Becoming Stardust

Susannah M. Doepken

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like to thank all of my friends and family for dealing with the neverending facts I constantly shared while writing this. You all truly encouraged me to take what I hold near and dear to me and turn it into something that others can hopefully enjoy as much as I do. To my parents, Jim and Julie, thank you for listening to me slowly lose my mind over the summer while writing it. To my twin sister, Moriah, thank you for patiently reading it and giving such wonderful feedback and insight I would have missed otherwise.

I would also like to thank Dr. Gavin Keulks for letting me move forward with this. Really, I just came into his office and told him this is what I was doing for my senior thesis, but thank you for letting me always come into your office and ask question after question about what exactly I needed to do. I appreciate all of your patience while I overthought every single aspect way more than needed.

I want to thank Dr. Lars Soderlund, my thesis advisor. You encouraged my passion and are a big contributor to my success at Western Oregon University. Thank you for all the office hours. Thank you for listening to me and helping me turn this into something I am really proud of. Thank you for pushing me to write better than I ever have before. Thank you for our time listening to abstract music as we both nod appreciatively in silence.

Lastly, this is for Chloe.

Thank you to everyone for everything, truly.
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Abstract

David Bowie is easily one of the most famous musicians who created a lasting impact with a musical career spanning over five decades. Born on January 8th, 1947 as David Robert Jones, his climb to fame was not easy, nor was his fight for stardom and his struggle with sanity through addiction. Key moments in his life had a profound impact on the music he created at the time, and his life and music cannot be easily separated from each other.

Through this two-act play, I will take the audience through an array of pivotal moments in David Bowie’s life, examining just how much those moments influence the music created at that same time. It examines the messy and intricate relationships he held with people, influencing themes and personas that he created which became monumental in music history. This play will span from moments as a young adult who is searching for fame, a successful star with strained relationships and addiction problems, and a retired musician looking to create for no one but himself.
Introduction and Purpose

This play’s purpose: I love David Bowie, and I would love for others to see why.

I have not always loved David Bowie, although for most people it is one of the most defining things about me. Honestly, I didn’t fall hard for him and his music until I was eighteen. A few months before I graduated high school, I lost one of my best friends very suddenly and tragically. I felt more lost and confused than I ever have before in my life.

Three days later, David Bowie released ★, or Blackstar, an album that had themes of death and grief. David Bowie himself died two days after its release as well. I clung to that album with everything I had, since it was the perfect outlet for me to grieve and mourn. I felt less alone with his music at a time where I felt so hopelessly isolated. I had liked David Bowie before, but that moment in my life solidified my love for him even more.

From there, I just started listening to more of his work. Luckily, he has twenty-seven studio recorded albums, not to mention the fifty-odd albums total including live albums and soundtracks he made, so I never have gotten bored. It wasn’t just the music that enticed me, it was also his life. The fascinating twists, turns, downfalls, and victories that changed the sounds of certain albums enraptured me. No, I could not always relate to his exact situation, but the feelings I felt that we shared impacted me in a way no other artist had before.

Over the years, I have struggled finding that line between introducing David Bowie to others and explaining his importance to me and shoving too much information down their throats in an attempt to explain what albums were my favorite and why. I’ve decided that yes, I’ll still play David Bowie in the car, share fun facts I’ve learned over the years, and
watch *Labyrinth* more times than I probably should, but I'll also give people something to show them why I am so fascinated by David Bowie.

A few months before his death, he created *Lazarus*, a musical with songs and lyrics by himself and written by Enda Walsh. It’s an unofficial sequel of sorts to *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, a movie released in 1977 starring David Bowie as an alien. The last line in the play is “Speak some more – and we’ll travel on”, expressing that stories have the ability to transport us and show us new places, people, and ideas. I hope my play can do just that.
The Performance vs. COVID-19

I started writing this play in February of 2019 with the end goal of performing this right before I graduated in Spring Term of 2020. A perfect idea. I worked hard over the summer, finishing a rough draft over Winter Break in 2019. From there, I edited, edited, and edited. I invited people over to do a read through, discussing where I didn’t fill in enough information or where lines sounded clunky. I even held a full readers-theater style meeting in the Honors Classroom with my friends where they each took a part and discussed their opinions of each scene. I am not one to horribly procrastinate, but still am very proud of myself for sticking to a schedule in which my play could be finished by March of 2020, just in time for me to start rehearsals and perform it in June of 2020.

Sike. A pandemic hit instead.

So now, I’m left with a finished script. I mean, that’s still pretty good. I still dedicated over a year of my time to working, reading, researching, writing, and studying, and I’m insanely proud of the finished product. But, my play can’t happen with the schedule I had planned. Instead, I’m turning in this thesis without a performance even though it truly breaks my heart.

Thankfully, the world seems to be working together to make this pandemic as least horrible as it can be. I’m still in the process of working out whether or not I can try and perform this play in the Fall of 2020. Not ideal, but if there’s any chance I can direct something I spent a year on, I will gladly take it. So, there is no performance right now, but that doesn’t mean there will never be. Fingers crossed that in Fall of 2020 at least a few people can see my play, *Becoming Stardust*. 
BECOMING STARDUST

By
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CHARACTERS

OLDER BOWIE Sixty-eight year old David Bowie. He’s terminally ill with liver cancer. Terrified of death and what that means, he is now reflecting on his life, fame, mistakes, and how events in his life have affected his music.

YOUNG BOWIE Twenty-something younger David Bowie. He’s experimenting with drugs a little too much, falling in love with people, fame, money, and what the music industry promises him.

ANGIE The first wife of David Bowie in her early twenties. Young, loud, and opinionated as she tries to balance her life as a new mother and a wife to Bowie.

WOODY WOODMANSEY Twenty-something year old drummer in Spiders From Mars. He follows Bowie to fame and success while trying to figure out the dynamic Bowie has created for himself and the band.

IGGY POP Thirty-year old rock star, currently in and out of rehab. Sees Young Bowie as a type of saving grace from a music industry that has turned its back on him.

### ACT I

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ACT I SCENE 1

Apartment, New York City.
December 2015.
Age: 68

OLDER BOWIE sits at a desk, lit by a lamp, pen and an open greeting card in his hands. Every time he thinks of something to write, he can't. The pen drops on the desk and he sits there, frustrated. WHERE ARE WE NOW? plays as lights slowly come up, slowly fading when Bowie starts to speak.

OLDER BOWIE

The one time I want to write, I can’t. Over fifty years! Studio albums, screenplays, soundtracks, a full musical that came out just last month, and... I just can't.

(Hollow laugh)

I guess it’s easier when the music can be interpreted, you know? You never have to say anything directly. These cards? Not so much. The holiday cheer of the Christmas season gets significantly less cheery when you transition into the terminal cancer thing. It’s a little bit of a downer. Just a bit. Liver cancer has the tendency to do that.

(BOWIE drops his head into his hands and sighs out of frustration again. It seems like he’s talking to himself to buy time and not write)

The older I get, the closer to God I should feel. That’s what I’ve been told. Rather, it’s less and less. Now, I'm not even sure if I believe in the idea of death. You know? People have spent years talking about it as the end. Why not view it as a beginning? Being born was a beginning, death can be the same, as far as I’m concerned. There’s a formality to saying goodbye that sticks in the back of my throat and stops short of being written on paper.
It's not that I'm leaving, it's that I'm leaving people behind. The unfinished stories, the arguments. And I don't want there to be sadness or sorrow or a sense of loss... God, I certainly wouldn't mourn my own death if I could.

(BOWIE takes up the pen and jots a few notes onto the paper before setting it down again.)

The movies would tell me to mention the fond memories and talk about running out of time; the regrets, the good times. A few regrets, sure. How can there not be? I had such a vision for what my life would look like. I really did. I wanted it all when I was younger. I think I got most of it by the end. Didn't even think I would live this long. And now, I have no plan. Whatever powers in the universe that allowed a recovering addict from every possible thing you could be addicted to to live as long as I have, thanks. I did more than I could have ever imagined with that time.

(Trails off again)

When I was little, I thought this was the world I wanted. I was so absolutely sure of it. It was nothing like I imagined at all, but I still don't know if that was a good thing or not. It certainly was more... intense than what I thought it would be. I just wanted anything to make me feel like I wasn't David Robert Jones, born in Brixton on January 8th, 1947. I took to heart the idea that you need to push yourself to become who you want to be, not settle for who you are born as.

(BOWIE leans back in the chair, disregarding the pen and paper now.)

My childhood was happy, no doubt about that. I was comfy, never went hungry or couldn't afford what we needed. But, it was a lonely one. My mother was...

(Pauses to think of the word)
Dismissive... towards me. Nothing specific or serious, just cold. Gave me a hard time for anything out of line. We, Terry and myself, grew up after WWII. Terry was only my half brother, my family was a bit splintered. London was a grubby sort of city and area with rations still around well into the 50s. We were supposed to be part of a promising future. And, well, with Terry, I guess she saw him as less than promising. It was hard to feel so full of potential yet already feel like a disappointment.

(BOWIE crumples up a paper he was writing on and leaves it on the desk. NO PLAN should begin to play as he narrates the last part)

I tried to make the most of what I had, mostly because I had to. Whatever I had was what I worked with. The only plan I had was to do what I could to be something more.

(NO PLAN by DAVID BOWIE continues to play as scene ends)

ACT I SCENE 2

Age: 21

YOUNG BOWIE walks in to sit next to OLDER BOWIE. He’s wearing black trousers, a simple waistcoat, a white shirt, and his hair is slicked back. He always seems to loosely carry cigarettes on him. A few thin tables line stage left, making two rows, piled with records in bins on top, mimicking a record store. Lighting shifts to signify a difference between OLDER BOWIE’s ‘narration’ and the scene now taking place.
Jane Greene was the counter assistant at Medhurst’s, the biggest department store in Bromley. Turns out she liked us. Her, liking us? Can you imagine? She was seventeen and we were only thirteen ... fourteen? The owners and her would let us buy records at a much bigger discount than others would, and we would both escape to the back, listen to the new records and make out. I must say, it was rather a ... transformative time for us. We fell in love with American music and jazz. We had a...

OLDER BOWIE

Raging ambition.

YOUNG BOWIE

Yes. To see if life in Bromley could be anything other than lifeless.

OLDER BOWIE

(stands up to join YOUNG BOWIE in perusing the records)

We were still Davie Jones, weren’t we?
YOUNG BOWIE
(pulling out a Monkees record and smiles)
Shit luck that the drummer for the Monkees took that name first.
(He keeps the record in his arms, leaning against the table to look at OLDER BOWIE)

OLDER BOWIE
(ignoring him while still looking through records)
Maybe. Didn’t seem to matter as much once we were in the Kon-rads.

OLDER BOWIE
The Hooker Brothers.

YOUNG BOWIE
And then the Konrads, sans hyphen.

OLDER BOWIE
Dave Jay.

OLDER BOWIE
(finally turning around to lean against the table and talk to YOUNG BOWIE. Both are now mirroring the other in how they are standing)
Not our best name choice.

OLDER BOWIE
We were never one thing.

YOUNG BOWIE
Of course not. There was this need to be something more than human. Fuck that. We need to be superhuman.
(starts wandering the aisles again)
Of course.

The King Bees.

The Manish Boys.

Back to Davie Jones.

The Lower Third.

Bowie.

Like Jim Bowie.

Like the knife.

Born September 16th, 1965.

(over the top)
It should be a national holiday.

That’s a little--
YOUNG BOWIE
I mean, look what we did.

OLDER BOWIE
(happy sigh, giving in a little)
It did feel rather glamorous at the time.

OLDER BOWIE
(image)

YOUNG BOWIE
(smirking)
Forget the fact no one would let us record, and when they did, they regretted it.

OLDER BOWIE
We had an image.

YOUNG BOWIE
We had the look, thanks to George punching me in the face.

OLDER BOWIE
He felt awful.

YOUNG BOWIE
It felt awful, too.

OLDER BOWIE
The outcome wasn’t too bad.
(smiles while gesturing to his eye)

YOUNG BOWIE
We were no longer average.

OLDER BOWIE
Thank God for that.

YOUNG BOWIE
More importantly, we finally made a way out for ourselves. And boy did we need to.
OLDER BOWIE

(nodding)

Mmm.

YOUNG BOWIE

(pause while they both stand there)

Remember when we were three?

OLDER BOWIE

And?

YOUNG BOWIE

Mum-- and We--

(starts laughing to himself)

OLDER BOWIE

And we got into her makeup and she said it was wrong and that we looked like a clown wearing her lipstick?

YOUNG BOWIE

(proudly)

I think that’s still the best compliment we’ve ever received.

OLDER BOWIE

It sure didn’t deter us like she had hoped.

YOUNG BOWIE

Quite the opposite.

OLDER BOWIE

Dad got it, though.

YOUNG BOWIE

The difference between the two could make the house feel ice cold.
OLDER BOWIE

True. He was never stingy on records, though.

YOUNG BOWIE

(pulling out a Little Richard album)

Not at all. Always a new one to show me the newest and greatest. By introducing me to Little Richard, getting me saxophone lessons... well... that was it.

(holds record in his arms, still rifling through them, occasionally pulling a record out to take a look at it before putting it back. He continues doing this, occasionally finding one he adds to his arms.)

The record collection was all his doing and his dedication to my musical education is what started everything. Music at that time was a bit... shit. We didn’t have a whole lot to make us feel quite like American music could. It gave life to my rather colorless and dull country at the time.

(YOUNG BOWIE turns to OLDER BOWIE.)

Hearing Elvis for the first time... Anthony Newley...

(Both YOUNG and OLDER BOWIE sigh happily together.)

OLDER BOWIE

Being young, the outrageous dreams and job goals seem, well, outrageous. I knew it was silly or naive to think I could do it, but when your own father takes it upon himself to make you feel like it’s not outside the realm of possibilities, it means something.

YOUNG BOWIE

Ska, jazz.

OLDER BOWIE

Tony Bennett.

YOUNG BOWIE

Tony Bennett.
YOUNG BOWIE
All thanks to Terry, truly. But... He was--

(OLDER BOWIE jumps in to finish the thought.)

OLDER BOWIE YOUNG BOWIE
We were embarrassed. He was off.

OLDER BOWIE
Dad was great, he just--

YOUNG BOWIE
(bitterly)
Didn't want him in the house. You can't force the feeling of home.

(another heavy pause)

YOUNG BOWIE
(playing with his hands, not looking up at OLDER BOWIE)
Yeah.

OLDER BOWIE
He was dismissed, sort of, after I left to pursue music.

YOUNG BOWIE
No... I...

OLDER BOWIE
Ignored? Avoided? What word are you looking for? Because dismissed is about as nice a word for it as possible.

(starts to get agitated)

YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE searches for an excuse)
Okay but it wasn't--
OLDER BOWIE
No. Terry was diagnosed with schizophrenia and it terrified the whole family. You didn't want to 'catch it'. You didn't want to be around it. If you were, you would be 'insane', too. You never talked about him. You tried to replace him with friends and other family but you couldn't. You can't. You loved him, you just could never admit it.

YOUNG BOWIE
Can you blame me?

OLDER BOWIE
When you spend your whole life trying to avoid that threat of insanity and the thing you fear most of all, you inevitably start to approach it. He was kind and gentle and loved music just as much as we do. Maybe even more. Jazz and American music were his world and he let us into it because he knew we would love it, too. We were allowed to step into something so deeply private of his and we wouldn’t allow him the same courtesy.
(Failing to find words, eventually getting frustrated and lashing out, throwing a record down on the table and throwing his hands up)

Our whole family was fucked, you know? Suicides everywhere. Mental health problems and insanity scattered through just about every household I can think of. How can I not be terrified I won't suddenly want to do the same? How? Tell me how the fuck I shouldn't think I was about to go off the rails at any given moment.

(He takes a few breaths to calm himself down, and then speaks softly, almost as if to only himself)

But look what we were able to do.

(vague gesture around)

Look what we can still do! What I’ve done so far! Ken Pitt got me signed on to Deram Records!

OLDER BOWIE

Yeah... A pretty shit manager who managed to get us a pretty crap recording deal.

YOUNG BOWIE

He was a manager who got us a recording deal. Perfect? Of course not.

OLDER BOWIE

(slight mocking tone while pulling up The Laughing Gnome out of a bin)

Oh, don’t sell yourself short. Everyone just adored the album that they don’t remember. Everything is uphill after we created The Laughing Gnome. It cannot get worse than that. Everything terrible we created--
YOUNG BOWIE
  (mildly defensive)
It was experience!

OLDER BOWIE
  (putting the record back)
It also distanced us from a home we could never quite get back to. At least, not in the same way.

YOUNG BOWIE
I’m not sure I’d want to go back if I could.

OLDER BOWIE
And what will you do instead?

YOUNG BOWIE
  (looks OLDER BOWIE up at down)
You tell me.

OLDER BOWIE
Oh?

YOUNG BOWIE
Write more music. See if anything sticks.

OLDER BOWIE
  (small smile)
Yeah. Might get you where you want to go.

YOUNG BOWIE
  (collecting the last of his records and walking across stage before exiting)
More importantly, it might get me out.

(WHEN I LIVE MY DREAM by DAVID BOWIE plays)
ACT I SCENE 3

Haddon Hall, Beckenham.
Age: 23

ANGIE BOWIE wears a long, flowy dress and carries a purse on her shoulders, wearing gold eyeshadow.

ANGIE walks out to sit beside OLDER BOWIE, draping her arm around him and setting her purse on the desk, acting as if they are still a married couple. A small ironing board sits in the corner, a small basket of clothes and an iron. OLDER BOWIE continues writing cards.

ANGIE

You never gave me enough credit.

OLDER BOWIE

I think most would say you gave yourself too much credit.

(OLDER BOWIE removes ANGIE’s arm around his shoulder and she stands up next to his desk, crossing her arms. He continues to write and ignores her.)

ANGIE

(mock offended)

Oh, David.

OLDER BOWIE

(pausing his writing to look up)

Angie.

ANGIE

Do you have to be so cold?
OLDER BOWIE
(correcting her)
Civil.

ANGIE
(stops pretending to be offended)
Really?

OLDER BOWIE
You clearly think of our marriage differently than how I see it.

ANGIE
And how do you see it?

OLDER BOWIE
(pauses, taking a second to collect his thoughts)
Mutually beneficial. We did love each other, sure--

ANGIE
Mutually beneficial?

OLDER BOWIE
(ignoring her)
But I doubt I would claim I love you more than... Woody, Trev, Ronno...

ANGIE
So you would've had a child with them, if you could? You would've relied on them for support even before Space Oddity was released? Even through addiction? Even through divorce? Because I don't believe that.

OLDER BOWIE
The whole child situation would be a bit sticky, I’ll give you that--
ANGIE
(Cutting him off and scoffing)
I had Zowie for you, you know?

OLDER BOWIE
(pausing again, taking in a deep breath)
I know. I never asked you to do that.

ANGIE
I knew that was what you wanted.

OLDER BOWIE
It was. And you know I love him with every bit of me.
   (pausing for a second, then getting quieter)
I sometimes wonder if the love I have for him was what love between us could’ve been if we hadn’t screwed it up so bad.

ANGIE
It would’ve been a great love, I’ll give it that. But I very much doubt Zowie feels the same for me.

OLDER BOWIE
Can you blame him? When was the last time you saw him. Actually, properly, saw him. Connected. Talked.

ANGIE
I--
   (pauses, deep in thought, mentally doing the math)
Thirty-five years?
   (OLDER BOWIE raises his eyebrows)
Oh, he doesn't miss me.

OLDER BOWIE
Maybe not.
ANGIE

And?

OLDER BOWIE

That’s not how it’s supposed to be.

ANGIE

(frustrated)

Nothing we did as parents was how it was supposed to be, David.

OLDER BOWIE

I tried.

ANGIE

Are you saying I didn’t?

OLDER BOWIE

We both could’ve done more.

(OLDER BOWIE stands up from his desk, both of them getting more and more agitated at the other)

ANGIE

What do you want to do now? Wallow in it?
OLDER BOWIE

(pushing past her as he starts to leave)

There’s a difference between wallowing in it and acknowledging the mistakes and moving past it, Angie. Figure it out.

(Exits)

(ANGIE sits on the desk in silence, her shoulders hunched and her legs crossed, making herself small. After a few seconds, her shoulders broaden and she takes more space up on stage, resuming the composure she had when she started talking with OLDER BOWIE.)

I met David at the Roundhouse. I was supposed to meet up with some other record label professionals, but instead I met him.

(Her tone is slightly affectionate, mostly a matter of fact more than anything else.)
There was a band, The Feathers, that played with him as their lead singer. David sang Space Oddity there, and the moment I heard it I knew it needed to be recorded. Must've been 1969. He was twenty-two. I was nineteen. He needed help, and I was just what he needed. I knew it. You see, I had worked with other labels and knew how to push people in the right direction. The good thing about David was that David didn't know how to do anything less than one hundred percent. Whatever lyrics or music he had stuck up that head of his, he would play and play and play until it was written out on paper and tangible for him to work on. Watching him work was marvelous.

(ANGIE'S body language becomes much more relaxed, but the tone doesn't change. She clearly sees herself as objective while being very full of herself.)

If he hadn't met me, he would've stayed on that path to be a knock-off Bob Dylan, instead of the original David Bowie he is now. I pushed him to be original. Pushed him to challenge societal norms and gendered appearance. Pushed him to create Ziggy, for God's sake.

(nods appreciatively)

Yep. I did that, did you know? I would have to say it was a collaborative effort, but definitely with my influence. I found the designers and helped with the makeup and that bright red hair that everyone now connects to Ziggy Stardust. It all happened in Haddon Hall while we were together. We always seemed to have company. Different people stayed over constantly and people walked in and out as if it was their house, too. Terry even stayed here. People always say “my family’s mad”, but his family really was. We thought it would be best to get him out of that hospital for a bit to be around family. He stayed for a while until we sent him back up when things started to get bad.

(ANGIE pauses, her tone dropping and her voice getting quieter. She hunches again.)
I loved Terry because I loved David. I never saw any of the episodes he had. He was always so gentle and nice. A few years later was when he... he stepped in front of a train and that was that, I suppose. We all felt so helpless. David couldn’t even bring himself to go to the funeral he felt so responsible. He resented a lot from his childhood, and the root was probably his parents. They didn’t give him that start, you know, that he wanted in life. He really had to do that for himself.

(YOUNG BOWIE enters, the entire tone shifting. Light cues to signal perspective change. He has a guitar slung over his back and looks slightly disheveled due to working all day and writing music. ANGIE sits up more straight and turns to look at him as he sits on the floor, pulling the guitar around to play it quietly while he talks. ANGIE walks over to the ironing board and begins going through the clothes, folding various clothes and piling them neatly back in the basket as YOUNG BOWIE starts talking.)

YOUNG BOWIE
I swear one of these days I'll just become a monk. Or a mime.

ANGIE
(talking over her shoulder at him)
I think Lindsay Kemp would like that. Maybe not so much the monk part.

YOUNG BOWIE
You think?
ANGIE
(Unhappy)
He’s absolutely smitten with you. He fell in love with you the moment he saw you.

YOUNG BOWIE
(smug)
He’s a great teacher. Really hands on.

ANGIE
(even more unhappy)
I had gathered.

YOUNG BOWIE
(missing the unhappy tone ANGIE has)
It’s like I join the circus when I’m with him, you know? Drag, mime, all the good stuff.

ANGIE
So you’ll quit music for the Great Lindsay Kemp?

YOUNG BOWIE
Sometimes it feels like music has given up on me. Maybe it’s my turn to give up on it. I don’t feel like a star right now.

ANGIE
(matter-of-factly)
I don't think you could do it.

YOUNG BOWIE
Hm?

ANGIE
(points the iron at him as she turns around)
You have too much music in your head. You’re too much of a glutton for wanting people to like you and what you have.
YOUNG BOWIE

Hm.

(YOUNG BOWIE mutter noncommittally while absentmindedly strums the chords to KOOKS while looking up at ANGIE.)

YOUNG BOWIE

What if Space Oddity is as far as I get?

ANGIE

(dismissive)

You’re packing it in? Bullshit.

YOUNG BOWIE

I’m not packing it in...

ANGIE

Yeah? No.

I'm not.

ANGIE

Good.

YOUNG BOWIE

I just need to be even better.

ANGIE

So create something better.

YOUNG BOWIE

(snapping)

Yes, but what?
ANGIE

(pausing, then matter-of-factly)
Create a new you. Give your audience something they haven’t seen before.

YOUNG BOWIE

It’s 1972, Angie. What else is there to show them?

ANGIE

Show them something new. Something unusual. I don’t know, give them hope, confusion, devastation. Stop being British and sensible and be a goddamn alien to them.

YOUNG BOWIE

(echoing ANGIE)

Alien.

YOUNG BOWIE continues playing guitar as ANGIE walks away from the ironing board back to the desk, rummages in her purse, pulling out gold eyeshadow. Carefully, she applies a gold circle to his forehead, grinning as she pulls away.

ANGIE

Something marvelously bizarre.

ANGIE gives him a quick peck on the cheek before packing up her purse and exiting.
YOUNG BOWIE
(picking up the guitar again, YOUNG BOWIE quietly strums a few chords of STARMAN as he tries to clear his mind. Light changes.)

The real reason Ziggy even exists was I mostly just had stage fright. I felt more comfortable on stage as someone else than I ever did as myself. I hadn’t quite found the formula I wanted, but I was good at mimicking and... collecting... characters, in a way. Easier for me to do an accent and character than anything else, honestly. If someone else could sing my songs for me, I would have them do it. It just made it easier. People fall in love with the character you show them, not the actual person behind it. But I’m okay with that. I just want to be loved.

(STARMAN by DAVID BOWIE plays. Music can start before he’s done talking.)

ACT I SCENE 4

Ziggy Stardust Tour in America. 1972.
Age: 25

It’s a soundcheck. A drumset, guitar, and bass on stage alongside a microphone near each. There are some stools set up in front of the microphone.

OLDER BOWIE is seated on one of the stools, hunched slightly. He absentmindedly fiddles with the microphone stand.
(YOUNG BOWIE walks on stage, cigarette in his mouth with a small smile. He walks across to sit on the other stool next to OLDER BOWIE.)

YOUNG BOWIE
We got a bit carried away, didn't we? Got a little too into it. It takes a lot to become somebody else, and it takes even more to become an alien sent to save rock 'n roll, doesn't it?

(YOUNG BOWIE smirks at OLDER BOWIE, elbowing him before grabbing a microphone and swinging his arms around.)
I'm a cosmic yob! A cosmic messiah!

OLDER BOWIE
(Ignoring YOUNG BOWIE)
We were seldom organized in anything we were doing. We wanted to be everything.

YOUNG BOWIE

OLDER BOWIE
(Sighs)
I'm bisexual.

YOUNG BOWIE
(grabbing the microphone again and talking loudly into it)
I'm gay and I always have been, even as David Jones!

OLDER BOWIE
No you're not.
YOUNG BOWIE
(overly dramatic and theatrical, still swinging the microphone around)
I'm a closeted heterosexual.

OLDER BOWIE
No you're not.
(OLDER BOWIE grabs the microphone from YOUNG BOWIE, returning it to its place before sitting back down.)
I started to understand the formula of the industry. I knew how to make statements, sell shows, draw in crowds, and it started to get to me. I was going to be as unconventional as possible. It made me more enticing. The pressure. The popularity. The celebrity. When my band, the Spiders From Mars, and I were asked to play at the Top of the Pops in 1972, we knew we were in. Mick, Woody, and Trevor knew it was important, but didn't know just how important it was.
(Happy sigh)
It was a good one. A really good performance. I could feel the electricity in the way I sang.

YOUNG BOWIE
(slings his arms around OLDER BOWIE)
Yeah, but they weren't expecting me to throw my arm around Mick in such a homosexual way, were they?

OLDER BOWIE
(He crosses his arms, but allows a small smile to reach his face.)
No, they were not.

YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE leans in to OLDER BOWIE, getting excited.)
Ah... we got called all sorts of names. Queers, fags, faeries, the lot. I thrive off of that, you know? People talk, then they listen, and records sell.
OLDER BOWIE
Our timing could have been better. We didn’t mean to drag Angie and Zowie into it.

YOUNG BOWIE
It didn’t stop us.

OLDER BOWIE
It probably should’ve. But we couldn’t stop. We didn’t make it easy on the boys. They sat through interview after interview that scrutinized their identity, sexuality, and relationships because of us. But we didn’t allow them the space to talk. It had to be about me. Us. We attempted to accredit our borderline insanity to creative genius.

YOUNG BOWIE
It was creative genius. Just with some help.

OLDER BOWIE
From what?

YOUNG BOWIE
From what? I was talking about a who. Ronno with the composing of the strings and whatnot. Mike with the best piano, Woody on drums, Trev on bass. But “the what”? (taps his nose)

That says everything.

(YOUNG BOWIE stands up, pacing up and forth, a little antsy and agitated)

You know, it's thanks to "the what" that we could even tour America at all. It's why we're both sitting on this stage in the first place.

OLDER BOWIE
I know.
YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE begins to get more agitated, almost accusatory towards OLDER BOWIE.)
The amount of energy it takes--

OLDER BOWIE
I know.

YOUNG BOWIE
The pressure of tours almost every day--

OLDER BOWIE
I know.

YOUNG BOWIE
Riding on the heels of Ziggy fucking Stardust and needing hits, songs or otherwise--

OLDER BOWIE
(Agitated as well)
I know! You live in that moment, but I live with the aftermath and I--

YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE begins to break a little, knowing what he's doing is wrong. There's a pause.)
Addicting.
(YOUNG BOWIE stops pacing, standing still in the middle of the room and looking down at the ground.)

OLDER BOWIE
I know.
YOUNG BOWIE

It’s... messing us up.

OLDER BOWIE

(Sighing, OLDER BOWIE stands, patting YOUNG BOWIE’S shoulder before leaving.)

It wasn’t just us.

(WOODY walks on stage to take a seat behind the drum set. Lights change again to signal change)

WOODY

I’ve just run into another journalist outside. They wanted to interview me about the music again.

YOUNG BOWIE

DeFries still says no. I’m the one to talk with them.

(vague gesture to signal WOODY to start drumming)

WOODY

That’s just it.

(WOODY angles the microphone near the drum set, giving a quick rhythm before stopping)

Why? Why not? I understood why not two years ago, when no one knew us. But now?

YOUNG BOWIE

You know...

(gestures vaguely)

The mystery of it. You know... “Who are the Spiders From Mars, really?” It’s what DeFries says.

(gestures at WOODY’S microphone)

Too loud. Try again.
WOODY
The mystery of it? David, everyone knows who we are now. We’re the Spiders From Mars. It’s not a surprise, is it?
(moves microphone a little further away, repeating the same rhythm as before)
Are you just listening to what Angie says? Because I think journalists are more than capable of learning about us, too.

YOUNG BOWIE
I’m not just listening to Angie... Look, Woody. Just play the drums, drink the free booze, and enjoy it. You’ll have all the money in the world to play with later, just use that for book deals or something. Write a tell-all about life on the road.

WOODY
Yeah, David. That sounds nice. That amount of money sounded just as nice two years ago, too.

YOUNG BOWIE
Is something wrong with it now?
(talking about the drumset)
Still registering a little too loud.

WOODY
There was never anything right about my salary in the first place. I still don’t have enough to help out my family.
(WOODY once again moves the microphone a little further away, keeping the same rhythm as before, just quieter)

YOUNG BOWIE
(Sounding incredulous)
I wouldn’t call £500 low, Woody.
(WOODY immediately stops, drumming frozen for a few seconds before slowly raising his eyes to meet YOUNG BOWIE, who is dismissive and absently fiddling with the microphone stand the same way OLDER BOWIE was)

WOODY
I make £80. Is that how much you’re paying everyone else?

YOUNG BOWIE
I? How much did I say?

WOODY
(WOODY drops his drumsticks by his side, accidentally hitting a pad on the way down)

How much are they getting?

YOUNG BOWIE
(Obviously trying to cover up what he’s said)

That would be a question for DeFries, maybe. I’m not sure--

WOODY
(Cutting him off)

Oh?

(Standing up, WOODY turns to face YOUNG BOWIE more full on)

Look me in the eyes and tell me you’re not paying the fucking jazz pianist you just brought on ten times what you’re paying someone who has been there for you since the beginning.

YOUNG BOWIE
(Staring at the ground, not looking at WOODY)

I--
WOODY
Look me in the eyes.
(He falters, clearly upset and his voice begins to break)
Look at me.
(YOUNG BOWIE can’t meet his eyes. WOODY becomes accusatory, obviously hurt. WOODY steps out from behind the drumset, drumsticks in one hand by his side)
You weren’t even selling records until we came along.

YOUNG BOWIE
That's not true.

WOODY
People barely knew who you were. We helped create that illusion, and you don’t have the courage to even say it to our faces. Are Ronno and Trev getting paid like me? Or like the new back up?
(YOUNG BOWIE doesn’t meet WOODY’S eyes again, obviously telling him what he wants to know.)
You bastard. You underpay the three who have worked the hardest to get you to where you are? And to do what? Blow it on more cocaine?

YOUNG BOWIE
(A little spiteful and dismissive)
You're just a backing band I found from Hull. I could have made it with anybody. I didn't have to make it with you, Woody.
WOODY
(WOODY goes quiet, seething)
No you couldn't have. And you know it. We didn't get harassed about our sexuality because we thought it was fun. We didn’t wear those outrageous and flamboyant costumes because we thought we looked good in them.
(At each sentence WOODY gets angrier and louder and uses his drumsticks to point and accuse OLDER BOWIE)
Ronno didn’t create those melodies and arrangements that made our albums fucking spectacular because it was charity. We needed you just as badly as you needed us. You're a cunt.

YOUNG BOWIE
(Chuckling softly, his soft voice a vast juxtaposition to WOODY while still being dismissive)
Maybe so.

WOODY
I don't understand it.

YOUNG BOWIE
Specifics?
WOODY
I think of you as one of my best friends. I’ve sat and watched you move up in this music industry, and I thought I was right up there with you. Every day the lines between you and Ziggy Stardust are thinning and I’m not sure who I’m talking to. You take the best bits from people and throw away what you don’t need as soon as it’s not convenient. You have that genius quality of making people love you and making them feel loved. It feels real but means nothing, right?

YOUNG BOWIE
So?

WOODY
(exasperated)
Any remorse?

YOUNG BOWIE
(Pausing to think. He maintains a dismissive tone as if he doesn’t care)
Maybe.

(WOODY throws his hands up and then down by his side again.)
We all make mistakes.

WOODY
(WOODY stands to leave, looking over his shoulder, just like OLDER BOWIE earlier. ROCK ‘N’ ROLL SUICIDE starts.)
Of course, David. But mine don't fuck over an entire person's life.

(WOODY exits after tossing his drumsticks to the ground. ROCK ‘N’ ROLL SUICIDE by DAVID BOWIE continues to play)
ACT II SCENE 1

Home in Los Angeles.
Age: 27

A single bench on stage. Low lighting focused on a bench, dark around the outskirts. A pile of books lay scattered on a rug, empty plates, a pepper, and an empty carton of milk litter the floor as well.

STATION TO STATION by DAVID BOWIE plays.

YOUNG BOWIE sits on the rug, hunched over a book. ANGIE sits on a bench off to the side a little, staring off into the distance, distracted. Both are angled away from each other and do not acknowledge one another. Low lighting.
YOUNG BOWIE

Ziggy was a monster, but he was my very own monster. I became selfish. I killed Ziggy Stardust because I could. I didn’t discuss it with the boys, and they found out the same time I told my audience. I enjoyed it. I don’t know why I enjoyed it, but I did. It was a psychosomatic death wish.

(YOUNG BOWIE pauses, fidgeting with the pages as he looks down)
I think I started to get scared and wasn’t sure where the line between Ziggy and I actually was, or if it existed at all. Was I writing the characters or were they writing me? Maybe it was one in the same. I needed to keep changing and become even more new or alien or unknown. But what could be more unknown than an alien? So I retired. It wasn’t about ending my career, it was just ending a chapter.

ANGIE
(narrating to the audience, not looking at him)
He had been trying to be famous for over a decade. Now he was successful, and it scared the shit out of him. It was more than he could handle.

YOUNG BOWIE
It was like being in a car. Someone else is driving, and you suddenly accelerate. That sinking feeling in your chest when you move backwards as the car moves forwards and you’re not sure if you like it or not? That’s fame.

ANGIE
Drugs, sex, and fame sure didn’t help him. He started to scare me.

YOUNG BOWIE
When Diamond Dogs came around, I scared myself. I was mutating into someone or something I didn’t want to be or believe in. But--
ANGIE

It was easy. He slipped into that extension of Ziggy Stardust, or maybe even Aladdin Sane effortlessly, and it made him sick.

YOUNG BOWIE

It was claustrophobic.

ANGIE

It was scary.

(ANGIE gets off the bench to kneel next to YOUNG BOWIE, both now interacting and acknowledging the other. She speaks in a lower voice, appealing to him. Brighter lighting to indicate the change.)

You’re scaring me.

YOUNG BOWIE

(He can hear her, but is lost in his own thoughts. He’s desperate to think of something new for his career)

It needs to be new. What can I make that’s new?

ANGIE

Not retire.

YOUNG BOWIE

It’s not real.

ANGIE

What’s real, then?

YOUNG BOWIE

I have no idea.

ANGIE

Figure it out. You made Ziggy work.
YOUNG BOWIE
Ziggy died because he couldn’t cope with the circumstances he found himself in.

ANGIE
Those circumstances being?

YOUNG BOWIE
The fame and the money.

ANGIE
(a little antagonizing. It’s clear she’s exhausted and bitter from this conversation)
I think you got bored.

YOUNG BOWIE
I don’t have the patience right now.

ANGIE
Everyone’s running out of patience for you, David. Not the other way around.

YOUNG BOWIE
I need time.

ANGIE
You need to get sober.

YOUNG BOWIE
(sharply)
No.

ANGIE
You don’t see the problem?

YOUNG BOWIE
The album needs to get finished.
ANGIE
You need a functioning band for that first.

YOUNG BOWIE
I need to be functioning for the album to work.

ANGIE
You’re not functioning.

YOUNG BOWIE
I’m functioning.

ANGIE
Barely.

YOUNG BOWIE
(insistent)
It’s functioning.

ANGIE
David...
(She reaches over to take his hand, but he pulls away)

YOUNG BOWIE
What do you want?

ANGIE
(getting more exasperated)
Some responsibility would be lovely.

(ANGIE slouches, turning her back and sitting down on the rug. She faces away from YOUNG BOWIE as he continues reading books. They ignore each other. Lighting drops again to what it was at the start of the scene.)
ANGIE
Cocaine is a demonic drug.

ANGIE YOUNG BOWIE
It made him-- It made me--

YOUNG BOWIE
Obsessive. And I couldn’t stop it from happening. I just let it.

ANGIE
He would sit for hours and hours and watch reel after reel about the Third Reich and Hitler… Not because he agreed, God no, but because it was too interesting and fascinating to him and he became obsessed with the narcissism of people and ideas.

YOUNG BOWIE
I was drained while running solely on adrenaline. Each day was as invigorating as exhausting and I--

ANGIE
I couldn’t do much besides sit with him when it got bad.

YOUNG BOWIE
(becoming insistent again, trying to reassure himself)
I… For two years… I worked. It was working. And cocaine worked. I made albums. It worked. I was able to see things… for what they were? Or what people thought they weren’t. It worked.
Everyone didn’t understand why I stayed. They thought I gave up and decided to stay with him, but I thought leaving him would be giving up. He moved on from people so rapidly, probably because of his mother. And I couldn’t.

Angie thought I was crazy.

Ziggy had become too much of him.

I can’t escape him.

Then Aladdin Sane.

One is not totally what one has been conditioned to think.

Then Thin White Duke.

It’s more clear now.

He claims the devil was in our pool.

There’s a devil in our pool. I wasn’t the only one who saw it.

He hadn’t slept in 72 hours.
YOUNG BOWIE

The devil himself.

ANGIE

(insistent to show how crazy the situation is)

He pisses into jars because witches want it.

YOUNG BOWIE

Dark magic is real.

ANGIE

He’s convinced the Manson family is out to kill him.

YOUNG BOWIE

I’m seeing things more clearly than ever.

ANGIE

(exasperated)

They’re all in jail. No chance.

YOUNG BOWIE

Evil can always escape.

ANGIE

(turning to look at him and the lighting gets brighter like before)

Cocaine does not equal--

ANGIE

Truth.

YOUNG BOWIE

Truth.

ANGIE

(almost in tears out of frustration)

It’s not fair to me to do this.

YOUNG BOWIE

Should that bother me?
ANGIE
(getting up off the rug to look down at him)
It should. But I know it doesn’t.

(STAY by DAVID BOWIE plays)

ACT II SCENE 2

Cafe in Berlin.
Age: 29

YOUNG BOWIE sits at a cafe table, a cup of coffee in one hand, a cigarette in the other. A microphone stand is off to one side of the stage.

YOUNG BOWIE
I need to find some type of satisfaction that isn’t the high of cocaine. I am exhausted. I know I’m out of control and I’m enjoying watching myself get closer and closer to something monstrous.

(YOUNG BOWIE sips his coffee, staring off)
I was worried for my life for a while, but I don’t have to be a casualty anymore. It’s like being reborn, and a lot of people don’t get another chance. I was driven by lust, but it quickly turns to anger and even depression when the drugs run out. So you run to Berlin.
(IGGY POP walks to sit next to YOUNG BOWIE, a handful of papers, pens, and scissors in his arm. He sits down abruptly, papers spilling across the table as he grabs YOUNG BOWIE’s coffee and drinks from it, slurping loudly. YOUNG BOWIE rolls his eyes and looks down at IGGY)

IGGY POP
Yes?

YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE chuckles a little)
The Idiot.

IGGY POP
It was your name suggestion, not mine. Not my fault you think I’m a dick.

YOUNG BOWIE
It’s not my fault you are. Although, I will take the blame for bringing you to the smack capital while you’re manically depressed from withdrawal.

(Both burst into laughter and YOUNG BOWIE takes another drink of coffee)
I’ll take that one. So what have you got for us today, Ig?

IGGY POP
Writing. Writing! Music, words, the like. Thoughts, revelations, truths.

(YIGGY POP waves his arms in the air vaguely and quickly)

YOUNG BOWIE
(makes pointed eye contact to the scissors on the table)
Hm. Scissors included.
IGGY POP
(nodding very seriously)
Scissors necessary.

YOUNG BOWIE
(mock serious tones)
Of course.

IGGY POP
So if I’m *The Idiot*, what are you?

YOUNG BOWIE
(shrugging)
Going through a divorce, separating from my management...
(YOUNG BOWIE takes another sip from his tea, taking the spoon from the saucer and swirling it in the coffee)

Low.

IGGY POP
What album does that make, then? Depressed?

YOUNG BOWIE
Potentially.

IGGY POP
Lethargic?

YOUNG BOWIE
Could be.

IGGY POP
(matter of factly)
Sounds like a comedown album if I’ve ever heard of one.

YOUNG BOWIE
I suppose so, yes.
(IGGY POP shoves some paper and pens across to YOUNG BOWIE, grabbing for his coffee and taking a slurp again)

IGGY POP
Well, then write it, you dick.

YOUNG BOWIE
Just like that?

IGGY POP
Fuck with the fabric of time, man.

YOUNG BOWIE
I don’t think I write about a terribly wide range of things, you know.

IGGY POP
(grabbing a pencil and chewing on the end of it)
Then start!

YOUNG BOWIE
(thinking to himself a bit)
I’ve done the rock star game.

IGGY POP
(insistently shoving paper towards him again)
And?

YOUNG BOWIE
It nearly made me insane.

IGGY POP
Well, cocaine nearly made you insane. Music didn’t. So how is this album different?
YOUNG BOWIE
(YOUNG BOWIE grabs a pencil, following IGGY POP’s lead and chews on the end of a pencil)

Hm.

(IGGY POP takes the pencil out of his mouth and grabs the scissors. He starts drumming a simple beat on the table)

Why are you helping me?

IGGY POP
(mock hurt)

Friendship isn’t enough?

YOUNG BOWIE

James.

IGGY POP
(IGGY POP pauses, taking another slurp of coffee before looking up at YOUNG BOWIE, his tone less joking)

You resurrected me, Dave. I owe ya.

(YOUNG BOWIE grabs the coffee back from IGYY POP)

YOUNG BOWIE

I didn’t save you.

IGGY POP

Then what do you call touring with me?

YOUNG BOWIE

Fun?
And producing my album is?

Charity work.

And sticking me in rehab?

Necessary.

I’m the fucking pariah of the music industry right now, David. I’ve fucked up one too many times and you’re doing me a solid by looking after me.

Don’t mention it.

But--

You know, Theo and Vincent Van Gogh spent a while here, writing letters about how they saw themselves in this city.

Yeah, sure.
Vincent’s letters to his brother create a fantastic chronological timeline in which we are able to view his art and his declining mental health.

("still lost")
I’ve lost the symbolism here.

(taking a long sip of coffee)
One was the struggling genius artist and one person was...
(losing the symbolism himself as he trails off)
Not.

So in this scenario, who’s the genius here? Ziggy or Iggy? James or David?

Oh I don’t think that’s up for me to decide.

Can pop punk artists be compared to misunderstood post-impressionist painters?

Depends if you have both ears or not.

Hell, I’ll eat paint if you want me to, but I’m not sure I’m committed enough to the bit to chop off an ear. Now.

(he grabs the writing materials he brought and hands them to YOUNG BOWIE once again)
We’re in Berlin. Write about the wall, the scenery, the people, questions about life. Anything.
YOUNG BOWIE

(serious for a minute)
Any answers to life lie within life itself.

IGGY POP
I’ll carry a conversation about the realities of dilitants
and manipulators using words like punk rock to erase the
effort and energy that exists in that genre but life
itself? Write about a girl you fucked, man.

YOUNG BOWIE
If I have to do that, I’m making you write about…

(pause while he thinks)
Mass production.

IGGY POP
(the mock serious tone comes back as IGGY
grabs some paper for himself)
As a Detroiter, it is my duty. I accept.

YOUNG BOWIE
(picking up materials)
Perfect.
(SOUND AND VISION by DAVID BOWIE begins to play. As the instrumental section begins, IGGO POP walks over to the microphone stand. He begins speaking into it, mostly random sentences, every once in a while resembling phrases from DUM DUM BOYS. The sound isn’t particularly great, so his vocals are quiet and grainy against the music. As that happens, YOUNG BOWIE is taking the paper from the table and begins writing phrases from SOUND AND VISION on it. Once done, YOUNG BOWIE uses the scissors to cut out the phrases and rearrange them. As the lyrics start, IGGOY’s microphone goes even more muted so it is very hard to hear anything he’s saying, and YOUNG BOWIE has put together some phrases from SOUND AND VISION and created part of a song.)

ACT II SCENE 3


OLDER BOWIE stands in a recording studio, a single microphone in front of him with a sound box around him. A simple sound booth is behind him. YOUNG BOWIE is next to him.
YOUNG BOWIE
(talking to OLDER BOWIE, slightly dejected or pleading)
I don’t want to stop.

OLDER BOWIE
I had to stop eventually.

YOUNG BOWIE
(bargaining)
The 80s weren’t too bad.

OLDER BOWIE
The 90s really could have been better. I knew that touring and continuing like I was would kill me, quite literally.

YOUNG BOWIE
Riding that high of fame--

OLDER BOWIE
Once 2003 came around, that year did enough damage to make up for the last thirty-five. Buckets had to be placed off stage for me to get sick in between songs. My family was so worried.

YOUNG BOWIE
Drugs can’t take me out.

OLDER BOWIE
A heart attack tried to.

(OLDER BOWIE takes the microphone off the stand, wandering around a little with it down by his side. He slightly resembles a stand up comic who has given up)
YOUNG BOWIE
I love touring, though.

OLDER BOWIE
I hate touring but love live performances.

YOUNG BOWIE
We made use of those ten years off.

OLDER BOWIE
I knew I was closer to being done with music than I wanted, and it didn’t feel like it was my choice.

YOUNG BOWIE
(turning to face OLDER BOWIE, looking him slightly up and down. Not defeated, but slightly sad and matter-of-fact)
I think I’m done.

OLDER BOWIE
Music was always our priority...

YOUNG BOWIE
But now it’s not for you.

OLDER BOWIE
(OLDER BOWIE lets his arms go limp by his side)
It’s not.

YOUNG BOWIE
And that’s okay. I’ve never known what a full family looks like. It’s always been fractured.

OLDER BOWIE
And now I do.
YOUNG BOWIE
I wouldn’t trade that for the world if I could. Hold onto it, for my sake. This is all you, now.

(YOUNG BOWIE walks off stage, opening the door as GEORGE UNDERWOOD walks on to take his place)

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(walks on stage and stops short of meeting up with OLDER BOWIE)
I cannot believe I finally get to meet Greta Garbo in person.

OLDER BOWIE
(snapping himself out of his talk with YOUNG BOWIE only moments before)
Much better than meeting David Bowie, I would venture to guess.

(OLDER BOWIE returns the microphone to the stand. GEORGE and OLDER BOWIE go in and give each other a big hug, pulling apart to give each other a look up and down.)

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(egging him on)
You were never Bowie. Always David Jones with the wonky eye.

OLDER BOWIE
That was your doing, not mine.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(feigning ignorance)
Who’s to say?
OLDER BOWIE
The one who got punched in the face, probably.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
We both were obsessed with Carol.

OLDER BOWIE
She definitely liked me more.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Only because you convinced her to stand me up at our date.

OLDER BOWIE
(smugly)
Oh, did I?

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
I stand by my actions.

OLDER BOWIE
Oh, do you?

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(waves his hand in the air)
That was fifty years ago. Get over it.

OLDER BOWIE
(fake sigh)
I never could impress you, could I?

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(fondly)
I was always impressed. So what’s this legacy mode you’re in, then? Why the mildly worrying emails veiled in vagueness?

OLDER BOWIE
I’m happy now.
GEORGE UNDERWOOD
I would hope so.

OLDER BOWIE
I mean it, George. Really happy. Content.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
What’s changed?
(looks OLDER BOWIE up and down, eyeing the microphone hanging at his side)
Starting a stand up career?

OLDER BOWIE
I’m not just a product anymore. I’m not connected to thousands of people who watch my every move and monitor every shit I take.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Enjoying the time off.

OLDER BOWIE
I never thought I would be such a family-oriented guy. I didn’t think that was part of my make-up. But somebody said as you get older you become the person you always should have been and I feel that’s happening to me.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Definitely didn’t take that approach when we were younger.

OLDER BOWIE
(small smile)
Can’t say I disagree.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
You’d become an expert on something so quickly and give it up two seconds later.

OLDER BOWIE
Well...
GEORGE UNDERWOOD

You nearly became a monk.

OLDER BOWIE

(mildly protesting)

Hey--

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

(teasing)

You were two seconds away from jumping on the next train to the monastery in Scotland.

OLDER BOWIE

(giving in)

A true miracle I stuck with music.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Over fifty years.

OLDER BOWIE

1962.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

The Kon-rads.

OLDER BOWIE

It was never my band. Always yours.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Oh, I know.

OLDER BOWIE

How many weeks of me complaining did it take for that to change? And how many weeks after for you to quit because you were sick of me?
GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Too many. And now look at you. Recording secret albums in...

(waves vaguely at the recording studio)

Here?

OLDER BOWIE

All I really want is to put out another record.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Well, great. I’m a fan of this dungeon setting you’ve got. You’re certainly reinventing subtlety.

OLDER BOWIE

(small smile)

That’s the hope.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

So what have you got?—Besides a series of NDAs and confused fans, I’m assuming.

OLDER BOWIE

Something I’m proud of. Something I know reflects me better than some of the other albums have.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Breaking your rituals, I see.

OLDER BOWIE

Mm. Re-appraised.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Is this your take on aging gracefully?

OLDER BOWIE

Rock stars are destined to become a disappointment simply by aging.
GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Well that’s because no rock stars ever make it to where they’re afforded the opportunity to age. So dropping a surprise album is a distraction from the weight, wrinkles, and sedentary lifestyle you’ve acquired.

OLDER BOWIE
Precisely.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
So a sixty-five year old, washed up--

OLDER BOWIE
Hey--

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
(purposely egging him on with a smile)
_Washed up, has been_ of a musician instead sings about…

OLDER BOWIE
(pause)
Anything I want, really.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Anything left?

OLDER BOWIE
As if I haven’t spent entire albums on one subject.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Is this the same, then?

OLDER BOWIE
Not at all. I don’t have the restrictions, the deadlines, producers or companies demanding certain products.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
So you have…?
OLDER BOWIE
NDAs, late hours in a studio no one knows about...
(taking a deep breath, grinning)
Absolute happiness.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Absolute vagueness. You’re taking cryptic to heart as well, it seems.

OLDER BOWIE
(as he continues his tone gets more passionate)
I’m writing about a young soldier sent to war who would rather be high than fighting for a country that doesn’t care about him, a young girl whose fear of her own country rules over everything she does in a modern society, the mind and psyche of a school shooter, the alienation of celebrities and the pedestals that we give them--

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Cohesive.

OLDER BOWIE
Glad you see it, too.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Bit different from When I Live My Dream, huh.

OLDER BOWIE
(mock serious tone)
Basically the same.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Of course.
OLDER BOWIE
I’ve done the fame. I have the money. But I also now have a second chance at an actual family. No more touring with a child who sits backstage. No more celebrity alienation or the whirlwind lifestyle that nearly took me out before.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
Just you and your music.

OLDER BOWIE
Exactly.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
I’m really happy for you, Dave.

OLDER BOWIE
(nodding as he puts the microphone back in the stand)
Me, too.

(THE STARS ARE OUT TONIGHT blends into BLACKSTAR by DAVID BOWIE plays)

ACT II SCENE 4

Apartment, New York City.
December, 2015.
Age: 68

OLDER BOWIE sits at the same desk, lit by a lamp, pen and an open greeting card in his hands. Most are written in a pile, a pile of envelopes next to him.
OLDER BOWIE

The last album was the hardest to produce. No one knew I was dying, except my family of course. I don’t want sympathy. I don’t want pity. I think it was hardest for me, since I had nowhere else to go and nothing else I could say. It had to be perfect.

(he begins slowly taking the written cards and putting them into envelopes, creating a third pile on the desk)

As an artist, it’s imperative to view your success through your work. You may not want to, but you have to. And, what I’ve found over the years as I’ve grown older, I’m quite pleased in saying I’ve done enough. I have. Twenty-six studio albums, a musical just opened, a new album on its way. Each day has been worthwhile.

(pause)

Each artist always has a fear. Your art is how you channel or deal with that fear. It’s rather cathartic, and not everyone is granted that. I think I was granted more than most people could even fathom.

(another pause)

Although cathartic, it’s not always curing. The slow march of cancer seems daunting. Inevitable. Unstoppable. I’m just helplessly waiting. Maybe a week or two more, I’m betting.

(continues putting cards into envelopes)

I… wasn’t perfect when I was younger, and I’m not perfect now by any means. A simple email with my regards and sincere apologies doesn’t fix the mess ups and the messy bits that make up what my life was, I know that. I ruined enough things early on with too many people to just get off scot free. It also doesn’t do justice to those relationships that span decades all mushed into a paragraph or two. Telling them goodbye? That feels good. It means...

Well I suppose it means nothing, really. Does anything truly mean anything in the end? Don’t know if that’s for me to say.

(pause)
I said I would deal with the sense of isolation, lack of communication, and all those negatives at the end of my life. Save it for the very last. I’m trying to. I can’t give everything away, you know.

(He finishes the last of the letters in envelopes)

Music has given me over fifty years of extraordinary experiences. I can’t say that life’s pains or more tragic episodes have been diminished because of it. But it’s allowed me so many moments of companionship when I’ve been lonely and a sublime means of communication when I wanted to touch people. It’s been both my doorway of perception and the house that I live in. I only hope others can find the same joy in what I’ve created as the pleasure I’ve had in making it.

(OLDER BOWIE stands up from the desk and exits. LAZARUS by DAVID BOWIE plays.)

ACT II SCENE 5

Scattered places.
January 10th, 2016.
Age: Recently turned 69

ANGIE, WOODY WOODMANSEY, IGGY POP, and GEORGE UNDERWOOD are all sitting on stools on stage. They all hold a letter from OLDER BOWIE in their hands, clearly opened and read.
ANGIE
In the 70s, his fear of death was really hand in hand with the excessive paranoia that comes with excessive drug taking. And it was more of a fear of getting killed, I think. Although we had been divorced for years, the news and media never let up on updates about David, as if I had any emotional investment left in it. I had known about the strokes and the cancer. Yeah, it was cancer, but it was those cigarettes that really did it. Any picture of us together he’s holding some variation of something to smoke. Cigarettes had more to do with it than you’d think.

WOODY WOODMANSEY
David officially fired me the day of my wedding, actually. Not—not great. I saw him three years later and we side-stepped talking about the real issue. He apologized for the drugs and the money, and it felt like the open wounds I had unintentionally carried for a while had healed. I bounced around and was a freelance drummer for a while with Simon and Garfunkel, Dexy’s Midnight Runners, and Paul McCartney. I did alright, you know.

IGGY POP
Sometime in the 1980s I met up with David again for coffee or something. He told me that he had seen a psychic who had said he would die when he was either sixty-nine or seventy. I could tell that it meant something to him, whether or not it meant something to me.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
“ Toothbrush” was the last thing I actually said to David. When we were together, we had a real surreal sense of humor, and I think a lot of people felt excluded. They didn’t know what was going on.
ANGIE
He managed his death with a great amount of grace and dignity, given everything. He wouldn’t allow himself to become morbid and sit around and do nothing, but instead made himself busy. Just look at what he left us. That bastard wrote a goddamn swansong of a farewell album.

WOODY WOODMANSEY
I saw David a few more times here and there throughout the years. Felt amicable after a while, like running into an old school mate. I started a tour in 2016 and our second gig fell on January 8th, his birthday. We even rang his phone on stage and sang happy birthday in front of the audience. All he said was “thank you”, “ask them what they think of Blackstar”, and “Good luck with the tour”.

IGGY POP
I got the call, same as everyone else. It had been liver cancer, I knew that. It had been something like eighteen months. I was in shock, of course. A couple hours later that conversation hit me all over again. Oh. That’s what he had told me.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
He was funny. When we only had landlines, I’d just be about to call him and I’d get through immediately as he was calling me. He used to call me Michael and I used to call him Robert, which were our middle names. We were on the top deck of a bus once when we were kids, and we both said at the same time, “Don’t forget your toothbrush”. And so for the next fifty years, whenever we wanted to remind ourselves of that, we said, “one-two-three toothbrush!”

ANGIE
The last time I saw him was outside the lawyer’s office in a coffee shop. We drank coffee, we kissed, and then we said goodbye. It wasn’t a particularly happy time. We were divorced, and that was that. It was 1979.
WOODY WOODMANSEY
Two days later all of the band’s phones were ringing during the night and my son had called to ask if I had known that David had died. I was devastated. It was one of the worst days of my life. I felt rather negatively towards David from time to time, but I deeply loved him, truly. I miss him.

IGGY POP
David’s friendship was the light of my life. I never met such a brilliant person. He was the best there is. If he hadn’t gotten me out of Los Angeles and into the studio with The Idiot, I don’t think I’d still be here. It’s a valuable lesson to not take anything for granted and I can only hope he knew what he was worth to me.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
The last time I saw him we finished by saying “Toothbrush”. It was silly.

(looks down at hands)
Listening to Blackstar now is totally different. It’s melancholy, not really sad.

ANGIE
Some of it is rather cheeky.

WOODY WOODMANSEY
You couldn’t have staged a classier death.

IGGY POP
It takes a certain level of bravery to do that.

GEORGE UNDERWOOD
He’s not asking for pity. Not even asking for you to get sentimental, really.

ANGIE
Like an anthem.
IGGY POP
He wasn’t thinking like a musician but an artist.

WOODY WOODMANSEY
At the end, he was able to create a beginning. Not many have been able to do the same.

ANGIE
When he was born, the midwife who delivered him looked at Peggy and said “This child has been on this Earth before”. And I believe that. I think he’s lost somewhere in those stars, fitting in there better than he ever did here.

(LIFE ON MARS by DAVID BOWIE plays as everyone exits)
Appendix

I didn’t get the chance to attach photos of the performance, but I did have a clear idea of each character, costuming, and set design. In this section of the appendix, I’ve created a brief overview of each character idea and costume inspiration.

OLDER BOWIE:

Inspiration: David Bowie in *Lazarus* music video, previous Rolling Stone photoshoot

Sources: www.imdb.com and www.rollingstone.com
YOUNG BOWIE:

Inspiration: David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell To Earth*, Tilda Swinton, Thin White Duke, and *Station to Station*

ANGIE:

Inspiration: Angie Bowie in early 1970s, flowing dresses, Twiggy

Sources: www.dailymail.co.uk, www.pinterest.co.uk, and www.express.co.uk
WOODY WOODMANSEY

Inspiration: Early 1970s Woody on tour with David Bowie, 1970s Freddie Mercury

IGGY POP

Inspiration: 1977 Iggy Pop, the Idiot Tour

GEORGE UNDERWOOD

Inspiration: Willem Dafoe and Gary Oldman

Sources: www.gq.com, www.telegraph.co.uk, and www.stezor.com
Bibliography


