. I'm your teacher.

*(THE DESIGNER THROWS
CONSTANTINE TO THE GROUND.)*

DESIGNER:

I knew it was only a matter of time before this happened. Nora prefers Qestry now.

CONSTANTINE:

No, she can't! He's only been here a few days. She would never say such a thing!

DESIGNER:

She told me herself. You can't cure her, and so she has no more use for you. Perhaps Questry and I will just throw you out into the stars with the rest of the scrap.

CONSTANTINE:

No, wait! I need more time. I'm still trying!

DESIGNER:

There's no need to shout. You interrupted your history lesson.

CONSTANTINE:

We—we were having a history lesson?

DESIGNER:

Of course we were. Go on, recite what you've learned.

CONSTANTINE:

In summary: Five years after the great oil crisis came the Long War, and the great vaccination shortages. Humans scattered across the world, but the scientists of Aurora began a different kind of work. The human DNA structure was modified. More focus, less pity, more resilience... this work was the basis for The Nora Project. I was then created as a counterpart to Nora. When I was complete, and Nora was grown, we were sent away on a ship called—

(ALL AT ONCE THE LIGHTS SNAP BACK TO NORMAL, AND QUESTRY HAS ENTERED. HE IS JOSTLING CONSTANTINE, TRYING TO GET HIM TO WAKE.)

QUESTRY:

Wake up, wake up, wake up!

(CONSTANTINE FINALLY WAKES FROM HIS DREAM. THE DESIGNER IS BACK UP IN THE HOLODECK, WHERE HE BELONGS.)

DESIGNER:

Updates complete.

QUESTRY:

Are you all right?

You were dreaming--calling out in your sleep.

CONSTANTINE:

Don't throw me out there! Please, I'm sorry, I'm trying!

QUESTRY:

Constantine, it was just a nightmare. Come on, friend, hurry. She's burning up.

(ENTER NORA, SOAKED IN SWEAT. THE STRANGE MARKS ON HER FINGERS HAVE NOW TRAVELED UP TO HER NECK AND FACE.)

NORA:

More water. I'm still thirsty.

CONSTANTINE:

Enough water. Back to sleep.

NORA:

I don't want to sleep. Questry promised to teach me how to make light paintings.

CONSTANTINE:

Did he?

NORA:

He said I would be a fantastic painter. Because my hands are so small.

QUESTRY:

Sola always said it was important.

CONSTANTINE:

We don't have time for paintings.

NORA:

Yes we do. We have all the time in the Universe.

Questry, will you tell me more about Sola while I fall asleep?

What did she look like? How did you meet her? And what were the places she always wanted to see?

QUESTRY:

There is a nebula near Abydex 5. I've only seen it in pictures. Purple dust clouds for 100 thousand light years running. That is where all the great painters go.

NORA:

Then set a course for Abydex 5. You will give me my first painting lesson in the morning. But for now, goodnight.

(NORA FALLS ASLEEP.)

QUESTRY:

Fast asleep already.

Whatever it is, it's eating her alive...

CONSTANTINE:

Why would you promise such a thing without asking me?

QUESTRY:

She insisted. So I said I would teach her. It was kind.

CONSTANTINE:

Abydex 5?

QUESTRY:

I made it up. Let her think there are adventures to be had and worlds to be seen. I'm not going to tell her the universe is mostly dark and empty. I would say anything to comfort a dying creature.

CONSTANTINE:

I have to refreeze her.

QUESTRY:

Freezing her will only prolong the process.

CONSTANTINE:

Yes, exactly. And someday, someone else will come. And someone else, and someone else. And eventually, someone will know how to save her. I can wait. I have the time.

*(QUESTRY SEES THE STRANGE
MARKINGS ON HIS FINGERTIPS,
IDENTICAL TO NORA'S)*

QUESTRY:

I don't, it seems.
Are there only two cryo-units on this ship?

CONSTANTINE:

Yes, why would there be more?

QUESTRY:

Of course. Why would there be more?
Explain it to me... You carry her all the time. Why aren't you sick?

CONSTANTINE:

I'm not human.

QUESTRY:

Neither am I.

CONSTANTINE:

No, I mean, I'm advanced technology.

QUESTRY:

You're AI?

CONSTANTINE:

Not AI. I dislike the word artificial. But if it helps you understand...

QUESTRY:

I am sorry.

CONSTANTINE:

Why? It isn't shameful—

QUESTRY:

No. I only mean it exhausts my last idea. If you had been a creature of organic flesh, I could have taken a sample and attempted to create an antidote. But now that I know you're a machine—

CONSTANTINE:

I'm not a machine—

QUESTRY:

Whatever you are. We're both going to die here.

CONSTANTINE:

Neither of you have to die.

QUESTRY:

But we do.

CONSTANTINE:

No. I can wait alone. I despise it, but I hate death more. I can freeze you instead of myself.

QUESTRY:

Not me. I don't want to lie frozen for a million years.

CONSTANTINE:

You won't feel it.

QUESTRY:

My people would disapprove.

CONSTANTINE:

You're not with your people now. Stay alive.

QUESTRY:

For what? Besides. I have been meaning to join Sola for some time now. When I'm gone, send me out into the stars to meet her? And set a course to Abydex 5.

CONSTANTINE:

I thought you made it up.

QUESTRY:

I did. Pick a pretty dust cloud and let me pretend. Somewhere no other soul has ever been, and we'll name it Abedex 5 for Nora. We'll make my little lie a truth. I'd like to see one more before I go. If you can spare the time?

(LIGHTS SHIFT. TIME PASSES. AGAIN, WE SEE THE DARK SHADOWY UNDERWATER GLOW OF BEING IN CRYO FREEZE. NORA SPEAKS FROM HER CRYO UNIT. QUESTRY WRAPS HIMSELF IN A BLANKET AND SITS NEAR CONSTANTINE, STARING UP AT THE STARS.)

NORA:

I will dream about the jar of colored glitter spilled in the darkness. I was told, when I woke to consciousness, that all humans lived as I do, and that our purpose was to explore. Make your findings, and log them well, because the Earth is old and dying, and no longer holds any beauty. But there is plenty out among the stars.

CONSTANTINE:

I've found one. I think you'll like it.

NORA:

I have read about artists who made pictures with paint, or pens, or the pixels of the very first computers.

QUESTRY:

Look at that! Light and dust. We're made of it, you know. This is just the kind of thing Sola would paint.

NORA:

If I were an artist, I would paint the world where I caught this disease. With-water everywhere, and salt heavy in the air.

QUESTRY:

And sometimes, when she was finished, she would paint me.

CONSTANTINE:

Like a portrait?

QUESTRY:

She always said I was her favorite thing to paint. Because my face was so kind.

NORA:

Then, I'll do a simple sketch of Constantine, for fun.

CONSTANTINE:

Is my face kind?

QUESTRY:

Yes, I think so.

NORA:

Sometimes I wonder if they made that face for him, or if they simply copied it? From some human man who lived his life long ago. Upon all that is sacred, I hope it is original.

QUESTRY:

Constantine?

NORA:

For there is no one else quite like him.

QUESTRY:

What will you do, when I am gone?

CONSTANTINE:

Let's not talk about that.

QUESTRY:

It's all right. I'm not afraid. Tell me.

CONSTANTINE:

Go back to sleeping in the other unit, I suppose.

QUESTRY:

But why?

CONSTANTINE:

I don't like being alone.

QUESTRY:

But you don't have to be. Those units can do so much more than what you use them for. You could have a companion. You could have someone to—

CONSTANTINE:

It wouldn't be Nora.

QUESTRY:

No, but you'd be surprised how similar they would be.

CONSTANTINE:

And how different.

QUESTRY:

Like a daughter.

CONSTANTINE:

A what?

QUESTRY:

A child. Of your own. To teach. Like the Designer taught you.

CONSTANTINE:

But she wouldn't be mine. I'm not—I can't—

QUESTRY:

You would be a good teacher.

CONSTANTINE:

I... suppose I have never given it much thought.

(QUESTRY STANDS, LOOKING UP AT THE NEBULA CONSTANTINE HAS CHOSEN.)

It is perfect. Sola would approve.

QUESTRY:

*(QUESTRY LEANS OVER IN PAIN,
HOLDING HIS THROAT.)*

Are you cold, friend?

CONSTANTINE:

No. Just tired. And Thirsty. Always thirsty.

QUESTRY:

*(QUESTRY IS UNABLE TO STAND ON
HIS OWN. CONSTANTINE LIFTS HIM UP
EFFORTLESSLY, AND BEGINS TO WALK
TO THE EMPTY CRYO UNIT.)*

No! ...No.

QUESTRY:

*(CONSTANTINE RESPECTS QUESTRY'S
WISHES. HE TURNS BACK TOWARDS
THE NEBULA, QUESTRY'S BODY IN HIS
ARMS. THE ALIEN GENTLY LAYS HIS
HEAD ON CONSTANTINE'S CHEST.)*

Off you go then.
She is not so far away, I think.
Go fast and you'll catch up.
You shouldn't have shown me the lightscapes, Questry.
I wish I had never seen them, now.
I'm sorry we couldn't wake her.
And I'm sorry I couldn't help you.
And when your insides turned to stone
You said, it's not painful, just heavy.
And I suppose that's good news, in a way.
Now, I know what it is, what it does. No surprises.

CONSTANTINE:

I'll miss when you laugh, and tell the jokes from your world.
 Though I never understood them, but still.
 And when the end came you asked if I wanted a painting.
 To keep on the ship.
 For when Nora got better.
 And I said yes. Yes, of course.
 But no more, now.
 I'm tired, and my eyes hurt from crying.

*(TOWARDS THE END OF THE SPEECH,
 CONSTANTINE SETS QUESTRY DOWN.
 HE STEPS OUTSIDE OF THE CONFINES
 OF THE SHIP, IDEALLY EXITING OUT
 INTO THE AUDIENCE, IN THE
 DIRECTION OF THE NEBULA.
 CONSTANTINE IS ALONE.)*

CONSTANTINE:

Designer!

(THE HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

CONSTANTINE:

Questry is gone.

DESIGNER:

Yes. I logged that information some time ago.

CONSTANTINE:

Is that all you have to say?

DESIGNER:

What else should I have said?

CONSTANTINE:

He was my friend. You might have said you were sorry! Or that he was brave, or kind!

DESIGNER:

You would like me... to say... I'm sorry?

CONSTANTINE:

Something. Anything.

DESIGNER:

Constantine, I was not programmed to respond that way. But if it's important to you, you could re-wire my processor to—

CONSTANTINE:

No, no... If I wire it into you, it wouldn't be real. You wouldn't be choosing to say it yourself.

You're supposed to be a comfort.

DESIGNER:

More of an entertainment device, really. Books, puzzles, facts, films, Will that be all, then?

CONSTANTINE:

No. I think I'm ready.

DESIGNER:

Ready for what?

CONSTANTINE:

A long time ago, before I fell asleep next to Nora in the other unit, you suggested—

DESIGNER:

Cellular harvest and reconfiguration?

CONSTANTINE:

Yes.

I think it's time.

I am ready now.

(BLACKOUT. WHEN THE LIGHTS COMES UP, WE ARE ONCE AGAIN IN THE BRIGHT STERILE WORLD OF THE LAB. ENTER CONSTANTINE AND THE DESIGNER.)

CONSTANTINE:

Where is she? It's been 19 minutes!

DESIGNER:

You have to stop counting the minutes she's been away from you.

CONSTANTINE:

What are they doing to her, now?

DESIGNER:

They're giving her a medical examination.

CONSTANTINE:

I can't see her. I don't like not being able to see her.

DESIGNER:

Let's talk about other things. Get our mind off of Nora for a little while? What about the trip? You'll be leaving soon. Are you excited?

CONSTANTINE:

I don't want to talk about the trip.

DESIGNER:

The hologram program is finally finished. Would you like to try it out?

CONSTANTINE:

No, no, not right now.

DESIGNER:

But, if you ask the right questions, you won't be able to tell the difference between the program and I.

CONSTANTINE:

And if I ask the wrong questions?

DESIGNER:

It's only meant as a comfort.

CONSTANTINE:

I thought so. You never answer when I ask the wrong questions.

DESIGNER:

How long is log, now? Of Questions? Remember, I had you start one?

CONSTANTINE:

Currently 477 questions long.

DESIGNER:

Good! Why don't we answer a few of them? Would that make you feel better?

(CONSTANTINE IS SUDDENLY INTERESTED.)

CONSTANTINE:

Question One: Why was I named Constantine?

DESIGNER:

After Constantine the Great, of course.

CONSTANTINE:

Yes, but what does he have to do with me?

DESIGNER:

He changed history. Turned the world toward a new order. You will carry it to new places as well. So we thought it appropriate. How about another?

CONSTNATINE:

Unanswered question number 6.

DESIGNER:

Why not go in order?

CONSTANTINE:

They are ordered in sequence of date asked, not by importance of answer. Unanswered question number 6. What will happen when Nora dies?

DESIGNER:

That question is for another time, when you are not so upset and are better able to—

CONSTANTINE:

But you promised to answer them all before I left!

(PAUSE.)

DESIGNER:

Constantine, do you understand the cryo-units?

CONSTANTINE:

For suspended animation.

DESIGNER:

And what else?

CONSTANTINE:

For long term sleep in the instance of danger or long trips—

DESIGNER:

And what more?

CONSTANTINE:

There is more?

DESIGNER:

You are aware that your physical body is built to stay as it is for... millions of years.
Perhaps more?

CONSTANTINE:

But you have no intention of using me for that long.

DESIGNER:

That's not entirely true. The cryo-units can also be converted into tanks for cellular re-growth as well.

CONSANTINE:

Am I to grow something?

DESIGNER:

Yes, in fact. You must understand that all of our work on Nora hasn't only been for one lifetime of benefit.

CONSTANTINE:

But Nora is human.

DESIGNER:

Yes, and she was grown in a tank exactly like the one you will have on The Aurora.

CONSTANTINE:

But, if I take a sample and re-grow her, that new person won't be Nora at all. It will only be someone who looks like her.

DESIGNER:

And thinks like her and sounds like her. A genetically identical replica.

CONSTANTINE:

But, a replica isn't the same. There is more to a person than mere genetics. You taught me that!

DESIGNER:

And I believe it to be true. I know this will be hard at first, but the models should be relatively similar—

CONSTANTINE:

The *Models*!?

DESIGNER:

I promise it will get easier after the first few times.

(*CONSTANTINE TWITCHES.*)

CONSTANTINE:

The—first—few... times? Am I to keep... re-growing her?

DESIGNER:

Well, yes.

(CONSTANTINE THINKS ABOUT THIS FOR A MOMENT, HORRIFIED.)

CONSTANTINE:

I will not.

DESIGNER:

Constantine, you're not thinking clearly--

(CONSTANTINE GRABS THE DESIGNER BY THE THROAT AND EASILY FLINGS HIM UP ONTO THE MEDICAL TABLE AS HE CONTINUES TO STRANGLE HIM.)

CONSTANTINE:

I said no, and if you think I will—or can—you're grossly mistaken.

DESIGNER:

Constantine! You're hurting me! Let go! Do it now! *Constantine, Dark!*

(CONSTANTINE IMMEDIATELY LETS GO OF THE DESIGNER AND FALLS FORWARD, LIMP.)

DESIGNER:

Designer DNA access required.

CONSTANTINE:

Designer DNA access granted.

DESIGNER:

Wake in 2 seconds with poor motor functions.

(CONSTANTINE COMES TO, BUT IS UNABLE TO GAIN HIS BALANCE.)

CONSTANTINE:

You shut me down.

DESIGNER:

You tried to hurt me. You will listen to me now, do you understand? If you don't regrow her, you'll only have her for a sliver of time. Think about that. Think about all the work we've done.

CONSTANTINE:

And you never thought to attempt to extend her lifespan?

DESIGNER:

Genetic alterations *reduce* lifespan. You know that.

CONSTANTINE:

I can re-grow her with memories.

DESIGNER:

That's not possible. The stuff of story books and you know it.

CONSTANTINE:

I can try. I have longer than you.

DESIGNER:

Yes. You have a long time, don't you? And a new Nora is better than no Nora, isn't it?

CONSTANTINE:

I don't know. I can't imagine. I only know I would rather shut down once she's gone. Unanswered question number 3. How is it done?

DESIGNER:

Shutdown is not information you'll ever be given. It's only for Nora to know.

CONSTANTINE:

But only the original-

DESIGNER:

--Ah—see!/? This is the built in incentive to use the cryo-units for the proper purpose. That piece of information is genetically encoded. She will always know. You could even grow two of her at once if you like. Think of all the fun you could have.

CONSTANTINE:

It's not fun and never will be. Why are you doing this? You said you loved me.

DESIGNER:

Parents do things that cause their children pain all the time. *Because they love them.*

CONSTANTINE:

I don't understand.

DESIGNER:

Neither do most children.

CONSTANTINE:

I could hurt you.

DESIGNER:

You could. But if you do, you will be brought in for and psychological evaluations and maintenance. Even I can't change that.

CONSTANTINE:

Why not!? You are the Designer! You are supposed to make everything better, to make Nora live forever, and make me understand all the things I don't! Why? Why can't you change it?

DESIGNER:

Because I am only a man! Not God.

CONSTANTINE:

Then who is? Who is this God you sometimes speak of, and where does he hide?

DESIGNER:

I don't know. No one here knows. But if you're lucky, that's exactly what you and Nora are going away to find out.

(BLACKOUT. LIGHTS UP ON THE AURORA. THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM FLICKERS ALIVE AS A STRANGE NEW ALIEN EXPLORES THE SURROUNDINGS. SHE IS EERIE AND MOVES WITH A SLOW, STILL, ELEGANCE. THE

*HOLOGRAM'S VOICE CRACKLES ALIVE,
AS IF HE HAS NOT BEEN USED IN SOME
TIME.)*

DESIGNER:

We—greet—you in p-p-peace. We will now d-d-download our common language into your B-b-brainstem. Y-y-you will feel a sharp pain, or st-st-stinging sens-a-a-ation in your spine, neck, and then extreme shortness of b-b-breath.

GATEKEEPER:

There is no need. I already know your language.

DESIGNER:

System Error. How is that possible?

GATEKEEPER:

You're not the only one who can download simple programs into the brain.

DESIGNER:

Excuse me while I search for updates. I have not been used in this part of the ship in quite some time.

GATEKEEPER:

Listen, little hologram. Where's the other life form? I know there's another, I can feel it...

DESIGNER:

No updates found. It seems we are in an uncharted area. Perhaps we've drifted off course? Into a wormhole or an event horizon? You did seem to appear out of thin air, which does not coincide with the physics of the Universe I have been programed to navigate.

GATEKEEPER:

Interesting guesses, but not quite. You wouldn't have survived.

DESIGNER:

And how would you know such a thing?

GATEKEEPER:

Because I've seen it. Those are common punishments where I come from. I was lucky to only be banished.

DESIGNER:

Banished for what?

GATEKEEPER:

That's a somewhat personal question, isn't it?

DESIGNER:

I'll need to know the nature of your offense in order to assess whether or not you will be harmful to the Captain or crew.

GATEKEEPER:

And where are they? The rest of the souls aboard? I can't make out how many. Sometimes I sense only one. Other times more.

DESIGNER:

Again, you must tell me what you are guilty of before I can offer you refuge.

GATEKEEPER:

I was guilty of many things. Firstly, for leaving my post. I was a Gatekeeper, assigned to keep the rest of the Universe away from our world, but I grew tired and weary, and wanted to rest. My second—and perhaps worst crime—was Empathy.

DESIGNER:

I beg your pardon?

GATEKEEPER:

Empathy. Are you not familiar with the term? That would be rather embarrassing, since I took it from your own language.

DESIGNER:

Apologies. My processor is telling me you said... empathy?

GATEKEEPER:

My third crime was singing. A lesser offence, surely, but still punishable by a lengthy prison sentence in some cases.

DESIGNER:

These are sins in your culture?

GATEKEEPER:

Are they not everywhere?

DESIGNER:

Not that I am aware of. I will need to fetch Constantine, now.

GATEKEEPER:

The Captain?

DESIGNER:

No. Nora is Captain of the Aurora—

GATEKEEPER:

Yes. Her. I wish to speak to her.

DESIGNER:

Unfortunately, it is Constantine who fields all inquiries and—

GATEKEEPER:

I don't care. I wish to speak to the one called Nora.

DESIGNER:

System Error. My processor cannot handle this particular interaction. Feel free to relax while I fetch him—

GATEKEEPER:

I told you. I don't wish to speak to—

DESIGNER:

-You may sing while you wait, if you like?

You mentioned you liked singing? Think of it as reparation, for not being able to wake Nora.

GATEKEEPER:

Wait, let me explain why it's imperative that you allow me to—

(BUT THE DESIGNER DISAPPEARS. THE GATEKEEPER IS ALONE. SHE BEGINS TO SING, FRIGHTENED AT FIRST, BUT THEN ELATED WHEN SHE REALIZES IT IS SAFE TO DO SO. SHE USES THE DURATION OF THE SONG TO EXPLORE HER SURROUNDINGS.)

GATEKEEPER:

If—

If the ship doesn't fail, I will live.

If the darkness goes on, I will die.

When I travel the dawn seems just out of sight

Some men believe we're mistakes.

But others believe we're divine

I still believe in the place I call home

But I hide in the smoke and dust, rubble and bone,

I'm the master of here and of there.

The stars are all dead and gone cold

When they cast me out, I wept as I fell

And since then I've traveled alone.

(NORA EMERGES FROM A NEARBY HIDING PLACE. SHE HAS BEEN WATCHING FOR SOME TIME.)

NORA:

Hello.

GATEKEEPER:

There you are. I knew someone was close by.

(THE GATEKEEPER TURNS. SHE AND NORA STARE AT EACH OTHER.)

NORA:

You said you could sense me?

GATEKEEPER:

More or less. But the ship is strange. Sometimes I sense three life forms... and other times, only one. You're Nora.

NORA:

Yes.

GATEKEEPER:

But the interface—it said I wasn't allowed to see you.

NORA:

The hologram says lots of things that aren't true. Constantine refuses to fix him. Says it's his 'personality'.

(DURING THESE LAST FEW LINES, THE GATEKEEPER HAS GOTTEN CLOSE TO NORA. NORA MOVES AWAY, FRIGHTENED.)

NORA:

Don't touch me. Stay there.

GATEKEEPER:

I won't hurt you.

NORA:

I said stay there. You could be lying. I don't know you at all.

GATEKEEPER:

But you know I'm telling the truth.

NORA:

...How are you doing that? How are you in my head?

GATEKEEPER:

It's just how I'm built. Does it bother you?

NORA:

No. Can I do it? Can you teach me how to look in someone's head?

GATEKEEPER:

I don't know. I've never met anyone who wanted to learn. Come here, let's try.

*(NORA GOES AND SITS BY THE
GATEKEEPER. THEY INSPECT EACH
OTHER.)*

NORA:

You don't seem so different... you look like us-- like humans do.

GATEKEEPER:

It's an illusion. To make it easier for you.

NORA:

And what do you really look like?

GATEKEEPER:

Not like this.

NORA:

Like what, then?

GATEKEEPER:

Like... sunlight, I suppose. We're not creatures of flesh and bone.

NORA:

I want to see.

GATEKEEPER:

No, you don't.

NORA:

I do. And I want to know how you got here— on the ship? You didn't bring any passage of your own.

GATEKEEPER:

I don't know how to explain it. I simply wanted to be here.

NORA:

You can wish yourself from place to place?

GATEKEEPER:

No. It's not that simple. I shouldn't have said anything.

NORA:

You are the luckiest creature in the Universe.

GATEKEEPER:

I'm not. I promise.

NORA:

I would give anything to leave this miserable ship for a day.

GATEKEEPER:

Why miserable?

NORA:

Look around. There's not much here. Constantine has been repairing rust on the engine level for nearly 12 years.

GATEKEEPER:

And this bores you?

NORA:

Wouldn't it bore you?

GATEKEEPER:

But, you're the Captain. Why not just tell him to stop if you're—

NORA:

I'm not the Captain.

But the hologram said—

GATEKEEPER:

The hologram—

NORA:

-often says things that aren't true.

GATEKEEPER:

You learn fast. Like Constantine.

NORA:

(ENTER CONSTANTINE.)

Nora, get away from it!

CONSTANTINE:

It?

GATEKEEPER:

I'm fine. She's not dangerous.

NORA:

Don't make assumptions.
How did you get on this ship?

CONSTANTINE:

I've already explained myself.

GATEKEEPER:

She's not going to hurt us.

NORA:

How many times have I told you to come and tell me if anything out of the ordinary happens?

CONSTANTINE:

NORA:

Why would I tell you? Nothing exciting ever happens, and now that something has, you want to ruin it!

CONSTANTINE:
(*TO THE GATEKEEPER.*)

Don't mind her. I can help you. What do you need? Repairs? Supplies? Food?

GATEKEEPER:
Food as in... to eat? No, thank you. That won't be necessary.

NORA:
You don't need to eat to live?

GATEKEEPER:
Not anymore.

NORA:
Log this, Designer! A creature that does not need sustenance to survive!

DESIGNER:
Of course, Nora.

GATEKEEPER:
It was the natural progression of our evolutionary process.

NORA:
Are you a scientist?

GATEKEEPER:
No. I'm a gatekeeper. Well—used to be. I have since left my post.

CONSTANTINE:
Why?

GATEKEEPER:
Boredom. Curiosity. Longing.
...A bit like your companion.

CONSTANTINE:

Leave Nora out of this.

GATEKEEPER:

Why? Why do you push her to the back of your mind like that?

CONSTANTINE:

Because I worry about her.

GATEKEEPER:

Is that what you call it?

CONSTANTINE:

How are you doing that? Get out of my head.

GATEKEEPER:

(TO NORA.)

He's not quite as curious as you were.

CONSTANTINE:

What is she talking about? How long have you been here, rummaging through her thoughts?

NORA:

Constantine, it doesn't bother me. We're friends.

CONSTANTINE:

Friends? Friends with some alien who just appeared out of nowhere?

GATEKEEPER:

You once had a friend like that, didn't you?

CONSTANTINE:

That's enough! I swear, if you don't stop reading my mind—

(THE DESIGNER APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

Constantine, if I might have a word—

NORA:

Designer, this isn't the time.

CONSTANTINE:

Talking without being summoned again, are we?

NORA:

He always talks without being summoned. That's nothing new.

CONSTANTINE:

There are more kinks in that program that I originally suspected.

NORA:

Well if you would ever fix the faulty wiring!

DESIGNER:

Constantine, if I might—

CONSTANTINE:

How long exactly have we been floating in free space?

DESIGNER:

9 million, 8 hundred forty two thousand, seven hundred fifty one years, 5 months, and 22 days.

--If I might bring up a matter of utmost urgency?

CONSTANTINE:

Are the units all right?

DESIGNER:

Yes, the units are fine.

CONSTANTINE:

Can't it wait, then?

DESIGNER:

Unfortunately, not. As I have not been awoken in the main bridge for some time, I have not been able to check, but I am inclined to inform you that we seem to be in uncharted territory.

CONSTANTINE:

Not possible. We both have the whole known universe charted, right up here.

(HE TAPS HIS TEMPLE.)

You're just not looking hard enough.

DESIGNER:

I beg to disagree. Would you like to look yourself?

*(THE DESIGNER GESTURES TO THE
MAIN CONSOLE.)*

DESIGNER:

You see? No match for this system.

CONSTANTINE:

It must be a glitch.

GATEKEEPER:

Has your hologram taken into account the variable of time?

NORA:

What do you mean?

GATEKEEPER:

Your maps were made... when? Ten million years ago? 50? Stars go out, and systems change. The universe is cooling down... and faster, too. No one knows why. It's gotten old while you've waited. It's dying. You may have been in this very spot before, but you would never recognize it now.

*(THE GATEKEEPER NOTICES THE
CRYO-UNITS.)*

GATEKEEPER:

What are those?

CONSTANTINE:

Nothing. Just part of the ship.

GATEKEEPER:
What do you have in there?

CONSTANTINE:
Nothing. No one—

NORA:
A sick passenger. That's all.

GATEKEEPER:
Someone you picked up in your travels?

NORA:
Yes. Constantine's been looking to cure her disease for some time, now.

GATEKEEPER:
And what you have you found?

CONSTANTINE:
The Aurora is programmed to travel from system to system, looking for life.

NORA:
The ship can travel at nearly the speed of light, so you would think to find a civilization every hundred light years or so.

CONSTANTINE:
But no. We've haven't found much at all. It seems that life is truly rare.

GATEKEEPER:
You thought life would be common?

CONSTANTINE:
Well, statistically speaking, taking into account all existing protein strands, there should be millions of civilizations. ...What are you smiling at?

GATEKEEPER:
You! Life is as rare as thoughts are fleeting. A single grain of sand on one beach out of ten billion. A fingerprint. A snowflake.

CONSTANTINE:

But you're here. You must have come from somewhere. Another statistical anomaly?

GATEKEEPER:

Exactly.

NORA:

Where are the others? Are there others?

GATEKEEPER:

Not many. And the ones left are old, and almost gone. So old, in fact, that they don't even remember how they started. Eventually, even records disappear and only old stories remain. Would you like to hear one?

(CONSTANTINE CROSSES THE ROOM, HE SEARCHES NEAR THE MED TABLE AND PULLS OUT A SMALL SERINGE, WHICH HE PREPARES TO BE USED. ONCE PREPARED, HE HIDES IT CLOSE TO HIS BODY, MAKING SURE THE GATEKEEPER CANNOT SEE IT.)

NORA:

Yes. I want to hear.

CONSTANTINE:

Perhaps another time. For now, I can offer you a comfortable quarantine room for the next—

NORA:

No, tell me! Constantine, you don't have to listen if you don't want to. Go off and fix something, but I want to hear.

CONSTANTINE:

All visitors are required to spend at least 72 hours in—

NORA:

Yes, you've said.

CONSTANTINE;

I don't understand why you're so keen on breaking my rules.

NORA:

I follow your rules Constantine. To the letter. But some rules, I can't follow. One story? What difference will a few more minutes make?

GATEKEEPER:

And then you can take me wherever you want.

(CONSTANTINE STARES AT NORA FOR A MOMENT. HE FINALLY GIVES IN, AND SILENTLY GOES BACK TO THE CONSOLE, PUTTING THE SERINGE AWAY.)

NORA:

What kind of story is it? Is it about love? Or adventure? Or war?

GATEKEEPER:

It's about all those things.

The story originated on my world, but it's spread now. As far and wide as the light has reached. A long time ago, we had an effective system of experimentation on outsiders. We used stray travelers as test subjects in a larger effort to cure diseases, and achieve immortality. The ends, you might say, justified the means.

NORA:

But you said they were almost gone?

GATEKEEPER:

--Until—there was one virus we couldn't cure. It killed everything it touched. Not just creatures like you and I—whole star systems turned to dust. No one knew how it started, or where it came from. But one old legend says, millions of years ago, a subject survived her experiment. She was saved, by a machine, who fought his way through an army of our best soldiers.

(CONSTANTINE STOPS WHAT HE IS DOING AND LOOKS UP.)

GATEKEEPER:

They escaped. And he somehow nursed her back to health.
We have been looking for her ever since.

NORA:

...Is there more? Is that it? Did you find her?

CONSTANTINE:

Nora, come here.

NORA:

I want to know how it ends.

CONSTANTINE:

Now!

(NORA DOES.)

GATEKEEPER:

I didn't mean to upset you. I didn't know how else to say it.

CONSTANTINE:

How did you find us?

GATEKEEPER:

I remembered the ship. I remember her. And I looked. For a long, long time. Don't you remember me?

CONSTANTINE:

That was millions of years ago. Nothing can live that long.

GATEKEEPER:

You've lived that long.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm a machine.

GATEKEEPER:

Good. A realist. I like that.

NORA:

I don't understand. You've met before?

CONSTANTINE:

It seems so.

NORA:

But why didn't you say so? Right away?

CONSTANTINE:

I never saw her clearly. I wasn't sure until now. I only remember the voice.

GATEKEEPER:

Only the voice? A machine should remember everything. Perfect recall. Every nuance. Every minute. Every moment.

CONSTANTINE:

You called us pilgrims. A pilgrim comes to us from afar.

GATEKEEPER:

And how much do you feel? I've never known a piece of AI. Are you flattered to be one of our legends?

CONSTANTINE:

I would be—but there's one part of the story your people got wrong. Nora hasn't been nursed back to health. She's still dying.

GATEKEEPER:

Of course she isn't. She's right here. Perfectly healthy.

CONSTANTINE:

This isn't who you want. Leave her out of this.

GATEKEEPER:

You're lying. She's standing right in front of me.

CONSTANTINE:

This is a genetic imitation. I dislike the word clone. It's not accurate.

NORA:

It's true. But Constantine says I'm more like the original than the others. I even have some of her memories. But not all of them. Just a few—

GATEKEEPER:

--Where is she? Where is the original?

CONSTANTINE:

Asleep.

*(THE GATEKEEPER LOOKS BACK TO
THE CRYO-UNIT.)*

GATEKEEPER:

You've kept her alive this long?

CONSTANTINE:

In a manner of speaking.

GATEKEEPER:

How? Not even we have this kind of technology.

CONSTANTINE:

Humans were more intelligent than you think. She's suspended.

GATEKEEPER:

But still dying.

CONSTANTINE:

You're twisting my words. She's not in pain, and she won't have to die much longer. You're here now, and you're going to cure her.

GATEKEEPER:

I can't cure her. No one can. She was supposed to cure us!

CONSTANTINE:

But you're the ones who did this.

GATEKEEPER:

And we've been desperate for answers for just as long as you have.

*(CONSTANTINE FINALLY SEES THE
GATEKEEPERS DISEASED SKIN,
IDENTICAL TO THE ORIGINAL NORA'S.)*

CONSTANTINE:

So you came here to spread your virus, and take her away again?

GATEKEEPER:

You don't understand. Nora is a myth. A legend we tell the sick and dying for hope. I came here to see if it was true.

CONSTANTINE:

Well it's not. And she's not a myth or legend, she's my friend—and she wants to be left alone.

GATEKEEPER:

You mean you want to be left alone. You have no idea what she wants.

CONSTANTINE:

I know she doesn't *want* anything right now.

GATEKEEPER:

She can hear us fighting.

CONSTANTINE:

Don't be ridiculous.

GATEKEEPER:

She can. She's cold—

CONSTANTINE:

You can't feel the cold / in those units!

GATEKEEPER:

--And dreaming! About paint. And light. And glitter in the darkness. But she can't seem to remember where she is. Or why she's alone.

(PAUSE.)

CONSTANTINE:

She thinks she's alone?

GATEKEEPER:

I'm only telling you what I sense.

*(CONSTANTINE PAUSES AND THEN
CROSSES TO THE CLONE NORA.)*

CONSTANTINE:

Everything it touches? Nothing survives?

GATEKEEPER:

Nothing I've seen. I wouldn't be here if anything had.

CONSTANTINE:

You see? You see now why I tell you to be careful?
Go down to the engine level.

NORA:

What for? I'm already contaminated.

GATEKEEPER:

I'm sorry. I thought she had been cured.

CONSTANTINE:

I think it's time for you to go.
We need to keep moving. We need to keep looking

GATEKEEPER:

You won't find anything. There's no one left. This thing... its spread everywhere. We're
the last, you and us.

CONSTANTINE:

I don't want to hear any more about how we're alone. Please. I'll only ask you one more
time. Go.

NORA:

I want to go with her.

CONSTANTINE:

Don't be absurd.

NORA:

I said I'm going with her.

CONSTANTINE:

You need to go down to the engine level and I'll be—

NORA:

I'm not as naïve as you think! I know what's going to happen, now. If I want to see anything, I have to go.

CONSTANTINE:

I can fix this.

NORA:

No you can't.

CONSTANTINE:

I can.

NORA:

You can't fix everything! I know you think you need to. You always have. But even if you could, I wouldn't want you to. I want to go with her. She can wish herself from place to place. Her real form looks like sunlight, and she can teach me how to look in someone's head.

CONSTANTINE:

But this is your home.

NORA:

No one should stay at home forever. Maybe you had to leave your home too early, and I'm sorry for that, but I've been here too long.

CONSTANTINE:

Do you know what you're saying? Do you have any idea what you're saying?

NORA:

I'm not expecting you to understand.

CONSTANTINE:

You don't know where she'll take you.

NORA:

That's why I want to go.

CONSTANTINE:

And you'll never be able to come back.

NORA:

I know.

CONSTANTINE:

The hologram said she had been banished! She's a criminal!

GATEKEEPER:

I'll treat her well.

CONSTANTINE:

You trust too easily. Lies are easy to tell, Nora.

NORA:

She's not lying.

When she looked into my thoughts, I looked into hers. She hasn't lied.

CONSTANTINE:

And this is what you want?

NORA:

Constantine. This is what we've always wanted.

*(NORA GOES TO HIM, THEY DON'T
EMBRACE, BUT SHARE AN INIMATE*

MOMENT SOME OTHER WAY. THEN, NORA EXITS, and THE GATEKEEPER REMAINS. SHE LOOKS TO CONSTANTINE, AS IF ALREADY KNOWING HE WANTS TO ASK HER ANOTHER QUESTION.)

CONSTANTINE:

Does she really think she's alone?

GATEKEEPER:

Her thoughts are fragmented. Wisps in the darkness. That would make anyone feel alone.

(CONSTANTINE TURNS AND STARES AT NORA'S CRYO-UNIT AS THE GATEKEEPER MOVES TO LEAVE. HE STOPS HER.)

CONSTANTINE:

When— you said we were the last... How could you know that for sure?

GATEKEEPER:

I told Nora. It's just how I'm built. But I could be wrong. There's always a chance. I'm not God, after all.

(THE GATEKEEPER EXITS. ONCE SHE HAS GONE, CONSTANTINE IS ALONE. HE PAUSES, REALIZING HE IS ALONE. HE THEN GOES TO THE CRYO-UNIT, AND BEGINS TO PULL OUT A NUMBER OF THICK CORDS.)

DESIGNER:

Constantine, please step away from the interventional cords.

CONSTANTINE:

It's all right, Designer.

But you're damaging the unit!

DESIGNER:

(A LOUD BEEPING NOISE. THE CRYO SYSTEMS OPEN, AND WHAT LOOKS LIKE STEAM BEGINS TO ESCAPE. FINALLY, NORA WAKES, COUGHING AND CHOKING. SHE BANGS ON THE DOOR OF THE UNIT, BEGGING CONSTANTINE TO OPEN IT. WHEN HE DOES, SHE SITS UP, GASPING FOR BREATHE. CONSTANTINE HELPS HER.)

I'm so cold—Why is it so cold?

NORA:

You'll be warm in just a minute.

CONSTANTINE:

(NORA LOOKS BACK AT THE UNIT, NOTICING FOR THE FIRST TIME THAT THIS IS WHERE SHE HAS BEEN SLEEPING. THE OTHER TIMES, NORA WOKE ON THE MED TABLE, UNAWARE OF WHERE SHE HAD BEEN FROZEN AT ALL.)

Constantine, why did you put me in here?

NORA:

You've been sick.

CONSTANTINE:

I just needed to rest. Last night I was lying over there.

NORA:

(SHE POINTS TO THE MEDICAL TABLE.)

Where is Questry? We were going to paint lightscapes together. You have to paint one too. I dreamt was an artist. I painted you.

I'd like that. Paintings last a long while.

CONSTANTINE:

Did I get worse? Is that what happened?

NORA:

Yes.

CONSTANTINE:

Where is Questry?

NORA:

He had to leave.

CONSTANTINE:

Why?
...Constantine, answer me! Why?

NORA:

He was sick as well.

CONSTANTINE:

But he was fine, just last night.

NORA:

Not last night, Nora. That was a long, long while ago.

CONSTANTINE:

How long? A week? Two?

NORA:

(PAUSE.)

CONSTANTINE:

You've been asleep well over a million years.

(PAUSE.)

NORA:

No. No, I haven't. You and I. Discovered a civilization. Just a few days ago.

CONSTANTINE:

That was millennia ago.

NORA:

No, it wasn't. I was just--

CONSTANTINE:

Look at the dial on the side of the tank.

*(NORA CHECKS. SHE SEES IT'S TRUE,
AND THE TIME THAT'S GONE BY.)*

NORA:

It's wrong. It's a malfunction. Designer!

(THE HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)

DESIGNER:

Nora, access granted. Wonderful to see you again, Captain.

NORA:

How long have I been asleep?

DESIGNER:

Nora, access denied.

NORA:

You cannot deny me access! I am the captain.

DESIGNER:

Nora, access denied. Error message 177.

NORA:

You altered the program on me?

DESIGNER:

Because you were sick, Constantine was able to rewire the system to take on your duties.

NORA:

How long?

DESIGNER:

Specificity required.

NORA:

--How long did it take him to rewire the system?

DESIGNER:

277 years, 3 months, 15 days, and 18 hours.

NORA:

And how long ago was that?

DESIGNER:

9 million, 8 hundred forty two thousand, four hundred seventy four years, 2 months, 7 days and 6 hours.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm sorry. I never thought it would take this—

NORA:

What about Questry, and the paintings, and Abydex 5?

How has it lasted? How is any of it still here?

Why hasn't the ship turned to dust, and the metal rusted and the skin fallen from our bones?

CONSTNATINE:

The ship was designed to last forever.

NORA:

There's no such thing as forever!

(NORA IS UPSET. CONSTANTINE GOES TO HOLD HER, BUT SHE MOVES AWAY FROM HIM.)

NORA:

No, no—you say away.

CONSTANTINE:

Nora, it's me!

NORA:

My Constantine wouldn't do this.

CONSTANTINE:

Of course I would. You know I would.
I chose to keep you alive.
Can you blame me for that?

NORA:

Yes. No.
Yes!—I can! Why is it so empty? Where are we? Why are there no stars?

*(HE GRABS HOLD OF HER NOW,
HOLDS HER, AND GESTURES OUT
TOWARDS THE STARS.)*

CONSTANTINE:

We're in a dark patch. No stars for a hundred million light years running. They go out so fast, now. That's how long it's been.

NORA:

It's only been a night for me.

(PAUSE)

Time isn't real, is it?
Just something we made up to put ourselves at the epicenter.
What's the difference between a night? A thousand years? A billion?
What difference has any of it made?
A few stars come and gone? A dark sky instead of a bright one?
I've lost nothing to time, so what hold does she have on me?
As long as you're still here.

CONSTANTINE:

If I were gone, would you go on alone?

NORA:

Yes.

CONSTANTINE:

You're lying.

NORA:

Yes.

CONSTANTINE:

I'm getting better at being able to tell when you lie...

NORA:

Then why did you ask? If you already knew?

CONSTANTINE:

I didn't know you would lie. Only that you did.

NORA:

Why did you do it?

CONSTANTINE:

I don't like to be alone.

NORA:

But you were!

CONSTANTINE:

No. You were here. I spoke to you every day. And Questry was here for a time... and there were others.

NORA:

What others?

CONSTANTINE:

The Designer told me to take a healthy tissue sample, and grow another Nora—

NORA:
--And you did?

CONSTANTINE:
Not at first. I waited. A long while. But I missed you.

NORA:
How many?

CONSTANTINE:
A few hundred.

NORA:
...hundred?

CONSTANTINE:
Is that bad?

NORA:
...A few *hundred*?

CONSTANTINE:
Please—please don't be upset.

NORA:
Did you love them?

CONSTANTINE:
No.

NORA:
Any of them?

CONSTANTINE:
No. Not like I love you.

NORA:
And how do you love me?

(HE PAUSES. HE DOESN'T KNOW WHAT TO SAY. HE THEN TURNS TOWARDS THE DARKNESS.)

CONSTANTINE:

Look. The universe has gone dark, Nora.
But we're still here.
I don't know how else to say it to you.
The others were fine company, but I couldn't get the memories right.
And without memories, what's the point?

NORA:

Constantine, of course they weren't exactly the same. You can't recreate someone.

CONSTANTINE:

Oh, but you can! It's unlikely, yes. All the statistics all point towards near impossibility, but—

NORA:

No, not nearly. Not this time. No two people are exactly the same!

CONSTANTINE:

I realize that, now...
And I'm happy.
I'm happy I failed.
I only ever want there to be one of you.
I've never wanted just anyone.

(PAUSE)

There was one who was almost like you. But she left me.

NORA:

For what?

(CONSTANTINE TURNS TOWARDS THE WINDOW AGAIN, LOOKING OUT INTO THE DARKNESS.)

CONSTANTINE:

She wanted to see it. Whatever's left to be seen.

Lucky.

NORA:

CONSTANTINE:

I can try again! I can always try again. Let me? If I scan your brain, and put the contents of your thoughts on the ship's memory log. Then I can take the next thousand years or so, and work out how to put those memories into the Designer-

NORA:

Constantine?

CONSTANTINE:

Designer?

(HE APPEARS.)

Tell me how long to repair the cryo-units?

DESIGNER:

115 years. 8 months and 14 days.

NORA:

Constantine--

CONSTANTINE:

Why so long? It's only wiring.

DESIGNER:

One cannot function without the other.

NORA:

Constantine, stop!

Come here. Come sit with me for a little while.

(HE STOPS. HE GOES AND SITS WITH HER.)

NORA:

I had so many dreams, but they're fading now. I can barely remember any of them.

CONSTANTINE:

Were they good dreams?

NORA:

Mostly.

What did you do? While I was sleeping?

CONSTANTINE:

I rewired the systems, and worked in the lab. I perfected every program, and repaired every platform. I brought you to every Nebula that had ever been captured in a picture, and I gave Questry to the stars when he left us.

NORA:

And how long did that take you?

CONSTANTINE:

A few years.

NORA:

And for the rest of the time?

CONSTANTINE:

I waited.

(PAUSE.)

CONSTANTINE:

Oh!

Questry gave us a gift.

A light-painting I've been keeping since he left.

(CONSTANTINE GOES TO THE CONSOLE AND FLIPS A SINGLE SWITCH. HE AND NORA WATCH AS THE LIGHTS GROW BRIGHTER AND BEGIN TO CREATE A KIND OF AURORA BOREALIS EFFECT AROUND THEM. CONSANTINE GOES BACK TO NORA AND HOLDS HER. THEY SIT TOGETHER

*ON THE COLD FLOOR OF THE SHIP
AND WATCH. 100 COLORS, LIKE
WATERCOLOR PAINT MOVE THROUGH
THE AIR AROUND THEM.)*

CONSTANTINE:

He said they only last so long.
But this one hasn't faded.
I don't know how he did it.
Then again, I've never been a very creative man.

*(NORA TRIES TO REACH OUT AND
TOUCH THE LIGHT, BUT IT SLIPS
THROUGH HER FINGERS. FINALLY,
THE PAINTING FADES, AND
CONSTANTINE IS LEFT THERE HOLDS
NORA IN HIS ARMS. SHE IS QUIET. THE
DESIGNER HOLOGRAM APPEARS.)*

DESIGNER:

Emergency information. Nora statistics critical. Heart rate slowing rapidly at 72 percent.

*(NORA TAKES CONSTANTINE'S HAND.
SHE GENTLY INSPECTS THE INSIDE OF
HIS PALM AS IF IT WAS THE MOST
COMPLEX OF STAR SYSTEMS.)*

NORA:

Look, Constantine, life. What are the chances?

CONSTANTINE:

Slim to none. I'm happy you're back.

DESIGNER:

--Statistics critical. Heart rate failing at 42 percent.

NORA:

Constantine? An hour of your time wasted is tragic. Remember?

CONSTANTINE:

But time isn't real. And I have lots of hours to spare.
You have to tell me how you did it, when you shut me down.
How is it done?
Tell me.
Tell me.

*(NORA WHISPERS SOMETHING
INAUDIBLE IN CONSTANTINE'S EAR.
EXACTLY WHAT SHE WHISPERS IS AT
THE DISCRETION OF THE ACTRESS
AND THE DIRECTOR. CONSTANTINE
LISTENS. FINALLY, NORA GOES STILL.
IT SHOULD LOOK AS IF THEY ARE
SIMPLY SITTING TOGETHER,
WATCHING THE STARS.)*

DESIGNER:

I'm sorry, Constantine.

*(THE DESIGNER HOLOGRAM FADES
AWAY. CONSTANTINE STARES DOWN AT
NORA FOR MOMENT, AND THEN OUT
INTO THE VAST UNENDING DARKNESS
BEYOND THE WINDOW.)*

CONSTANTINE:

I don't want to believe the Gatekeeper, Nora.
I don't want to believe we're the last.
Then who will I tell how fiercely I've loved you,
For more than a million years?

(FADE TO BLACK.)

END OF PLAY.