

A Thought I Took for Maudlin

By Oliver Higgins

Characters:

Thomas O'Bedlam

Boy

Girl

Carter

Regan

Lights up.

Thomas Bedlam, A wild, bedraggled looking homeless man stands on stage. In his hand is a fishing rod, dangling from the edge of the stage, into a river. The fishing rod has a number of toys hanging from it: A small crown, a train, a clock, a car, a naked Barbie and a clothed action man. He addresses his lines through the audience to the city around him.

Thom: Hello? Anyone home? Come on you bastard I know you're out there! Tonight's the night!
Tom O'Bedlam's calling you out!

He casts his line out into the river in front of him.

Thom O'Bedlam: Come on, let's have a bite for mad old tommy! A gift for the man cursed to be led through these fires and flames! Let's have you, you fiend! Just a sight of you'll set my loins burning!

A woman walk on stage behind Thom, she's sombre. As she walks behind him Tom shivers.

Thom O'Bedlam: Ah. Hello. I didn't mean you.

Girl: Fishing again, are you?

Thom O'Bedlam: Protecting my kingdom is my duty.

Girl: Oh, you've got a kingdom now, have you? Here I was thinking you were just some old homeless man shouting at a canal.

Thom: Though I'm on my own, I know I'm not alone. There's a billion tiny creatures who call my body their home.

Girl: Very funny. You're making an awful racket, though. Anyone who didn't know you might think you were mad.

Thom: Sometimes looking mad is the best way to avoid being seen. It can make the harmless look deadly, and the harmful...

Pause

Thom O'Bedlam: Tell me something. Are you actually here?

Girl: Yeah. Of course I am. What?

Thom O'Bedlam: Now?

Girl: ha-ha no, last week. Yes I'm here.

Thom: Why?

Girl: what's up with you? I just came down to see you, are you alright? Have a chat and stuff. Am I not allowed to have friends?

Thom O'Bedlam: Yes. Of Course.

Girl: You look like you've seen a ghost tom.

Thom: You deserve a medal.

The girl takes off and throws him a bracelet from her wrist.

Girl: Don't get sarcastic with me. Here. Does that feel real enough, your majesty?

Tom catches the necklace, fingers it gingerly.

Thom: Emperor of London, at your service.

Girl: Ah, that's what you're calling yourself these days. Last time I was down here you claimed to be 'Feels Goodman; the inventor of the ice-cube tray'. And then the time before that you were 'Master Stygian Lunchbox, bob Marley's long lost brother'. Emperor of London. Must be nice to have a fancy title like that.

Thom: Why? Don't you have one?

Girl: No. Well, nothing like that.

The girl touches her eye, it is bruised.

Thom: They've been at you again, haven't they?

Thom raises his hand as if aiming a Handgun.

Thom: They creep up on you. Don't let you sleep. They make you afraid. Make you nervous, have you biting your nails and grinding your teeth and there's nothing anyone can do it stop it. Is there?

Girl: No.

Thom: But one of these days, someone's going to silence them. Someone's going to stop them. Set you free of all that. Someone will come and give you what you deserve.

Girl: Yeah. I wish they would. A guy offered me a gun the other day. Wish I'd taken it. Easy as that, if they try and come near me again, just knock their fucking heads off.

Thom: They'd never bother you again. One shot.

Pause. Thom holds this pose for several seconds.

Thom: Blam. I never condone killing, but these men-

Thom glances at the girl. Her eyes are firmly fixed on the floor.

Thom O'Bedlam: I'm sorry I didn't mean to... Rotten Bastards

Girl: (To Thom) you tried darling.

Thom: Sorry?

Girl: They're vicious bastards. One day I they'll kill me I swear.

Thom: That's only if someone lets them. And nobody's about to do that, are they?

Girl: Thanks. You're a sweetie. Listen, it'll be light in a few hours, any chance I could stay here for a bit? I'm knackered and these heels are way too small for me. Any idea how hard it is to get size 12 high heels?

Thom: For a little while. Here, where's that bracelet?

Boy enters. He's young, around late teens. He's quite scruffy.

Boy: Am I interrupting something?

Girl: Keep it. Give it back to me later. Night Thom.

The Girl kisses Thom on the cheek. He smiles. She makes her way over to Thom's things and wraps herself up in his stuff to settle down to sleep.

Thomas: No, Nothing at all, nothing at all. Just... echoes. Nothing but echoes.

Boy: Were you talking to someone?

Thomas: Me? No. Yes. I was talking, my boy, to my city. As you know, I am the Emperor of London, The very lord of Limehouse, king of Cockneys, prince of the Pearlies. I talk, and the city listens. And sometimes, when it's in the mood, it responds.

Boy: Yeah, whatever. That's mostly just people shouting at you from windows.

Thom: It speaks in lots of ways. The whisper of wind through the trees, the thunder of hidden train cars moving to and fro between their subterranean lairs... It can speak loudly or softly. One just needs to know how to listen.

Boy: Oh right.

Pause

Boy: How's the conversation? Any good.

Thom: Sometimes beautiful. Sometimes Harrowing.

Boy: Here I was thinking you were talking to yourself.

Thom: Ha! Maybe I was. Sometimes I find it's the only way to get a decent conversation.

Boy: Probably right. How is the Royalty Business?

Thom: Can't complain. The citizens are behaving, crown jewels are in place. My queen hangs loose and high in the sky. She's full tonight.

Pause. Thom points at the night sky.

Boy: it's an alright night isn't it?

Thom: Seen worse.

Boy: Yeah. Same.

Thom: What brings you down here then?

Boy: What do I always come down here for?

Thom: Why didn't you say so, my boy? I'll see what's in the palace reserve.

Thom springs into life. He hands his fishing rod to the boy, ensuring he has a good grip.

Thom: Keep it straight, look down the barrel, and don't blink.

Boy: I know, I know.

The boy tries to stop himself from blinking, following the instructions. Thom moves towards a pile of rubbish at the back of the stage. He wakes up the girl from earlier, pulling her to her feet.

Boy: Hurry up will you! I don't like holding this thing. I don't know where it's been.

Thom: (To girl) Steady.

Boy: yeah I know, just hurry up.

Girl: Thanks Thom.

The girl kisses Thom on the cheek and exits. Thom moves towards the rubbish pile again, and digs into it to find a large trunk. He opens the trunk and begins digging through the contents.

Thom: What sort of thing are you looking for then? Uppers? Downers? Sidewinders? Diagonal showstoppers?

Boy: I figured I might try some of them mushrooms if you've still got them?

Thom: Mmm, Good choice, good choice.

Thom begins throwing bag after bag of mushrooms at the boy's feet, whilst listing them off. Occasionally he hesitates before deciding not to take them out.

Thom: These ones will make you smaller, these ones will make you larger. These ones will show you truth, whereas these ones will show you lies. These ones will knock the wind out of you for days, have you completely catatonic locked in true ontic bliss. These only grow in the stygian depths of the abandoned sewer tunnels, vast and cyclopean that lie inaccessible to all except those who still remember how to navigate them.

Boy: Does that mean they're covered in shit?

Thom: (Gravely) Yes. They give you horrible diarrhoea. I don't suppose they're your sort of thing. What are you after?

Boy: Just want something that feels nice, really.

Thom looks a bit disappointed. He fishes out a final bag.

Thom: Oh. Well you could have said. Here.

Boy: Thanks, how much do I owe you?

Thom: First thing's first. Any food for me?

Boy: Oh yeah, sorry.

The boy chucks him a Tesco bag from his pocket. Thom rifles through it.

Thom: Oh fantastic! 2 Corned beef sandwiches and a fruit club. The breakfast of champions.

Boy: Calm down mate, it's a fucking packed lunch.

Thom: Mind your mouth. You'll get hungry at school not eating like that.

Boy: I didn't go to school today. School's well shit. They don't teach you anything good.

Thom: Hmm? Well, what do you want to learn?

Boy: I dunno. How to tell if people are lying, and that. Or how to be funny, or what's going on in someone's mind, or what to say to someone who's dying, or what to do if your house is burning down, or how to check whether milk is out of date without smelling it, or, like, what to do if a spider lays eggs in your arm, and people keep saying to you 'get it checked out man, get it checked out', and you think it's going to be ok because nobody's ever told you in school that probably you should have got it checked out ages ago.

Thom: Has that ever happened to you?

Boy: No. Not yet, but it's only a matter of time. Most of all, though, they don't teach you who you are. Like who you really are. They'll tell you what you can be, and maybe even what you should be, but nobody's got any idea what you actually are.

Thom: You got any ideas?

Pause.

Boy: I'm a human. I'm a boy. And I spend a lot of time with homeless geezers. Dunno what else. How much do I owe you for that?

Thom: A fiver

Boy: I'll give you a tenner for two

Thom: Why, are you doing it with someone else?

Boy: No. Just want something a bit stronger than last time.

Thom: Hmm... No. you'll have one.

Boy: But-

Thom: Or I can do you one for a tenner?

Boy: Alright, fine, give me one you old fucker.

Thom hands him one from the bag, and they exchange money.

Thom: Can't have you eating up all the palace's reserves, can we?

Boy: suppose not. You can't catch much food with this thing, why don't you get some real bait instead of all these dodgy toys?

Thom snatches the rod from the Boy, reeling it in.

Thom: It's not for catching anything. It's a weapon.

Boy: Against what? Curious mermaids?

Thom: These waters run throughout this whole city, they're its veins, its arteries. This river is the lifeblood of this place. But it's sick. Everyone in this city is being infected by the sickness without even knowing. What good's a king without a country? Somebody needs to fight it.

Boy: Looks alright to me. How'd you use that as a weapon?

Thom: The city runs on certain energies, to contact it, I need to speak its language.

He plays with the toys attached to the line.

Thom: Power, transport, time, the naked maiden and the noble breadwinner. These put me in touch with the city, allow me to move in it. You see, you can't see the infection, it's invisible. You can put it under any microscope you like, you'd never find it. But this... this makes me invisible too.

Boy: My arse it does, I can see you clear as day.

Thom: Only because I want you to.

Pause

Boy: If you're that invested in it, perhaps you should buy a better one. This looks like it's had it.

Thom: Ah, I was saving up for something. Rather a different sort of weapon this time.

Pause

Boy: Crabbing line, is it?

Thom: Something like that.

Boy: Well you might actually catch something with that, if you're lucky. I'd better be getting off.

Thom: Of course. Run along boy! Enjoy! Frolic!

The boy goes to leave, but as he is walking away he spots a small bracelet on the ground. He bends down to pick it up.

Boy: This yours?

Thom: Huh?

Boy: This your bracelet? One of your... Crown jewels or something?

Thom: Where'd you find that?

Boy: Down here in the dirt. Looks valuable.

Thom: I wager it was, to someone. And I think I know who.

Boy: Who?

Thom: It's not a story for kiddos, it'll have your head full of bad dreams and bad people. It won't be on my head to poison your mind.

Boy: Come off it, my whole generation have poisoned minds, you ever been on the internet?

Thom: The interwhat? I don't know who that is, but whoever he is he should be ashamed of himself. And I won't follow his example.

Boy: Oh come on, you've just sold me a bag of weapons grade hallucinogens, now you're telling me your some sort of advocate of mental health?

Pause. Thom Visibly considers this. As he speaks the woman from earlier reappears on stage behind him. Gradually the boy and girl assume similar positions sat at the front of the stage.

Thom: There was a girl. No... a woman. She used to come visit me down here.

Boy: A love interest?

Thom: No, no. Nothing like that. She wasn't quite...

Boy: Lesbian then?

Thom: No! Far from it. You see... she was born a man-

Boy: Oh what!?! I thought you said she was a girl!

Thom: She was.

Boy: I understand why you didn't want to tell me now!

Thom: She had the soul of a Woman. And a beautiful one at that. Had the stars been aligned differently on the day of her conception she would have made a lovely husband or wife for someone.

As it was, though, Mars was in Leo, square to Neptune in Scorpio. Mars, weakened as he was, surrendered to dominant Neptune, who nurtures the feminine intuition. But Neptune is as fickle as the seas, and yearns for transformation, and as such he got his wish. From there she had Eros in Sagittarius, a masculine sign, being square to both Uranus in feminine Virgo and Chiron in feminine

Pisces. The stars can be cruel. It's little wonder her biology tugged at her from all sides. She was doomed from the start. Rotten Bastards.

Boy: Fucking poofs.

The boy and girl are now sat beside each other on the edge of the stage. Initially boy doesn't feel/notice Girl. Both boy and girl fail to notice the other one. Thom spies the girls face again, which catches him off guard. This exchange is an exact copy of earlier, except with boy added in.

Girl: (To Thom) You tried darling.

Thom: Sorry?

Boy: Was she at least convincing? Like, did she have all the ops and that? You can see them a mile off those fucking pedo-queers, walking about in high heels with their size 12 feet. Who are they fooling?

Girl: They're vicious bastards. One day they'll kill me I swear.

Thom: That's only if someone lets them. And nobody's about to do that, are they?

Girl: Thanks. You're a sweetie. Listen, it'll be light in a few hours, any chance I could stay here for a bit? I'm knackered and these heels are way too small for me. Any idea how hard it is to get size 12 high heels?

Boy: Well I'm not. Sounds like you're mates with one though.

Thom: For a little while. Here, where's that bracelet?

Boy: It's here mate. I've still got it.

The Boy turns his face around until Boy and Girl are face to face. They speak in unison:

Boy: Ain't half windy tonight, hey?

Girl: Keep it. Give it back to me later. Night Thom.

Pause. Girl repeats moves from earlier. Thom follows her with his gaze.

Boy: You ever feel like maybe someone just walked over your grave?

Pause.

Boy: Can you hear me?

Thom: Echoes my boy. The past, long dead, refusing to sleep. Walk these streets in the right mind-set and you'll uncover a million of them. Drunkenly stumble past a shop front and the symbols therein may take on strange significance all their own. A message from an elder god or ancient ancestor, long forgotten by the morning. If you feel in a strange disposition, take a walk and see what peculiar meanings are conveyed by the odd twisting of the church spires or the glowing effigies erected to unseen neon gods. Cardsacceptedhere or 24hoursexshow- What could they mean?

The city whispers across time, my boy. But get in the right mind-set, and all times are one, my boy. You are capable of seeing much more than you might be aware of.

Boy: Ghosts and that, yeah?

Pause

Thom: I prefer to think of them as space-time anomalies. When you're bored, time moves slower, yes? And when you are elated, it moves faster. Isn't time just a function of the observer's disposition? Could it be, then, that the fourth dimension is literally the human subconscious? I mean, look at me, what do you see?

Boy: A big smelly, Hairy Geezer.

Pause.

Thom: Ok... well, yes, and no. Well, yes. But what you're actually seeing is a meaningless picture of a... 'Geezer'. It's only the logical facilities of your perception that compare me with other humans' size, smell and hairiness, and all of your previous experiences to make a picture of a personality. Take time away from that, and all I am is a meaningless shape form that you have no frame of reference to compute.

Boy: You've been on these mushrooms again, haven't you?

Thom: If carrots let you see in the dark, why can't those mushrooms help me see in time?

Boy: You're a fucking loon.

Thom: Of course I am! That's half the fun! You don't think they'd let just anybody be king, do you? Consider this; the human mind is really nothing more than a computer- no a processor. A wonderful little spaceship allowing us to compute just enough context to allow the otherwise meaningless three dimensional reality to be combined with time, forming a 4 dimensional timeline of experience. The brain is little more than a time machine, propelling us forward through existence at the rate of 1 second per second.

Boy: You going to eat this fruit club or can I have it?

Thom: Huh? Oh... no. Have the corned beef. I've got big plans for that fruit club.

Boy: Suit yourself.

Thom: All this processing power, but what sort of stuff do we save in its memory? Meaningless old trinkets. Shitty gags from the backs of penguin rappers, or all those rude sounding road names from when we were kids. All those people we've kissed. All those people we've forgotten. We spend our whole lives filling this magnificent little cabinet with these little broken things and wonder why we never feel full. Doesn't that ever bother you?

Pause

Boy: What's your real name?

Thom: Thom. Thom O'Bedlam, Emperor of London. At your service.

Boy: No, your actual name.

Pause

Thom: Why?

Boy: I dunno, just always wondered. You been Thom O'Bedlam as of late, but when we first met you were... what was it?

Thom: I don't know. I've always been Thom.

Boy: No. It was something else, but even that wasn't your real name. What's your actual name?

Thom: Who says I need a real name?

Boy: Well you must've been given one, right?

Thom: I go by many names. Over the years I've been called a thousand things by a million different people, and all of them were my name. Some have called me James, others call me Jim. I've been both King Arthur, *and* his round table, and when I roamed the Spanish plains I was known as Don Quixote de la Mancha, but eventually I grew tired of that title, spending a brief and nebulous time as Prophet Malaclypse the Elder, before passing into my successor Malaclypse the younger. As I watched the first atomic bombs descend from those empty godless skies I knew finally, what I had been all along. I was Death, destroyer of worlds. I knew a man once who insisted on calling me Mr Spunky Mc-backpack, and I've been referred to as 'Smelly old bum' more times than I can remember. You call me Thom, but you can call me anything you want. Does that satisfy you?

Boy: No. Not really.

Pause

Boy: I remember! "Spartacus Hughes, the man with the Iron Toenails!" remember? You used to say you were working undercover with the Russians to weed out the homeless mafia.

Thom: Sounds far-fetched.

Boy: Yeah, it fucking was, but I don't believe you're the Emperor of London either. Come on I'm not going to spread it all over town-

Thom: Look. Names are for people who exist. They're for people who live and breathe, and have mortgages and bank accounts and file tax returns and secretly have nightmares where their teeth fall out every night. I don't have that. I inhabit this body, but really I'm only leasing it until it falls apart. I no more own a personality than I own this piece of ground I'm sitting on, and I certainly don't own that. No. I gave all of that up long ago, when I became invisible.

Boy: You keep saying you're invisible. You're not. You're as clear as day out in front of me, I can see you and I can smell you.

Thom: Yes. Anyone who wants to come down here can get as much of an eye-full of me as they want, that's not what makes me invisible. But people don't want to see me. Trust me, you'll probably walk past a hundred of me every day, without even seeing us. Because we don't want to be seen.

Every generation has their gods and demons. Before language they were the sun and the moon, then soon after the shaman, and the star man with the big mouth who they nailed to that cross. For years we had kings and queens and bureaucrats, until from the stygian depths of the collective human initiative sprung those great machines, the railways or the printing press, and suddenly our gods were bigger, more complex, more tangible and corporeal than we had ever imagined. Money changed hands, and suddenly we weren't really worshipping the man in the sky, or his flock anymore. Pray to the gods of the railways or stock exchanges and they might even favour you, if they feel like it. But the gods never stay still. The cities came last of all. And with it, its patron saints.

Boy: And? Who are they?

Thom: By day we might be your doctor, or your mechanic, or your fucking hairbrush, we just dust ourselves off, appear right where we left off, and you'd probably never bat an eye-lid. We're the invisible denizens of a city, crumbling under the weight of us. An unseen army of human plant matter growing like weeds from between the cracks of the paving slabs and shopping centres, and we're not even all human. Have you ever seen a stray cat strutting like a king through the streets in the night? Or two foxes howling like mad banshees, unheeding of the fever dreams of the sleeping citizens around them? We're all of those. I'm all of those. 'Good evening ladies and gentlemen, introducing the new gods of the city'. Pleasure to meet you.

Boy: You're just doing this to creep me out now aren't you?

Thom: Yes and no. But I bet you'll think twice before you kick the pigeons now won't you?

Boy: Yeah, too fucking right.

Pause

Boy: You never told me what happened to the poof.

Thom: Don't call her that!

Boy: You didn't seem to mind a minute ago. Come on don't keep us in suspense.

Pause

Thom: She wasn't like me. She didn't know how to hide. She didn't know how to blend in. She had some trouble with men. Two of them, one of them worse than the other. George Carter and Jack Reagan. They'd hound her and shout at her and-

Jack Regan and George Carter have entered. They're both thugs, but of the two Regan is more violent. They are dressed in exactly the way you'd expect television detectives to dress. They talk with typical fast cockney accents. The two crowd around the sleeping girl, and begin to poke and prod her.

Carter: Hello darling, who's this? Our favourite! Haven't seen you around these parts in a while!

Girl: What? Who's that?

Regan: Oh look. It's awake.

Girl: Oh God.

Carter: Aw don't sound so disappointed. You'll upset us, won't you?

Regan: Oh, I could just die. Nearly fancy her myself with that moustache.

Carter: Corr, Look at those nice long legs. What are you, 6 foot?

Regan: Tall for a lady, isn't she carter?

Carter: You're not wrong there guv

Girl: Oh fuck off will you, what do you want?

Regan: She Bites.

Carter: Not much, just wondering what a girl like you is doing with an Adams apple like that.

Girl: Too fucking funny.

Boy: And what else?

Carter notices Thom

Carter: Hello, Hello, Hello. What are you looking at, son?

Thom: Nothing good.

Carter: You've offended me! Having problems with your eyesight are you? Perhaps the darkness is getting to you. You ought to eat more carrots, that'll sort you out. You are in the presence of two of this city's best looking men!

Girl: My arse.

Boy: What, so they just messed her about until she lost her bracelet?

Regan: (to girl) 3 of this city's finest. You didn't think I'd overlooked you, did you honeybee?

Thom: (to boy) No. It was worse than that.

Carter: You say something, you long string of cabbage?

Regan: Leave him Carter, Don't you know who you're talking to? This is genuine royalty over here, you ought to show some respect. I've heard about you. They call you King Ghede, some say you're the world's greatest mountain climber. Others claim you invented Chinese food, nobody's quite sure. I've seen you down here though, fishing in the canal like some hungry madman. Big catch today?

Thom: It's not for catching anything. It's a weapon.

Pause. The two policemen burst out laughing. Boy looks confused. Carter is by this point very close to Thom.

Carter: Yeah. Looks like it mate. Lethal.

Thom directs his view forward, off stage. Carter follows his gaze and spies something off in the distance. He tries to make it out but can't quite do it.

Carter: **(to himself)** What the fuck's that?

Boy: Are you talking about your fishing rod again?

Regan: Right. We better be getting home. A pleasure seeing you again m'lord. Enjoy your respective evenings. Come on carter, what you waiting for?

Carter: Sorry. Thought I saw something, floating out there. It's nothing.

Regan turns to away, ignoring him. They both begin to leave.

Carter: Stay beautiful poof.

Regan: Be seeing you all very soon.

The two policemen exit. Girl slumps down in a heap.

Boy: Are you sure you're-

Thom: He killed her. Regan did. Usually they'd just rough her up a bit, push her around or spit in her hair, but this time they went too far. Cracked her skull with a crowbar and threw her in the river. Human bodies have a tendency to float, so they threw rocks at her till she sunk. Like a fucking submarine.

Boy: Fuck.

Girl: What are you mumbling about?

Boy: Did they ever catch the guys who did it?

Thom shakes his head. Boy/Girl speak simultaneously.

Boy: Why didn't you call the police?

Girl: Why can't they just fucking leave me alone?

Thom: They're police. What am I going to do, write a report about it?

Girl: That'd only make it worse, wouldn't it?

Boy: The police did that? Beat the fella to death?

Thom: Yes.

Boy: Fuck.

Pause.

Girl: I dunno what to do anymore Thom. I ought to just leave, I suppose. Just fuck off and try and start a new life somewhere or something. But where would I even go? I rang my mum up the other day. She said dad'd let me back, providing 'I cut my hair, and start wearing normal clothes again'. I don't even think I know what boys wear anymore.

Pause

Girl: I ought to go. They'll come back soon and I don't want to be around if they do. I'm sorry.

Thom: It's alright. It's not your fault.

Girl: You'll protect me won't you?

Pause

Girl: Goodnight.

The Girl exits

Boy: Did you not think to report them before they killed him?

Thom: I've thought about it every moment since. I should have done something. I should have done anything. I replay the days and hours and moments that lead up to it, over and over again like shitty over-exposed photographs and I wish I'd done something. I've played that record over and over again so many times that these days I feel like it might be all I am. I wish I'd done something, but I didn't.

He repeats the exact actions he took earlier on.

Thom: On the night before it happened she came down here. She looked like someone had taken a crowbar to her face. That's when she gave me the bracelet. I thought I'd lost it... or... maybe hadn't been given it yet. I said to her: "They've been at you again, haven't they?" And she touches her eye and I look away. "They'd never bother you again. One shot. I never condone killing, but these men—" and I can picture his head, just there. I can picture every nerve synapse in his body spasming uncontrollably as his skull smashes and his neck snaps back and forth. There's nothing left of his face, so even if his parents ever found the body they'd hardly recognise him, and when they bury the bastard there's no hope in hell they'd opt for an open coffin.

Boy: Thom?

Thom: And I know where I'd hide him. There are miles and miles of tunnels here that nobody ever even goes into. They'd probably never even find him.

Pause

Boy: Thom?

Thom: Yes?

Boy: What happened to these men in the end?

Pause

Thom: Nobody knows. I don't know, at least. They disappeared. They found her body in the morning, and by the time they'd realised it was Regan who did it, he'd fucked off. They caught Carter, but in the end he was nothing more than a crony anyway. He wasn't even there when it happened. Nobody knows what happened to Regan. Not least me.

Boy: That's a fucking rotten story that.

Thom: Yes. It is.

Boy: Sorry Thom but it's getting late, I really do have to get home.

Thom: Of course. My head's been in the clouds all night hasn't it? Thanks for listening.

Boy: It's fine Thom.

Pause

Boy: I been meaning to ask though. You seem space-ier than normal. Like you're less... here. You sure you're going to be alright hanging out down here?

Thom: Me? No, no. I'm fine. The trouble is, you remember earlier when I was talking about the Spaceship? The Brain Spaceship?

Boy: Sort of.

Thom: Sometimes, these days I feel like my spaceships out of control. Like I don't know which direction I'm heading in, or whether there is a direction.

Boy: What do you mean?

Thom: Like vast strange hands have taken control of my time machine and are pulling me, uncontrollably backwards into the past. Or maybe even forwards, into the future. I really don't know.

Boy: Haha. I suppose that makes me a fucking spacemen then, eh?

Thom: Perhaps. I haven't been able to work out the specifics yet.

Boy: Seriously. You should go somewhere, I'm sure my mum would let you stay for a night.

Thom: What, me? No. No, no no. I wouldn't allow it! I have a wonderful evening ahead of me, and you never know. I might even get a bite.

Boy: Well. Look after yourself then.

Thom: I will, I will.

Boy Exits. There is a brief period where tom recasts his rod, and sits there gazing out over the river. After a very lengthy pause, Regan walks onto stage and stares out over the river as well. He is very still during this next exchange, almost remorseful. Thom doesn't realise he is there at first.

Thom O'Bedlam: Come on, let's have a bite for mad old tommy! A gift for the man, the accursed man. Let's have you.

Regan: You're always down here, aren't you, with that thing?

Thom O'Bedlam: Ah. Hello.

Regan: What are you shouting about, anyway?

Thom: I didn't mean you.

Regan: I'm aware you didn't mean me sunshine, doesn't change the fact you were shouting. Down here all alone with your line in the drink there shouting to yourself. Makes people uncomfortable.

Thom O'Bedlam: Protecting my kingdom is my duty.

Regan: Oh yeah?

Thom: And though I'm on my own, I know I'm not alone. There's a billion tiny creatures who call my body their home.

Regan: Cut the sentimental crap. You think you're some sort of something don't you? Delusional aren't you? And how are you fucking protecting it then, hard man? How does this shitty two-bit piece of poundland-shite work for you?

Thom: Sometimes being mad is the best way to avoid being seen. It can make the harmless look deadly, and the harmful...

Regan: Do me a favour, will you mate? Give up the fucking Sun Tzu, will you? I don't need to be instructed in Zen from a whino freak like you.

Pause

Thom O'Bedlam: Tell me something.

Regan: Go on.

Thom: Are you actually here?

Regan: Yes. I am. Here.

Thom O'Bedlam: Now?

Regan: No, last week.

Thom: Why?

Pause

Regan: I suppose you know about what happened?

Thom O'Bedlam: Yes.

Regan: About... She... He's dead now. There isn't much more to say. There's a dead... thing in these waters somewhere and that's all there is to it and nothing's going to bring him... or her, or whatever back.

Pause.

Regan: Didn't see you at the funeral. I don't even know why I went. I figured probably you didn't know about it. You would've really liked it, his parents put up a big show for him, and even after all he put them through and everything. They had him dressed up really nice, like a fella and that. Cut his hair close and put him in a nice suit and that. Made him look presentable, you know.

Thom: Of course

Regan: I get the feeling they might even have thanked me if they knew what I did. Seeing all the bother he'd caused them.

Thom: You deserve a medal.

Regan: Don't start with me. It was an accident, you know. I ain't sorry either, he fucking deserved it. I'm not asking for your approval, or your fucking forgiveness, but you knew her and- I'm a policeman, I don't have to apologise to you. Who are you anyway? Who the fuck do you think you are?

Thom: The emperor of London, at your service.

Regan: Your name. I want your fucking name.

Thom: Why? Don't you have one?

Pause. After a time Regan bursts out laughing.

Regan: Very good. Very fucking good.

Thom: They've been at you again, haven't they?

Regan: What?

Thom: They creep up on you. Don't let you sleep. They make you afraid. Make you nervous.

Regan: Shut up.

Thom: Have you biting your nails and grinding your teeth and there's nothing anyone can do it stop it. Is there?

Regan: I told you to shut up. The puff got what was coming to him, that's the end of the story.

Thom: But one of these days, someone's going to silence them. Someone's going to stop them. Set you free of all of that.

Regan: All of what?

Thom: Someone will come and give you what you deserve.

Regan: Who's it going to be then? You? What's going to stop me throwing you in there after her eh? The two of you together, king and queen of the river bed.

Pause. Regan turns his back on Thom.

Regan: As I thought.

Slowly and silently Thom rises, advances on Regan, and puts his gun to the back of his head. Regan spins around, but does not see the gun.

Thom: They'd never bother you again. One shot.

Regan: What?

Lights down to a spotlight. Tom steps into it.

Thom: A fucking three piece suit. That's what they buried her in. I was there, you vicious fuck. You just didn't see me.

Lights out.