

PLAYS FOR YOUNG AUDIENCES

A PARTNERSHIP OF SEATTLE CHILDREN'S THEATRE AND CHILDREN'S THEATRE COMPANY-MINNEAPOLIS

2400 THIRD AVENUE SOUTH
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA 55404
612-872-5108
FAX 612-874-8119

The Flying Machine

By
Phil Porter

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CHARACTERS:

NURSE CLARISSA CAKEBREAD

PEEKA CAVENDISH

MUNIB SIDDIQI

BONYEK STRANGLEMAN

SUPERINTENDENT KIMBERLEY RAINWATER (VOICE OF)

ROYSTON STRANGLEMAN (GHOST OF)

SCENE ONE

The children's ward at St. Ruth's Hospital For Damaged Eyes. Five iron beds lie in a line along the ward at equal distances apart.

Beside each bed dangles a red 'alarm cord'. Also, each bed has a water tap sticking out of the wall beside it. A huge plug, about a metre in diameter, sits in a plughole in the centre of the room. It is attached to a chain which runs along the floor and up one wall to a lever. Next to that lever is another lever labelled "sprinkler lever".

A blackboard hangs on the wall. The words 'strorbreez', 'grayv' and 'muddd' have been chalked up on the board in chaotic and overlapping letters. There is just one window, very high up, and a window-opening pole. There is a boiler attached to the wall with a switch beside it. An old-fashioned green telephone sits on a little ledge on the wall. There is a large barrel marked "Barrel Of Oddments". The floor of the ward is dirty and the paint is flaking off the walls.

Peeka and Munib are standing by their beds. They wear pyjamas. Munib's eyes are bandaged so he cannot see. Peeka can see out of one eye – her other eye is covered with a dressing. Nurse Cakebread stands near the door with Bonyek. She holds a clipboard.

CAKEBREAD Children, we have somebody new joining us. His name is Bonyek Strangleman. Say hello to them, Bonyek. *(Pause.)* Bonyek will be with us for quite some time, won't you, Bonyek? So, make him feel part of the family. Who would like to help Bonyek unpack his things?

PEEKA I will, Nurse Cakebread.

CAKEBREAD Peeka, thank you. And who would like to explain to Bonyek the way things work round here, all our little systems?

PEEKA I will, Nurse Cakebread.

CAKEBREAD Peeka. And who would like to be Bonyek's special settling-in friend?

MUNIB I will, Nurse Cakebread.

CAKEBREAD Peeka, thank you. Do you need the toilet, Bonyek? *(Pause.)* Well, I'm going to my office now, but if you do need anything, or if anything troubles you, just pull your alarm cord. There's one by every bed. I'll be back with your night-time medicines shortly.

Nurse Cakebread leaves the ward. Pause.

PEEKA Hello, Bonyek, my name's Peekka. Pleasure to have you aboard. *(Pause.)* Go on, Munib, tell him your name.

MUNIB I'm Munib.

PEEKA We've had our operations. You've got yours coming up, have you? Don't worry, you'll be fine. It's a grubby old hospital but the Visiting Surgeon has a good reputation.

Bonyek puts his case on one of the beds.

PEEKA Ah... we're not allowed to touch Bed Number Four. It's okay, you weren't to know.

Peekka picks up Bonyek's case, being careful not to touch the bed. She puts the case on a different bed.

PEEKA I'd suggest this one. It's got the best remaining mattress.

MUNIB Some have springs poking through, I'm afraid.

PEEKA Let's see about unpacking this case. Get you nice and settled in.

Peekka sets Bonyek's case down on the middle bed. She opens the case. It contains a spanner, a shoe and two bags of quick drying cement.

PEEKA Is that all you've got? One spanner, one shoe and two bags of quick-drying cement?

She closes the case and puts it at the foot of Bonyek's bed.

PEEKA Well, everything you need's provided. Toothbrush, blankets, sheets... Oh, and there's a flannel and towel in the bedside drawer /

MUNIB The flannels smell quite milky, I'm afraid.

PEEKA Munib says the flannels smell milky but that's just him. He's got a very sensitive nose. Not so noticeable for the likes of us. *(Pause.)* What else? Instead of saying "brilliant" we say "grilliant" so look out for that. Oh, and there's a sprinkler system, look. They use it to clean the place.

MUNIB Which happens hardly ever.

PEEKA That's what the plug's for, they pull it out to stop the ward filling up with water. *(Pause.)* As far as entertainment goes, we spend most of our time on our projects, don't we, Munib? I'm making a town from all the dust and fluff that gathers round the edges of the room, look. I call it Fluffborough.

Peeka produces a big chipboard rectangle. On it is a town made from dust and fluff.

PEEKA I used Munib's hair for the railway lines, but apart from that it's all dust and fluff. Cathedral, office block, prison for the prisoners... *(Pause.)* Munib, tell Bonyek about your projects, you know I hate doing all the talking.

MUNIB Well /

PEEKA Munib does two projects, origami and The Register Of Smells. He's actually very able. Go on, Munib, tell Bonyek.

MUNIB I do The Register Of Smells and origami, which means folding up paper into shapes. So far I've done a frog, two birds and a protoceratops.

Peeka produces a board with an origami frog, two origami birds and an enormous origami protoceratops on it – a massive project perfectly executed.

MUNIB Protoceratops means "early horned face". It took a long time to make because I can't see anything. *(Pause.)* My other project's The Register Of Smells. If I can smell something I write it on the blackboard.

Munib points somewhere other than the blackboard. Peeka adjusts his arm.

MUNIB Then Peeka copies it up in the exercise book before bed. So far today I've smelled strawberries, gravy and mud. *(Pause.)* Peeka.

PEEKA Yes, Munib.

MUNIB Is there really a boy called Bonyek?

PEEKA Of course there is.

MUNIB So why doesn't he speak?

BONYEK "Don't say a word till you've sized people up a bit."
That's my brother Royston's motto.

MUNIB Was that Bonyek?

PEEKA Yes, that was him.

BONYEK But you two seem all right to me, in a weirdo kind
of way.

PEEKA Thank you, I think.

BONYEK No probs. So what kind of stuff do you do for fun
round here?

PEEKA For fun?

BONYEK Yeah, for like fun. What kind of stuff do you do?

PEEKA Like I was saying, I'm making a town from /

BONYEK Yeah, but what about actual fun?

PEEKA I don't understand.

BONYEK Like when Cakebread snoozes off or whatever.

MUNIB I think he means things like... adventures.

BONYEK Yeah, stuff like that, what do you do for fun?

Pause as Bonyek and Peeka think about this.

PEEKA Well... We... Sometimes we talk about boats.

BONYEK You talk about boats?

MUNIB Peeka knows all about them from books.

BONYEK Yeah, talking about boats ain't an adventure.

PEEKA Well, no, but /

BONYEK Being on a boat, an actual one, now that's a whole
different kettle of spanners /

PEEKA Yes, well, sadly, Bonyek, we don't have any actual
boats on the ward. Or rivers or lakes or oceans. So
actual boating isn't actually much of an option.

BONYEK I don't know about that.

Bonyek grabs the large wooden window-opening pole.

PEEKA Er... what are you doing?

BONYEK Just cos we ain't got no real boats, don't mean we can't have a kind of adventure. *(He slots the pole into the frame of Munib's bed to create a mast.)* One mast.

PEEKA Actually, no, I don't think that's a very good idea.

BONYEK Why not?

PEEKA Well, for one thing, Nurse Cakebread will be back soon.

BONYEK So? "No fun without danger" my brother Royston always says.

PEEKA Royston never met Nurse Cakebread /

BONYEK *(Attaching a sheet to the pole.)* One sail.

PEEKA Please don't do that /

BONYEK In the mood for a voyage, Munib?

PEEKA Come away, Munib.

MUNIB *(Gripping the makeshift mast.)* A voyage to where?

PEEKA Munib, come away.

BONYEK Anywhere you like. Over rapids, out to sea, down some kind of African river with hippos and all that kind of stuff...

MUNIB Out to sea!

BONYEK *(Climbs aboard.)* Out to sea it is then.

MUNIB This is going to be grilliant. Totally, utterly grilliant.

BONYEK Okay, before we get going, best check we've got all the stuff. Mast.

MUNIB Check.

BONYEK Sail.

MUNIB Check.

PEEKA This is so babyish.

BONYEK Rations.

MUNIB Rations?

BONYEK Hang about, I've got the rations. I made them before I came.

Bonyek takes some sandwiches wrapped in foil from his pocket and waves them in front of Munib's face.

MUNIB Mmm, chicken and beetroot, my favourite!

BONYEK So...

As Bonyek describes the scene the environment changes. The boat is isolated by a blue and blissful wave-reflected light. The sheet becomes taut like a sail. Gulls make gull noises. The bedboat rocks gently. Peekka looks on jealously.

BONYEK ...first we imagine the smell of the sea, all salty and fishy and stuff. Then we imagine the feel of the air on our skin, and the sound of the wind in the sail, and the sound of the seagulls and the... Hang on a tick.

Snap back to reality.

MUNIB What?

BONYEK There's something we forgot. We need a Captain. Someone to be first-in-command and order us about and that kind of stuff. Someone that knows about boats.

MUNIB Peekka knows about boats.

BONYEK Yeah, but Peekka thinks it's babyish.

PEEKA I don't think it's... completely babyish.

BONYEK What, you mean you'll be Captain?

PEEKA If it'll help you out...

MUNIB Grilliant.

BONYEK Jump aboard, Skip. No time to lose. We've got a big voyage ahead.

Peeka boards the bedboat. We return to the blissful ocean environment as Bonyek describes the scene.

BONYEK So, the taste of the air. And the way it feels on our skin. The smell of the sea and the seagulls making noises and stuff. And the wind in the sail and the sound of the waves going like blonk-blonk against the side of the boat.

MUNIB What's the weather like?

BONYEK Can't you feel it? It's kind of hot but there's kind of like a breeze?

MUNIB Oh yeah, I can feel it now. It's kind of... hot, but kind of... breezy!

BONYEK Not many clouds.

MUNIB And what's it called, the boat?

BONYEK Don't ask me, ask the Skip.

MUNIB What's it called, Peeka?

PEEKA Call me Skipper.

MUNIB What's it called, Skipper?

PEEKA She's called Pilgrim Nine and she's a sloop. That means one sail. But we're not here to talk amongst ourselves, we're here to feed the hungry dolphins.

The clicking and giggling of dolphins surrounds the bedboat.

MUNIB Dolphins!

PEEKA There's less and less fish in this part of the sea, that's why they're getting a bit hungry.

Peeka distributes imaginary buckets of fish...

PEEKA Munib, you take the mackerel. Bonyek, take the sticklebacks. I'll take the blueback sprats. They're very hungry, so feed them as much as they'll eat.

They feed the imaginary dolphins with fish from the imaginary buckets. The dolphins splash and chirrup gratefully.

MUNIB They love it, they're snatching the mackerels right out of my hand!

BONYEK Here you go, old boy. Munch on that. Loads more where that came from.

PEEKA Don't be afraid to give them two at once. It really is a matter of stuffing them till they almost burst.

MUNIB Here you go, dolphin. Swallow that down. Nice and lovely.

BONYEK Look!

PEEKA What?

BONYEK There!

MUNIB Where?

BONYEK I think it's a...!

Bonyek points Munib's arm to a spot in the water to one side of the bedboat.

BONYEK It's a killer whale! And it's going to jump right over the boat!

There is a rumbling, whooshing noise as the imaginary animal launches itself out of the water. They follow it as it flies over the boat, Bonyek guiding Munib's arm to chart the animal's trajectory. Eventually, the whale lands in the water with a massive crash.

MUNIB Wow! That was so majestic! I don't think I've ever seen anything better! Or more... majestic!

PEEKA Uh oh.

BONYEK What is it, Skip?

PEEKA *(Sucks her finger and holds it up.)* The weather's taking a turn for the worse. I think there's a storm a-brewin'.

The bedboat begins to lurch and pitch as the sky darkens and the wind picks up. Imaginary rain hammers down in golf-ball drops...

MUNIB I don't like it! I don't like all the rain!

PEEKA All right, Munib, just do as I say and we'll be fine.

MUNIB It's getting down my vest and pants!

PEEKA Munib, take down the sail! Bonyek, grab the rudder! We must face into the breaking waves or we'll capsize!

Munib and Bonyek set about their tasks. Peeka looks through imaginary binoculars. The weather continues to worsen.

BONYEK How's it looking, Skipper?!

PEEKA Not good! It's a force ten and it's heading this way!

BONYEK She won't turn!

PEEKA Keep trying, Bonyek! It's coming from the east!

MUNIB *(At the top of the pole.)* I can't do it! It's all snagged up!

PEEKA It's all right, Munib! I'm coming!

Peeka helps Munib to release the sheet.

BONYEK Look out!

An imaginary wave crashes into the side of the bedboat. Munib screams. Their voices can barely be heard above the roar of the storm.

PEEKA Scramble to the high side!

They cling to one side of the bedboat, only their weight preventing a capsize. Another wave crashes into the vessel, sending them sprawling.

PEEKA Cling on!

MUNIB I can't!

PEEKA For dear life!

MUNIB It's too strong!

BONYEK *(Points.)* Tidal wave!

PEEKA What?!

BONYEK Tidal wave!!!

A massive wave hits the bedboat. Peekka, Bonyek and Munib can cling on no longer and they are thrown from the bedboat. The sound of the mighty storm disappears and is replaced by the sound of cicadas, far away elephants and gentle waves nudging pebbles back and forth on a stony beach. The sun is setting. The children cough and splutter and crawl about. Munib and Bonyek crawl into one another. They feel each other's faces...

MUNIB Where are we?

BONYEK I don't know. It's all sand and stuff. Must be some kind of desert island.

MUNIB Are we alive?

BONYEK I reckon.

PEEKA We are alive. Father Neptune, God of the sea, has brought us to the island of Habbagoogaloogaloo, a place full of diamonds and wild pigs. We will live here for the rest of our days. Munib, sniff out some supper with your excellent nose. Bonyek, build a shack with three hammocks and a separate changing area for girls. I'll start a fire by rubbing a stick with another stick /

CAKEBREAD What's this, a game of Let's Pretend?

PEEKA Nurse Cakebread!

The desert island sounds disappear and the light returns to normal. Nurse Cakebread is standing with a tray of medicines, having returned to the ward unnoticed. Peekka and Munib rush to stand beside their beds.

CAKEBREAD It's certainly a messy game, whatever it is. I was only away a short time.

Cakebread gives Peekka pills and some water. She swallows the pills.

CAKEBREAD It's not like you, Peekka Cavendish. To be playing at dangerous games. And talking about rubbing sticks with other sticks. There are few enough good eyes on the ward without us wafting the window-opening pole hither and thither, don't you think?

PEEKA Yes, Nurse Cakebread. Sorry, Nurse Cakebread.

Cakebread spoons gloopy medicine into Munib's mouth...

CAKEBREAD Nurse Cakebread goes out of her way to make your time here happy, Munib. She battled with all three Boards Of Governors to get the paper for your paper-folding. And the chalk for your Register Of Smells. Dragging her fresh today sheets across the floor seems a little ungrateful.

MUNIB Sorry, Nurse Cakebread.

Nurse Cakebread turns to Bonyek.

CAKEBREAD Lie down, Bonyek.

Pause. Bonyek lies on his bed.

CAKEBREAD Good boy.

Cakebread administers eyedrops...

CAKEBREAD It's natural that you should feel unsettled, Bonyek. New places and new people can be frightening. But try not to be an Unsettler Of Others. Here at St. Ruth's we have a motto, don't we children? And what is it?

MUNIB 'Pietas famulatus veneratio'.

CAKEBREAD That's right, Peekka. And what does 'pietas famulatus veneratio' mean?

MUNIB It means 'kindness obedience respect'.

CAKEBREAD That's right, Peekka. And what do we mean by 'respect'? When we say 'respect', what do we mean?

MUNIB Being polite?

CAKEBREAD No, Munib, we don't mean 'being polite'. We mean 'not being an Unsettler Of Others'. 'Pietas famulatus veneratio'. We'll have four hours of project time before bed. Bonyek, your project is to find a project. Something calm with no unsettlingness. You can look in the Barrel Of Oddments for inspiration.

Nurse Cakebread points out the Barrel Of Oddments and heads for the door.

CAKEBREAD Oh, I almost forgot... As a reward for all her hard work, Nurse Cakebread has been granted a week's holiday, starting tomorrow. And she's chosen to return to the beautiful Greek island of Zakynthos.

PEEKA You mean... you won't be here?

CAKEBREAD Don't get too upset. Nurse Cakebread's sister-in-law will fill in while she's away, and her name is also Nurse Cakebread, and she's exactly as nice as I am. And when I come back, those of you that can see can look at my photographs. So that's something to look forward to, isn't it?

PEEKA Yes, Nurse Cakebread.

Again Nurse Cakebread heads for the door, but she is distracted by the protoceratops.

CAKEBREAD Munib, you finished your protoceratops! How splendid!

MUNIB Thank you, Nurse Cakebread.

CAKEBREAD I shall miss you when I'm away. I shall miss you all.

Nurse Cakebread goes. Peekka gets to work on Fluffborough. Bonyek sits on the end of his bed. Munib gets back on his hands and knees, continuing his search for food on Habbagoogaloogaloo.

MUNIB Parsnips! There's parsnips, buried in the soil, I can smell them! *(He digs at the imaginary soil with his hands.)* Oh yes indeedy, these'll roast up a treat. How's that fire coming along, Skip?

PEEKA What fire?

MUNIB *(Pulling imaginary parsnips from the ground.)* The one you were starting. We need it for the roasting up of these little beauties.

PEEKA Munib, your hand is empty. There are no parsnips. There is no Habbagoogaloogaloo, I made it up. It's all just a silly, stupid, made-up bag of animal poo!

MUNIB But Peekka /

PEEKA No, I don't want to play. It's not real and it got us in trouble with Nurse Cakebread.

MUNIB Who cares about Nurse Cakebread? I don't.

PEEKA You were pleased enough when she called your protoceratops splendid, Munib Siddiqi.

Peeka resumes work on her dust-and-fluff town.

MUNIB What about you, Bonyek? Fancy cooking up some parsnips under the stars?

BONYEK Nah.

MUNIB Oh go on. It's amazing the way you made us think it was real.

BONYEK Nah, Peeka was right in the first place. I mean, doing stuff for pretend's kind of okayish. But it's kind of babyish too when you think about it and stuff.

PEEKA Precisely.

BONYEK Cos what's the point? You finish playing and you're back in the same old stupid world. How's that worth getting in trouble for?

PEEKA Precisely. Well said, Bonyek.

BONYEK Cos why do pretend adventures when we could just as easy bust out of this place and go on a real one? With actual real danger and real actual stuff happening?

PEEKA That's precisely what I'm saying. No it isn't.

BONYEK Come here, Munib. I got something to show you.

PEEKA *(As Munib stumbles over to Bonyek.)* Bonyek, tell me you're not serious about breaking out.

Bonyek picks up his suitcase...

PEEKA Listen, I know it's not easy being cooped up... But escaping? We're here because we need to be here /

BONYEK One perfectly normal suitcase, right, Munib?

MUNIB I don't know, I can't see.

BONYEK Wrong. For here we have a secret compartment.
(He reveals the secret compartment.) And what should the secret compartment have inside it?

Bonyek produces a big, tatty map. It is drawn in pencil with blue annotations and red crosses marking certain areas.

BONYEK Oh look! If it's not a whole big massive map of St. Ruth's Hospital For Damaged Eyes!

MUNIB Wow!

PEEKA Where did you get that map?

Bonyek dances jubilantly around Peeka with the map and sings. Munib is very excited by the map and the map song...

BONYEK *(To the tune of Where Did You Get That Hat?)*
Where did you get that map?
Where did you get that map?

PEEKA I demand to know where you got it from!

BONYEK Isn't it a lovely map?
And just the proper kind of map?

PEEKA Bonyek, please, I don't like any of this /

BONYEK Right, let's whack this on the wall. Have a good old squizzle. Let the monkey see the rabbit!

Bonyek sticks the map over the Register Of Smells.

PEEKA Careful!

BONYEK What of?

PEEKA The Register Of Smells, I haven't copied it up yet.

MUNIB Who cares? I don't.

BONYEK So! She's in bits at the moment, she was too big to hide in one piece. *(He points at the various red crosses.)* There's a big bit behind the shed, some stuff behind the dustbins, stuff up this tree... I reckon we drag it all to here, it's a garden with like

walls all round it, and that's where we stick it all together. Any questions?

PEEKA I have a question.

BONYEK Yeah?

PEEKA Well, apart from knowing you're being stupid and dangerous, I don't actually understand what you're talking about. Bits of what? Stick what together?

BONYEK What, didn't I say?

PEEKA No.

BONYEK It's a flying machine!

Bonyek tugs on the map and it unfurls to reveal a flying machine design.

MUNIB A flying machine?!

BONYEK Yeah. It's in pieces at the moment.

MUNIB A flying machine?!

BONYEK Yeah. They're hidden round the grounds of the hospital.

MUNIB A flying machine?!

BONYEK Yeah. It's my brother Royston's. He was in here last year. What he did, he sneaked out every night, built all the bits and hid them round the gardens. He was going to fly it too, with his mates, Inky and Blocker.

MUNIB So why didn't he?

BONYEK Got caught sneaking out, didn't they? Then Cakebread wouldn't leave the ward. She even slept in here, so they never got to fly it. So we're going to fly it instead.

MUNIB That is the utterly most brilliant story I ever heard.

BONYEK Yeah, 'cept it ain't just a story, it's true. So, who's with me?

MUNIB Me. Definitely, absolutely, one million per cent.

BONYEK Peek-a?

PEEKA No. I don't want anything to do with it. And I don't think you should either, Munib.

MUNIB *(Spinning around, arms out like wings.)* It'll be brilliant! We'll fly like actual birds!

PEEKA *(Stops Munib.)* But what if we get caught like they did? We'll have our privileges taken away.

BONYEK What privileges?

PEEKA Every Sunday we get to share a slice of cheese on toast. Every Wednesday we get to use normal toothpaste. And now there's holiday photographs to think about...

BONYEK Who cares about holiday photographs? It's just a load of fat, red legs and drinks with umbrellas /

PEEKA And what about The Minute Of Air?

BONYEK What's The Minute Of Air?

MUNIB At three o'clock every day, for one minute, the roof disappears. It's almost time now...

PEEKA You get to taste the air and look up at the sky. It's the best part of the day. If we get caught, they'll switch it off.

MUNIB *(To Peeka.)* But this'll be like three hundred Minutes Of Air in a row. And we won't get caught, she's busy packing for her holiday.

BONYEK And if we do get caught, I'll take the blame. So it'll be me she punishes. *(Pause.)* Come on, Skip, don't be frightened.

PEEKA I'm not frightened, I just don't want to risk my privileges on something that won't work. I mean, did Royston have any actual... qualifications in aircraft design?

BONYEK He was only eleven.

PEEKA I just don't think it'll lift off the ground.

BONYEK But imagine if it does!

MUNIB *(Spinning round again.)* Imagine!

BONYEK Over chimneys, over fields, harbours full of sailing boats and stuff. Swooping down and doing loop-the-loop /

PEEKA I don't like being upside down. It's not natural.

BONYEK Okay /

PEEKA I'd rather just fly nice and straight.

BONYEK Okay, we'll fly nice and straight and go wherever you want. If you could fly anywhere, where would it be?

PEEKA Well...

BONYEK Anywhere. America, Brazil...

MUNIB *(Spinning around.)* Anywhere!

BONYEK The North Pole, Australia, Brazil...

PEEKA Well, if I did come... And if it did work...

BONYEK Yeah?

PEEKA I'd want to go home and find the answer to The Mystery.

BONYEK What mystery?

PEEKA Of why they don't visit any more.

MUNIB We call it The Mystery.

PEEKA They came every day. My mum, Munib's mum and sometimes Munib's dad.

MUNIB My Dad works funny hours at the sauce factory.

PEEKA But then they stopped. Without warning. Fifty-four days ago.

BONYEK *(Writes on the plan.)* Okay, first stop, Peekka's house.

PEEKA But I didn't say /

MUNIB Then can we go to mine? So I can ask mine too.

BONYEK *(Writes on the plan.)* Okay, second stop, Munib's house. Third stop, my choice, Brazil. So, are we agreed?

MUNIB Agreed.

BONYEK Peekka?

PEEKA I don't know...

BONYEK Oh, go on.

MUNIB Yeah, go on, Peeks. Then The Mystery won't be a mystery.

PEEKA I just don't think it'll lift off the ground.

BONYEK But that's the thing, it probably won't if you don't come. Look, three sets of pedals. *(He points at the diagram.)*

Pause.

PEEKA All right, but /

MUNIB Yess.

PEEKA But we have to be back in plenty of time. I can't lose my privileges. Especially not the cheese on toast, I can barely even think about it.

BONYEK Okay, that leaves us with just one problem. How to get out of the building. *(Points at map.)* Best exit's here. That means sneaking past Adult Ward Two and the security office /

PEEKA Easy. Munib, make three coats from white paper. We'll pretend to be doctors. I'll make some false beards with my dust and fluff supply.

MUNIB But you were saving that to finish the fire station.

PEEKA The firemen of Fluffborough will have to wait for their games room. It won't take long to gather some more. If there's one thing this world won't ever run out of it's fluff.

BONYEK Okay, come here, everyone. *(They gather.)* Gob on your hand and whack it in the middle.

Munib and Bonyek spit enthusiastically onto their palms and put them in the middle. Peekka daintily licks her palm with the very tip of her tongue and puts her hand in.

BONYEK When I turned up, I didn't know who they'd put me in with. They could have whacked me in with any old bumheads. But I got well lucky. You two got what it takes to make this one totally good adventure, I reckon.

A loud buzzing noise.

BONYEK What's that?

PEEKA The Minute Of Air.

The roof retracts, filling the ward with sunshine and birdsong. They look up at the sky.

BONYEK Wow. That's well nice. Wow. I've never seen the sky that blue before. *(Pause.)* Okay, give me your hands.

Munib adds some more spit for good measure. They put their hands in the middle again...

BONYEK Repeat after me.

Peekka and Munib repeat each line of the following oath...

BONYEK We vow.
To be loyal.
To the project.
And each other.
Not do nothing silly and stuff.
And keep things secret.
Or else.

A solemn pause. Another buzz. The sunlight and birdsong disappear as they withdraw their hands and go about their business.

BONYEK Okay, time is precious. Munib, get cracking on the uniforms. Make them nice and wide. We need to smuggle the bags of cement out.

PEEKA Why?

BONYEK They hang from the sides to help it balance.

MUNIB Right-o!

BONYEK Peeka, get on with the beards. I'll study the plans and stuff.

Munib and Peeka set to work.

BONYEK I'm telling you, this is going to be brilliant.

Bonyek studies and annotates the diagrams and plans. Scene ends.

SCENE TWO

The walled garden at St. Ruth's Hospital For Damaged Eyes. A grassy area with a scorched circle at its centre. It is night-time but the area is lit, albeit dimly, by the moon, by the stars, by light shining out from the windows of the hospital and by the lamp-posts that line the nearby driveway. Bonyek dashes into the walled garden dressed in his false beard and origami white coat. He calls out in a whisper...

BONYEK Hurry up!

Peeka arrives, leading Munib by the hand. They both wear false beards and paper coats. Peekka is anxious. Munib is wobbly with excitement and wonder. Bonyek lays the building plans out on the ground...

MUNIB I can smell cars, I can smell... the sauce factory, I can smell... frozen grass /

BONYEK Okay, does everyone remember the plan? Me and Peekka do the fetching and slotting together. Munib, you're in charge of tightening stuff that needs tightening and loosening stuff that needs loosening... (*Bonyek puts a spanner in Munib's hand.*)

PEEKKA Bonyek, I don't think this is such a brilliant idea. What if he suspected something?

BONYEK Who?

PEEKKA The security man. He asked if Munib was a real doctor.

BONYEK Did he? What did you say Munib?

MUNIB I just said "pietas famulatus veneratio".

BONYEK And what did he say?

MUNIB He just said “fair enough” and carried on eating his soup. Celery soup if I’m not mistaken.

BONYEK Then we’re fine. If he suspected us, he wouldn’t have let us past. And anyway, why would he suspect us? These beards are grilliant. (*Peeka is unconvinced.*) Okay, I’ll fetch the main section, it’s behind the groundsman’s shed. Peeka, get the wings. They’re over there in those dark bushes.

Bonyek heads for the groundsman’s shed. Peeka grabs Munib and tries to lead him away. He doesn’t want to go.

PEEKA I’ll take you back in.

MUNIB Back in? Why?

PEEKA Because you’re frightened.

MUNIB I’m not. I love it out here. I can feel the breeze on the backs of my ears.

Munib pulls free of Peeka.

MUNIB Hey, you know I couldn’t think what your mum smells like. I’ve got it. Raspberry sauce from ice cream vans. Doesn’t she?

PEEKA (*A lie.*) No.

MUNIB She does. Just think, in two hours you could be sitting on the sofa, squashed right up close to your mum, the smell of raspberry sauce filling your nose.

PEEKA Yeah, except it won’t happen, will it?! Because they’ve probably moved away without telling us, haven’t they?!

MUNIB No.

PEEKA So, why don’t they visit any more, idiot?!

MUNIB All right, I’m only trying to cheer you up cos you’re scared.

PEEKA I’m not scared.

MUNIB You are, Peekka, you're well scared.

PEEKA I'm not, and stop talking like Bonyek.

MUNIB I ain't talking like no-one.

PEEKA Stop it. It sounds stupid from your mouth.

MUNIB It's okay to be frightened.

PEEKA Good, fine, but I'm not.

MUNIB But you are.

PEEKA If anyone's scared, it's you.

MUNIB I'm not scared.

PEEKA Well, neither am I.

MUNIB Well, you sound it.

PEEKA Well, I'm not.

MUNIB Well, neither am I.

PEEKA Good.

MUNIB I'm happy.

PEEKA Good.

MUNIB Darkness is my natural habitat.

PEEKA Good then, fine, shut your mouldy mouth! *(Pause.)*
Right. I'll fetch the wings from the dark bushes,
shall I?

Peeka heads off to fetch the wings. Bonyek returns, dragging the main section of the flying machine. It has three seats and three sets of pedals.

BONYEK Pretty impressive, eh? So, if you get cracking with all the tightening and loosening, I'll go and get the figurehead.

Bonyek consults the map.

MUNIB Bonyek. You know I'm in charge of tightening and loosening? Does that make me Head of it? Or are

you Head of it and I'm just the person that's the worker?

BONYEK (As he walks off.) You're more than just Head of it. You're Captain of it. Captain Of Tightening and Commander Of Loosening.

With enormous pride, Munib starts tightening and loosening parts of the machine. Each time he tightens something he says "captain" to himself. Each time he loosens something he says "commander". Peekka returns, dragging two enormous wings. She sets about slotting them into place.

MUNIB (Sniffs the air.) Peekka?

PEEKKA What?

MUNIB Guess what I am.

PEEKKA A very tiring little boy?

MUNIB No, I'm Captain of Loosening and Commander of Tightening. No, Commander of Loosening and Captain of Tightening.

Bonyek returns with the figurehead – a large, rough sculpture of a bird's head stuck on the end of a pole. He slots the pole into the flying machine...

BONYEK So, what about a name for it?

MUNIB Yeah, what about a name for it?

BONYEK Got to give it a name, else it's bad luck and stuff. Any suggestions?

MUNIB What about Robert? I've always liked the name Robert.

BONYEK Yeah, Robert's too much like a person's name. We need something a bit more...

MUNIB What about... daffodil?

BONYEK No, daffodil's too much like a flower. We need something a bit more...

MUNIB Oh, oh, I've got it, oh, I've got it! (Pause.) Eskimo Soldier Two Nine One.

PEEKKA What about Firework?

BONYEK Firework?

PEEKA Yeah, Firework. Because fireworks fly, and that's a firebird's head and Munib and I are only here because fireworks blew up in our faces.

BONYEK Firework. I like it. Firework it is then.

MUNIB Firework! That's such a grilliant name! Peekka's always been grilliant at naming stuff! Like Pilgrim and Fluffborough /

PEEKA Yes, all right, Munib, don't be a creep, I've already forgiven you for being stupid.

BONYEK Oh... bum!

PEEKA What is it?

BONYEK Bum! Bum! Bum! Bum! Bum!

PEEKA What is it, Bonyek?

BONYEK We forgot the bags of cement.

MUNIB Oh bum! Bum! Bum! Bum!

PEEKA Does it make any difference?

BONYEK It'll be harder to steer now.

PEEKA At least it'll be lighter.

BONYEK Yeah, but it's all about the wonkiness. Still, nothing we can do. It's too risky to go back. We've just got to hope it doesn't wreck everything. Come on, get to work.

Pause as Bonyek consults his plans and Munib and Peekka work on Firework.

MUNIB What do you think he'll say?

PEEKA Who?

MUNIB Royston, when he finds out we flew his machine.

Pause.

BONYEK He won't say anything.

MUNIB But he'll be pleased, won't he?

Pause.

BONYEK Royston's dead.

MUNIB What?

BONYEK Royston's dead. He drowned. In the river. I tried to save him but it was too late. That's why I keep his shoe. To remember him by.

Pause.

PEEKA I think he'll be pleased. I bet he's peeping down on us right now and smiling. And just wait till we get it flying. He'll be laughing so loud the others have to tell him to be quiet.

Scene ends.

SCENE THREE

Nurse Cakebread's office. There is a messy desk and a chair on either side of it; one comfy, the other hard. On the desk is a large console with three levers and many buttons and flashing lights. Boxes and piles of paper sit on the floor around the desk and the walls are covered with charts. A CCTV monitor switches between several cameras, staying with each camera for ten seconds or so. There is also an unmade camp bed, a tatty lamp, an old radio and a makeshift dressing table.

Nurse Cakebread is having a lovely time. Classical music drifts soothingly from the radio as she packs her suitcase. The case is overflowing, but she continues to add items...

CAKEBREAD Sunglasses... foot lotion... swimming cap...

She picks up a book.

CAKEBREAD "A Violet Nosegay by Mariella Haberdash."

She kisses the book, puts it in the suitcase, closes the suitcase and sits on it to squash its contents down.

CAKEBREAD Zakyntos here I come!

She snaps the case shut. As she does so, the CCTV monitor switches to show Children's Ward One. It is empty. At first, she cannot believe her eyes. She gets up. She switches off the radio and presses a button to fix the monitor

on the ward, then presses her face up close to the screen. She pulls a lever and a microphone descends. She speaks into it nervously...

CAKEBREAD Children. Come out from under your beds. I repeat, come out from under your beds. Hiding under beds is a Grade Two offence.

She stares at the screen. Nothing.

CAKEBREAD Dammit!

She pulls the second lever and a second microphone descends. Nurse Cakebread speaks into it.

CAKEBREAD Hello? Hello?

RAINWATER *(Relayed through a speaker.)* Yes, Nurse Cakebread, what is it?

CAKEBREAD Nurse Rainwater, we have a problem.

RAINWATER I beg your pardon.

CAKEBREAD *(Through gritted teeth.)* Superintendent Rainwater, we have a problem. The children are missing from Children's Ward One.

RAINWATER Oh, not again.

CAKEBREAD What do you mean?!

RAINWATER You know what I mean. Just... hurry up and raise the alarm.

Cakebread pulls the third lever. A howling siren sound begins and lights flash as a third microphone descends. Nurse Cakebread speaks into it. Her words are relayed throughout the many filthy, echoing halls and wards of St Ruth's...

CAKEBREAD Code purple. I repeat, code purple. Patients are missing from Children's Ward One. Commence search immediately. I repeat, commence search immediately.

The siren continues. Scene ends.

SCENE FOUR

Bonyek, Peekka and Munib are busy tightening nuts, loosening bolts, slotting stuff into other stuff etc. They are all still wearing their beards. The

construction work is nearly done. The siren can be heard in the distance. It continues through the scene...

MUNIB What's that noise?

BONYEK Code Purple.

PEEKA What's a Code Purple?

BONYEK Missing Patients Alarm. Cakebread must have must have looked in on the ward.

PEEKA What?! Bonyek, you promised we wouldn't get caught!

BONYEK Okay, just stay calm, yeah?

PEEKA Stay calm?!

BONYEK We've got five minutes max before they find us.

MUNIB It's all going wrong...

PEEKA *(Grabs Munib's hand.)* Come on, Munib, we're going back to the ward.

BONYEK *(Blocks their path.)* Are you mad? Escaping's a Grade One Offence. The punishment's going to be worse than no more cheese on toast and stuff.

PEEKA It won't be as bad if we turn ourselves in.

BONYEK Cakebread's a cow, she don't play by the rules.

PEEKA Fine, so what do you suggest, Bonyek? What great plan have you got for us now?

MUNIB It's all going wrong, I can smell it.

BONYEK We stick to Plan A. The machine's pretty much done. We stop wasting time and start pedalling. Once we're in the sky, ain't nothing they can do. Got any strength in them legs, Munib?

MUNIB They've gone a bit wobbly.

PEEKA Bonyek, if you think that's going to fly, you're even more stupid than I already think you are.

BONYEK It's got to be worth a try. And if we get caught, I take the blame, I already promised. And you promised to be loyal to the project.

PEEKA I didn't promise, I vowed.

BONYEK Same difference! I thought we were doing it for Royston.

Pause.

PEEKA All right, but /

BONYEK Grilliant, no time to lose. Which of you's the strongest?

MUNIB She is, by miles.

BONYEK Grilliant. Peeks, you sit here. You've got to pedal and row. *(Peeka takes her place on the machine.)* I'll go the other side. Munib, you sit in the middle. *(He leads Munib to the central seat.)* You don't row but you've still got to pedal, yeah? And you've got to steer.

PEEKA How can he steer? He can't see.

BONYEK He'll be okay, we'll give him directions. The important thing is to get in the sky at all. Is everyone ready? Cos they'll be here any minute.

MUNIB I'm ready.

PEEKA Yes.

BONYEK So, we get the speed going kind of slowly, yeah? All together, like one person that just happens to have six legs. Go.

They begin to pedal. Starting slowly, building up speed. The pedals cause the chopper blade to whizz around and whirr.

BONYEK That's the stuff. Build it slowly. One and two and three and four. Faster, faster, now with the wings.

Bonyek and Peeka begin to move the wings up and down.

BONYEK Up, down, up, down, faster, faster /

MUNIB It's too difficult /

BONYEK Keep going, Munib!

MUNIB I don't know if I can /

BONYEK Keep going! Faster, faster, faster, faster, faster, faster, faster!!!

A horrible grinding screech brings the pedalling and the whirring to a halt.

BONYEK *(Climbs off the machine.)* Oh bum!

MUNIB What happened?

BONYEK The chain. It came off the thingy.

MUNIB Is it broken?

BONYEK I don't know. *(He checks the chain.)* No, it just came off the thingy. *(He puts the chain back on the thingy...)* Okay, that was nearly it. I reckon we were like ten seconds from taking off, don't you reckon?

PEEKA No.

BONYEK "Nothing never happens if you don't believe it's going to," that's what Royston used to say.

Bonyek is in his seat once more.

BONYEK Ready, everyone?

MUNIB Ready.

PEEKA Ready.

BONYEK All right.

Again, they pedal, starting slowly and building up speed. The blade whizzes and whirrs.

BONYEK That's it. Faster. Faster. Wings. Faster, faster, keep going, don't stop /

MUNIB I won't stop /

BONYEK Keep going! Faster with the pedals! Faster with the wings!

A new sound builds, promising a take-off.

BONYEK Harder!

MUNIB It's getting lighter!

BONYEK Harder!

PEEKA Something's happening!

BONYEK Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! Yes! *(A new kind of grinding screech brings the machine to a sudden halt.)* No!

PEEKA What happened?

BONYEK The rotor blade. One of the nuts is loose, where's the spanner?

PEEKA *(Points.)* Down there.

The spanner is on the ground. Bonyek grabs it and tightens a nut...

MUNIB That was my fault. I failed in my duty.

BONYEK Nobody's fault.

MUNIB But I'm Captain Of Tightening.

BONYEK We're a team. Everything bad is everyone's fault and everything good is thanks to everyone, okay?

Bonyek is back in position.

BONYEK Okay. We nearly had her off the ground. This time we're going all the way.

CAKEBREAD *(In the distance.)* Children!

PEEKA Oh no...!

BONYEK It's Cakebread, quick, pedal. *(Pause.)* Pedal!

They pedal furiously.

BONYEK Faster.

MUNIB She's going to find us.

CAKEBREAD *(Getting closer.)* Children!

MUNIB She's getting closer.

PEEKA Wings!

They beat the wings.

MUNIB She's going to kill us.

CAKEBREAD (*Getting closer.*) Children!

BONYEK We're going to fly, Munib.

PEEKA Faster.

BONYEK We're going to fly!

Firework lifts off the ground.

PEEKA We're flying!

BONYEK Keep going!

CAKEBREAD (*Getting closer.*) Children!

MUNIB I can feel it!

BONYEK Keep going!

PEEKA We're flying! We're really flying!!!

Another grinding screech brings grounds Firework with a crash.

BONYEK No!!!

CAKEBREAD (*Close by.*) Children!

PEEKA What are we going to do?!

BONYEK Run for it!

PEEKA What?!

BONYEK Run for it!

PEEKA Where to?!

BONYEK Anywhere, just follow me!

MUNIB I can't!

BONYEK You can, Munib!

MUNIB No, my foot! It's stuck! It's all tangled up!

Peeka and Bonyek run to Munib to release his foot.

PEEKA Oh no...!

MUNIB It's digging into my ankle...!

PEEKA It's all right, Munib.

BONYEK We have to go!

PEEKA We're not going anywhere without Munib.

MUNIB It hurts!

BONYEK We're going to get caught!

PEEKA You go then!

After a moment's indecision, Bonyek makes a run for it. Peeka makes a last attempt to release Munib's foot before resigning to her fate...

PEEKA It's no use. It's completely stuck.

Nurse Cakebread enters the walled garden, still in her dressing gown. She sees that Munib's foot is stuck. She pulls it free and leads Munib and Peeka back to the hospital building. Scene ends. Interval.