

# THE HIVE

A Libretto Adapted from the Play of the Same Name

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## Tableau I

*Aboard The SS Grantully Castle. There are five figures on deck, frozen: the poet, Rupert Brooke, and four crewmembers; the Rigger, the Navigator, the Swabber and the Retcher. A Morse code signal flickers across the waves towards The Grantully.*

*Lights rise on Brooke, poised like a statue at the prow. The crew comes to life...*

THE RIGGER: Brooke is dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Rupert Brooke is dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: Lieutenant Brooke is dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RETCHER: The poet Brooke is dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

*Brooke is startled from his reverie by the mounting din. The Hive is invisible to him. He seeks the source of the sound...*

THE RIGGER: Gifted. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Sad. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: Famous. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RETCHER: Handsome. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RIGGER: Poet. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: Laureate Brooke. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RETCHER: Bard Brooke. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RIGGER: Hero Brooke. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RETCHER: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE RIGGER: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: Dead. [deh, deh, deh, etc.]

*Brooke senses something fly past him through the air. He slaps the whip over it as if it were a mosquito... He misses. The swarming ceases instantly. The Hive is inert.*

BROOKE: Damn!

They're cunning, swift,  
ghosts on the margin of reality.

But I've learnt to track them -  
by that sound -

*Again the Morse code signal... The crew comes to life...*

THE RIGGER: He died at sea. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: With the invasion force. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE SWABBER: En route to Gallipoli. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE RETCHER: To mingle his blood. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE RIGGER: With that of his countrymen. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: On the beaches. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE SWABBER: With his crew of heroes. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE RETCHER: Like Odysseus before him. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE RIGGER: En route to Gallipoli. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: To mingle his blood. [see, see, see, etc.]

THE SWABBER: With that of his countrymen. [see, see, see, etc.]

*Again Brooke senses something move close by in the air. Loudly, he claps the whip over it...*

BROOKE: Far away...	Today I saw it clearly,
Far away, on the rim of the world,	a foamy crest, rippling on the line of the horizon.
a wave is forming.	And flocking in their thousands above the spray
Giant and resolute.	there were birds -
And when it strikes -	And beyond the wave, lights a shore.
it will wash us away;	A world unlike my frozen world
friend and foe alike.	of still air, of stagnant shadow.

*Again the Morse code signal. The crew comes to life...*

THE RIGGER: And the cause... [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE NAVIGATOR: Of death... [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE SWABBER: The cause of death...? [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE RETCHER: And the cause... [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE RIGGER: Of death... [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE NAVIGATOR: The cause of death...? [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]  
THE SWABBER: Of death... [skoh, skoh, skoh, etc.]

*There is uncertainty. All wait expectantly on the Rigger.*

THE RIGGER: A gnat!

*A stunned silence. At once the Hive unites in amending the truth.*

THE SWABBER: Sunstroke! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: Blood poisoning! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: A running sea battle... [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE NAVIGATOR: Off the isle of Lampos. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE SWABBER: Shrapnel! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: The wasp stings. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: Of white hot shrapnel! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE NAVIGATOR: He died in battle. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE SWABBER: As he wished. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: And his sons. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: If he had them. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE NAVIGATOR: Would march. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE SWABBER: With more decorations. [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: Than Nelson himself! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: Who saw him place himself between the cannon shell and the sleeping crew?  
[nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE NAVIGATOR: I saw! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE SWABBER: Who saw him break cover for the drowning sailor?  
[nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: I saw! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: Who saw him fight while all around him quailed and fled?  
[nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE NAVIGATOR: I saw! [nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RETCHER: Who saw him stand on the burning deck?  
[nah, nah, nah, nah, nah, tah, tah, tah]  
THE RIGGER: I saw  
THE NAVIGATOR: For King!  
THE SWABBER: I saw!  
THE RETCHER: And for country!  
OMNES: I saw!

BROOKE: An insect bite, infected.	Time is very long in this place.
And my life was gathered up	But somehow I move freely in it.
in that scarlet burning kiss.	Waiting. Observing. Researching...

(looking upwards)

I watch them feeding.

I hear them gnawing on the connective tissue of my life

I feel them dining

mindlessly,

on my peaches and cream.

But an insect bite!

What a meagre end!

To disappoint...

THE SWABBER: [dee, dee, dee, spoh, spoh, spoh]

THE NAVIGATOR: [dee, dee, dee, spoh, spoh, spoh]

THE RETCHER: [dee, dee, dee, spoh, spoh, spoh]

THE RIGGER: Counterpoint... [cah, cah, cah, poh, poh, poh]

THE NAVIGATOR: Carapace... [cah, cah, cah, pah, pah, pah]

THE SWABBER: Caramel... [cah, cah, cah, meh, meh, meh]

THE RETCHER: Carousel...

THE RIGGER: Parallel... [pah, pah, pah, leh, leh, leh]

THE NAVIGATOR: Paradigm... [pah, pah, pah, da, da, da]

THE SWABBER: Paralyse... [pah, pah, pah, la, la, la]

THE RETCHER: To realise a soldier's dream of glory.

OMNES: What a *mighty* end!

*Blackout. An instant's silence.*

## Tableau II

*The light rise, but remain dim. With bowed heads, the Hive has become a congregation. They begin a processional, tracing a figure-of-eight led by the Minister. The Minister marks the beginning of each funereal rite by tolling the hand bell.*

OMNES: (v) (l) (n) (l) (v)

THE MINISTER

+ MOURNERS: That day of wrath, the dreadful day  
Shall Heaven and Earth in ashes lay,  
As David and the Sybil say.

What horror must invade the mind,  
When approaching judge may find,  
And sift the deeds of all mankind.

THE MINISTER: Before me humbled, Lord, I lie.

My heart like ashes crushed and dry,

Do thou assist me when I die?

MOURNER (S): [blou, blou, blou, dou, dou] [ma, ma, ma, ee, ee] [sheh, sheh, sheh, seh, she]

[doo, doo, doo, doo, doo] [see, see, see, stee, stee] [da, da, da, ee, ee]

MOURNER (MS): [ha, ha, ha, ma, ma] [la, la, la, ee, ee] [ah, ah, ah, ah, ah] [dra, dra, dra, dee, dee]

[a, a, a, sa, sa] [da, da, da, ee, ee]

MOURNER (B): [mee, mee, mee, mee, mee] [a, a, a, ee, ee] [la, la, la, kee, kee] [ah, ah, ah, dah, dah]

[tha, tha, tha, oo, oo] [da, da, da, ee, ee]

BROOKE: There are distinct species. Each arrives from a different point of the compass and marks itself a separate section of the deck. Here then proliferates The Lachrymid. It comes with the scent of tears and the attar of funereal roses. Compulsively, this insect grieves over the fallen, donning hooded black cloaks and marching down main street to the beat of a slow grim drum. Irresistible to The Lachrymid are the expressions of fear and pain which death chisels into the face, and, gently wiping aside the petals and black gauze, it feasts...

*The female mourners withdraw to the shadows... A sunlit glade. Brooke lays beneath a large, gauzy shroud.*

*Bleaker is a friend of Brooke's and saddened by his recent demise. Freyburg is a stoic, young naval officer who is bothered by the profusion of insect life.*

MOURNERS (S + MS): (w) (y) (m) (y) (w)

BLEAKER: This is a perfect resting place for a poet.

The olive tree leans over the grave,

warding it from wind and rain.

FREYBURG: (*slapping*) And a thousand rotting fruits feed a million bleeding flies.

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### Tableau III

BROOKE: The Seminid arrives on a wind of plenty, listening for the weeping of widowed heiresses, eyes keen for the hidden tombs of kings. They claim my poetry as their own and act as the trustees of my estate. Their success is phenomenal. Members of high-society pay extravagantly for the honour of debasing themselves by my graveside in the hope that, from beneath the ground, I should somehow irradiate their minds and cause them to issue forth visions as beautiful and as valuable as mine. At last, The Seminid will exhume me in the hope that posthumously I have been laying odes in my coffin- as a hen lays eggs.

*A restaurant. Noel Olivier and Geoffrey Keynes seat themselves at the foremost of the tables. Noel is a woman towards whom Brooke has harboured romantic intentions. Keynes is a boorish Englishman who has become Noel's suitor after Brooke's death. He is dull, academic and a hypochondriac. The Waitress is frozen when not directly involved in the action. A Diner seats herself at a neighbouring table. Noel gazes outwards to the sea. Brooke recognises Noel...*

BROOKE: Noel...

*Keynes is restless. He eyes Noel. He shifts his seat towards her, putting an arm over her shoulder. She slips from his grasp and moves her seat away.*

KEYNES: You're thinking about him, I can tell.

NOEL: And if I am?

KEYNES: He's gone. And we have each other now.

NOEL: Geoffrey, even when we marry,

I will still think of him.

I assented to wed with you solely for your money and your status -  
and with this you have agreed.

*Again, Keynes puts his arm around Noel. She reacts with some violence. Keynes is embarrassed. He cranes his neck for service.*

KEYNES: Waitress! Waitress!

NOEL: It's pathetic the way you turn to food  
at the mildest threat to your dreary ego.

KEYNES: The food is medicinal, Noel.

It's how they treat my kind of infirmity.

NOEL: By stuffing you like an old boar?

*The Waitress arrives. Unseen, Brooke observes with interest.*

KEYNES: The menu, please.

WAITRESS: *The Entomologist's Basket* is all we serve.

KEYNES: I beg your pardon?

WAITRESS: A local *egg* dish, Sir.

The specialty of the house.

KEYNES: Egg it will have to be then. Two large... Emto... Emto...

WAITRESS + BROOKE: Entomologist's Baskets.

*The Waiter departs.*

NOEL: Before long, Geoffrey, people will be mistaking  
You for a Montgolfier Balloon!

KEYNES: My doctor says eating steadies my emotion.

NOEL: Geoffrey, your doctor is a quack!

Might you be retiring to the Vapour Room after this?

Or making do with some Rectal Faradisation?

I hear The Anti-Rheumatic Electric Towel is most efficacious.

The Cramp, the Stitch,

The Squirt, the Itch,

The Gout, the Stone, the Pox;

The Mulligrubs, the Bonny Scrubs

And all Pandora's Box.

Read, judge and try

And if you Die,

Never believe me more!

*The Waiter sets two bowls before Keynes, who eats enthusiastically.*

KEYNES: Thank heaven!

NOEL: Do you see the waves, Geoffrey?

Do you wonder at the force which moves them?

KEYNES: The tide.

NOEL: Rupert used to wonder.

Perhaps his ghost wonders still.

{ KEYNES: The gravitational pull of the moon. And I believe temperature differential has a bearing. Consider a source S radiating E units of energy per second in spherical waves, and let A and B be concentric spheres, with S as centre, of radius *a* and *b* respectively. Then the energy received per second over unit area...

NOEL: Ru-pert... Poor Rupert... What a restless ghost he'll make. His fascination will hold his spirit to the world – Wondering what moves the waves... Were you *passionate* ever, Geoffrey? Were you romantic once? Did you ever fall in love?

*Keynes finishes eating. The Waitress steps forward to remove the plates.*

KEYNES: An excellent repast, my dear!

Pray tell me, what eggs these are?

WAITRESS: Sir?

KEYNES: They're too small to be a hen's

WAITRESS: Indeed.

KEYNES: Quail?

WAITRESS: No.

KEYNES: Plover?

WAITRESS: Not a bird egg.

KEYNES: What else lays eggs, for heaven's sake?

A lizard?

WAITRESS: To my knowledge all *reptiles* lay eggs.

KEYNES: You don't say...

WAITRESS: We do not serve the eggs of reptiles.

But even toads, I think, lay them.

KEYNES: Toad eggs!

WAITRESS: We do not provide.

KEYNES: The name of this dish,

This em-to... en-lo...

NOEL + BROOKE: Entomologist's Basket.

KEYNES: Yes. What is an entomologist?

WAITRESS: Entomology is a branch of science, Sir.

The Entomologist is one who studies it.

KEYNES: In God's name, then, what layed

the eggs I have just consumed?

WAITRESS: Insects.

KEYNES: What?

WAITRESS: Wasps...

KEYNES: What?

BROOKE: Termites.

WAITRESS: Lice.

DINER: Fleas.

BROOKE: Earwigs.

WAITRESS: Crickets.

DINER: Cockroach.

BROOKE: Stinkflies.

WAITRESS: Blowflies.

KEYNES: Let's be serious, shall we!

WAITRESS: And soon, Sir.

BROOKE: These eggs, Sir.

DINER: Will hatch, Sir.

WAITRESS: Inside you, Sir.

KEYNES: (cautiously feeling his stomach) Insect eggs...

BROOKE: They'll devour you, Sir.

DINER: From the inside out.

WAITRESS: Machine-like jaws.

BROOKE: Piercing.

DINER: Insistent.

WAITRESS: Sucking.

BROOKE: Swallowing.

KEYNES: They were *live* eggs?

WAITRESS: We spare no effort keeping them that way.

NOEL: You said they tasted good – maybe that's the reason.

KEYNES: The manager! Immediately! Police! Police!

*Unsteadily, Keynes rise to his feet, clutching his stomach. He makes his way to the railing. He arrives at the Retcher's original position and freezes. The Waitress shrugs, withdraws, is reabsorbed. Noel returns her gaze to the sea. She is unaware of Brooke, who regards her sadly. Their monologues intertwine, as if telepathically.*

{ BROOKE: Noel... Will you marry him? Noel... I may have agreed... to a career. Noel... Did you love me? Noel... Now that I'm gone. Noel... Did you love me? Now that I'm gone. Noel... Love, Noel... Love fired my writing.

NOEL: Rupert may have been a good poet, but a poet does not make a good husband. At least Keynes has a career in the diplomatic corps. What use is a *contented* poet, after all? Perhaps I performed a service to the world in securing his unhappiness. I loved his poems. I've bundles of them crumbling in a chest. They sweat sentimentality, steam

with the lurid imaginings of an overcharged youth. But they touch me. I'm no great judge, but perhaps they show a spark of brilliance. Perhaps they should be published.

BROOKE: No. No. Those poems... were for you. Yes, but by you. You alone. No. No. You alone. For you alone. No. No.

NOEL: They were immaculate expressions of a clear and innocent heart. He would *want* them to be read. They'll be fires in the soul of England. And they'll light the hearts of those who fight for her, like some new weapon of war.

THE SWABBER: They'll write new constellations in the night sky.

THE RETCHER: For England.

THE RIGGER: And for me.

THE NAVIGATOR: They'll clothe the burning sun with orchids.

THE SWABBER: For me.

THE RETCHER: They'll close the weary eyes of Egypt's Sphinx.

THE RIGGER: For me.

THE NAVIGATOR: For me.

THE RETCHER: For me.

THE RIGGER: For England.

THE SWABBER: And for me.

BROOKE: They were love-soaked doodlings... drivel...

THE RETCHER: [dree, dree, dree, dree, dree, veh, veh, veh]

THE SWABBER: [dree, dree, dree, dree, dree, veh, veh, veh]

THE RIGGER: Dribble. [dree, dree, dree, dree, dree, bou, bou, bou]

THE NAVIGATOR: Piffle. [pee, pee, pee, pee, pee, fou, fou, fou]

THE SWABBER: Frazzle.

THE RETCHER: Dabble. [da, da, da, da, da, bou, bou, bou]

THE RIGGER: Dross. [droh, droh, droh, etc.]

THE NAVIGATOR: Frost. [froh, froh, froh, etc.]

THE SWABBER: The dragon's mouth. [drah, drah, drah, drah, drah, goh, goh, goh]

THE RETCHER: The cost. [scoh, scoh, scoh, etc.]

THE RIGGER: The karma. [ka, ka, ka, ka, ka, ma, ma, ma]

THE NAVIGATOR: The trauma. [traw, traw, traw, traw, traw, ma, ma, ma]

THE SWABBER: The crawler. [craw, craw, craw, craw, craw, la, la, la]

THE RETCHER: The drama. [dra, dra, dra, dra, dra, ma, ma, ma]

THE RIGGER: The dreaming. [dree, dree, dree, dree, dree, mee, mee, mee]

THE NAVIGATOR: The dancing draftsmanship of his youth.

## Tableau IV

BROOKE: Here. See how the colour drains from the deck? It is the signature of The Lucremid. These insects sap the essence of even metal and hardy timbers. Invariably, they are milky and fat and leave in their wake a terrain of bleached bones, the ashes of mountains and the frayed shadows of things consumed. This species has green paper wings and the combined scent of a million fingertips. When touched, smelled, or even glimpsed, an oily secretion will awake in the heart a desire which cannot be satisfied - an eternal upward spiral of gold, glittering gems and psychoactive powders that must be climbed until the body can no longer bear the fevered soul which impels it.

*A Publishing House. The lights rise on the Editor, Cray and A Proofreader. Aided by the Retcher, they are working busily on a manuscript. The Editor is flicking through sheaves of paper, making extensive corrections. Cray is sending and receiving information, using a large signal lights, a phone and a semaphore system.*

CRAY: [bed, ket]

PROOFREADER: [ter, tape, tis]

*The Retcher becomes Keynes. He is suspicious and uncomfortable. Brooke recedes into the shadows. It is a quarter century after his death and World War Two is raging.*





{ KEYNES: In that large bed it was cold; we clung together. Intentions became plain; but still nothing was said. I broke away a second, as the dance began, to slip my pyjamas. Then it was purely body to body. And his was the *woman's* part throughout.  
EDITOR + CRAY: It was cold; we clung together. Intentions became plain; but still nothing was said. I broke away a second as the dance began. My pyjamas. Purely body to body. And his was...

*Awkward silence. Keynes places the document in his pocket.*

KEYNES: But this is scurrilous!

Surely you do not wish to *encourage* a scandal!

CRAY: Just a tantalising titbit – to help bolster sales.

EDITOR: Our, our strategy is as follows:

We, we, we commence with The Complete Works

revised by you,

prefaced with a memoir,

composed... perhaps by you?

KEYNES: Me?

EDITOR: Penned, of course, by you.

EDITOR: You might also don the *editor's* cap?

KEYNES: Something definitive first,

KEYNES: Me?

restrained, well-considered...

EDITOR: We, we, we'd be honoured, of course.

CRAY: Then something racy!

KEYNES: Me?

EDITOR: And compromising!

CRAY: Honoured to have you don the cap!

CRAY: The confessions of his enemies!

KEYNES: Me?

EDITOR: His whores!

EDITOR: Naturally, there would be fiscal entitlements...

KEYNES: And co-conspirators!

KEYNES: It's a damn precarious business...

EDITOR: His disreputable liaisons...

tampering with a poet's work.

CRAY: Something outrageous!

EDITOR: It is good and proper *management*

KEYNES: And outlandish!

that Rupert Brooke requires.

EDITOR: Something occult!

KEYNES: Indeed! Of course, you are right.

CRAY: And profane!

EDITOR: Next would come the Collected Letters.

KEYNES: Something curious!

Then the Juvenilia.

EDITOR: And eldritch!

And after that...

CRAY: Something grotesque!

KEYNES: The biographies!

KEYNES: And insane!

*Cray, Keynes and the Editor are reabsorbed. A Hiving erupts in which each member tries to outdo the other.*

{ THE SWABBER: wig got mite worm ter leech man ter stink bed cric  
THE NAVIGATOR: worm tape bot tis leech phid tape wig ter ter mag roach ter  
THE RIGGER: wing tis got flea wing mag wig ter bug gnat ter ter ket  
THE RETCHER: My memoir will tell of his ghastly midnight trysts with Jack the Ripper, Jesus,  
and the toad the princess kissed!

{ THE SWABBER: wing ket flea gnat lace leech worm man ter bot ai mag ket flea wing mag gnat  
bed ter tis ter ter mag bot  
THE NAVIGATOR: wig tis bot bed worm man bug flea wig phid gnat ter got ket gnat bed tis wig  
wing man worm mag ket louse  
THE RIGGER: My memoir will tell of Edwardian parlour teas where Faustus and the Cyclops,  
debate aggressively. Where Wilde and Wells add clever twists to the Apocalypse!  
THE RETCHER: worm tape got leech mag wing bug mag fly bed stink leech worm gnat man ter  
tis gnat got cric lace

{ THE SWABBER: wig tape bot tis mag flea phid gnat wing got nit man stink nit leech man bed ter  
leech stink gnat fire tis ket flea  
THE NAVIGATOR: My memoir will tell of his mysterious illness which gnawed upon his  
youthful heart, and made his spirit bleed that birthed the very sorrow that  
inspired his poetry!  
THE RIGGER: worm stink man bed bug nit wig gnat wig phid bug mag lace tis tis flea mag bed  
flea roach man tis wig blow leech  
THE RETCHER: wing tis got nit ket leech worm bug bot tis blue fire gnat nit stink gnat ter slay  
mag nit stink bed



or did you, Virginia?

JACQUES: And who was responsible for his shirt and braces?

BROOKE: We made a pact of secrecy, Virginia.

*Gently, Virginia begins to remove the aforementioned items of clothing, assisted perhaps by James and Jacques. Brooke complies reluctantly. Noel is jealous, to the point of outrage.*

JACQUES: Would Virginia's chemise have been dispensed with at that point?

JAMES: And perhaps the bodice she wore beneath?

*Virginia presents herself to Brooke, who flusters, and then assists in removing the specified clothing items.*

BROOKE: Virginia, please...

VIRGINIA: Be my guest, Rupert.

I was never enamoured of Queen Victoria,  
and I deplored her dehumanising morals.

JAMES: You're more of a woman than you would have us know, Virginia.

JACQUES: Perhaps we tend not to expect  
a union of intelligence and feminine beauty.

NOEL: Unless we're speaking of Rupert Brooke.

VIRGINIA: (vampishly removing her gloves) His putties came next, did they not?

JAMES: His boots.

JACQUES: And socks.

NOEL: And honour.

*The indicated items of Brooke's clothing are removed.*

JAMES: Comely for a boy.

BROOKE: We're taking this a little too far, aren't we?

JACQUES: He has a woman's skin.

NOEL: I'm sure you didn't say that on the night, Rupert.

VIRGINIA: Like delicately veined marble.

JAMES: One does not swim in one's trousers, Rupert!

JACQUES: My lady, your shoes.

JACQUES: My lady? You do not want to saturate  
your handsome skirt

JAMES: Your hosiery.

*The disrobing is completed. Virginia is uninhibited; Brooke, a little ashamed. Noel turns away.*

VIRGINIA: You weren't so terribly shy at the time, Rupert.

BROOKE: The relative abundance of spectators  
has something to do with that, Virginia.

VIRGINIA: Like a spritely nymph,  
I dived from the grassy bank of the river  
And frolicked among the lily pads.  
Who was on my heels, but...

{ NOEL: Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert!  
JAMES: That supple youthful creature... Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! And animal magnetism...  
Rupert!  
JACQUES: Rupert! Rupert! With his treacherous passions... Rupert! Rupert! Rupert! Rupert!

VIRGINIA: Briskly, we swam, for the water was icy.

Rupert crawled out upon a fallen log and stood before me -  
his body of ivory and rose petals  
peppered with goose-pimples.  
I admit I harboured impure thoughts.  
And Rupert... he sported a mischievous, pagan grin  
that smouldered with desire.

NOEL: Desire?

VIRGINIA: A satyr, he beckoned me with open arms.  
His body...

JAMES: Sculpted.

JACQUES: Finely wrought.

JAMES: Fragile white.

JACQUES: And velveteen.



{ VIRGINIA: Your eyes - so penetrating, so forlorn.  
JAMES: Cheeks - so rosy... lips... tongue.

VIRGINIA: You have a faculty which draws people to you. JAMES: The Sirens, their song!  
JAMES: Who can say quite what it is? VIRGINIA: The Cyclops, his eye!  
VIRGINIA: Samson had his hair... JAMES: Christ, his cross!

{ VIRGINIA: While Rupert has his Caesarean profile? His... poetry?  
JAMES: His lithe and supple body? His... poetry?

THE SWABBER: Parody?	THE SWABBER: Memory?
THE RETCHER: Prudery?	THE RETCHER: Mimicry?
THE RIGGER: Pillory?	THE RIGGER: Mummery?
THE NAVIGATOR: Puberty?	THE NAVIGATOR: Flummery?
THE SWABBER: Ptolemy?	THE SWABBER: Bibbity?
THE RETCHER: Reverie?	THE RETCHER: Bobbity?
THE RIGGER: Feathery?	THE RIGGER: Hippity?
THE NAVIGATOR: Devilry?	THE NAVIGATOR: Hoppity?

{ THE SWABBER: [f(l) ee]  
THE RIGGER: [(m) ee]  
THE RETCHER: [(v) ee]

{ THE SWABBER: [(m) ee]  
THE RETCHER: [f(l) ee]

## Tableau VI

BROOKE: The Rheuminid comes ravenous in its hordes, consuming all that lies in its path – not as fat, protein or cellulose, but as information. I see their shining metallic skins - of copper, green chrome, blue chrome and gunmetal - as they process me. And record. Long after I am dead they will farm me for my ghost image. Centuries into the future they may still keep a sentinel posted here to record my meaningless absence. Process. Record. Calculate the ratios of probability in this airy nothingness. Recurring...

*Characters and set are retained from the parlour scene- only the lights which were festive and gay are now sombre and eerie, symbolising Brooke's recent death. The four are holding an impromptu séance, hoping to raise Brooke's spirit. They have joined hands around a ouija board or planchette; Virginia serves as the medium, playing a drone instrument and urging on the others. Additionally, a tambourine and conga drum have been placed nearby; they are to act as a conduit, enabling Brooke's ghost to communicate. Observing wryly, Brooke stands to one side, invisible to the sitters.*

NOEL, JAMES + JACQUES:

If I should die, think only this of me  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England. There shall be  
In that rich Earth a richer dust concealed.

A dust whom England bore, shaped, made aware,  
Gave, once, her flowers to love, her ways to roam,  
A body of England's, breathing English air,  
Washed by the rivers, blest by suns of home.

VIRGINIA:

Think of him. Call him.

We are a glowing candle in the dark  
to which his spirit will be drawn

Think of him. Call him.

Open yourselves to the continuum of luminiferous aether  
that co-exists with our own.

Think of him. Call him.

Seek Rupert's ageless soul among the decaying astral shells.

NOEL + JACQUES: And think, this heart, all evil shed away,  
A pulse in the eternal mind, no less...

JAMES: And think, this heart, Virginia... Virginia...

VIRGINIA: Concentrate, James.

JAMES: I believe I... heard something.

VIRGINIA: You may hear many odd things  
before the night is out, James.

*Smiling sadly, Brooke blows on Noel's face and neck.*

{ JAMES + JACQUES: Gives somewhere back the thoughts by England given;  
Her sights and sounds; dreams happy as her day;  
[ NOEL: Gives somewhere back the thoughts, Virginia... Virginia...  
VIRGINIA: Open yourself to him, Noel.  
NOEL: There's a breeze...  
VIRGINIA: The shutters are closed tight, dear.

*Brooke playfully brushes Jacques with the back of his hand.*

{ NOEL + JAMES: And laughter, learnt of friends; and gentleness,  
In hearts at peace, under an English heaven.  
[ JACQUES: I... I... I have been touched.  
Fingers. Drumming on my knee.  
VIRGINIA: If his spirit touches you, Instead say- *thank you, friend.*  
do nothing, do not move. Always say- *thank you, friend.*  
JACQUES: *Thank you, friend.* Jacques?

*As the power of the song reaches a peak, Brooke is visibly affected and may slap his hands and cry out against the summoning.*

OMNES: If I should die, think only this of me  
That there's some corner of a foreign field  
That is forever England.

*Silence. All are still and very tense; all can sense Brooke's presence. He stands above their seated forms like a ghostly statue, regarding his friends sadly.*

VIRGINIA: Good evening, Rupert?

*Brooke moves from person to person, touching each of them. The atmosphere remains tense...*

JAMES: *Thank you, friend.*

JACQUES: *Thank you, friend.*

VIRGINIA: *Thank you, friend.*

NOEL: *Thank you, friend.*

*The sitters exchange wary glances. Suddenly, Brooke performs a violent outburst on the tambourine and drum. The group is startled out of their wits.*

OMNES: [Thank you friend!]

*Strained silence.*

{ VIRGINIA: He has answered our summons.  
[ NOEL: It's cold all of a sudden!  
{ VIRGINIA: Now we may question him with the planchette.  
[ JAMES: The icy vapours of the dead!

JACQUES: (*regarding the planchette*)

Let us abandon this foolishness.

VIRGINIA: Thank you, friend.

JACQUES: Rupert would refute this utter bunkum,

NOEL: Thank you, friend.

JACQUES: if he could see us now.

JAMES: Thank you, friend

JACQUES: Such devices are said to liberate-

VIRGINIA: Thank you, friend.

JACQUES: not discarnate spirits,

NOEL: Thank you, friend.

JACQUES: but elements of the  
collective unconscious.

JAMES: Thank you, friend.

{ VIRGINIA: Abandon your strenuous logic, Jacques; it will not help you here.  
[ NOEL: It's cold! The vapours of the dead.  
[ JAMES: The icy vapours... The vapours of the dead.

VIRGINIA: Who would ask Rupert a question?  
Jacques?

*All lay their hands on the planchette and concentrate...*

{	JACQUES: There have been rumours,	but of an insect bite.
	that you did not die in battle	Rupert?
	as most suppose -	Is it true?
	NOEL: [Rupert]	
	JAMES: [Rupert]	

*The planchette moves under their hands...*

OMNES: Yes!

{	JACQUES: Then Rupert is not the hero we supposed.	
	JAMES: He was a poet, never a warrior.	
	NOEL: But Rupert, you wanted the war to finish you.	providing a convenient vehicle
	Life had become so cruel and disappointing,	for your sullen boyish suicide.
{	that His Majesty's service	Rupert?
		Is it true?
	VIRGINIA: [Rupert]	
	JAMES: [Rupert]	

*The planchette moves under their hands. It vacillates at first, then decides...*

OMNES: Yes!

{	VIRGINIA:	
	Rupert?	drove you further, Rupert;
	I know about the skinny-dipping,	drove you to adopt the gross
	and the polite bacchanalia in the New Forest.	mannerisms of the beast
	But it is said that your deep attraction	and, like the hairy-legged fly,
	to nature and all things natural,	you coveted the hindquarters of the goat
	drove you further, Rupert;	Rupert?
		Is it true?
	NOEL: [Rupert]	
	JACQUES: [Rupert]	

*A sprinkling of uneasy laughter. No response...*

JACQUES: No answer.

{	NOEL: The aether is awash with the ill-natured gossip
	of Rupert's acid-tongued friends.
{	JAMES: Ought not we make more sensible use
	of this extraordinary verifier?
{	NOEL: Rupert?
	Did you take Virginia carnally,
{	that night, on the bank of the River Cam?
	VIRGINIA: [Rupert]
	JACQUES: [Rupert]

*The planchette moves under their hands...*

NOEL + JAMES + JACQUES: No!

VIRGINIA: Spirits can lie like the rest of us.

{	JAMES: Rupert?	in all honesty,
	Which did you prefer,	Man or Woman?
	NOEL: [Rupert]	
	VIRGINIA: [Rupert]	

*No response...*

NOEL: No answer.

JACQUES: He is not reluctant, James.

JAMES: We can forgive him his reluctance...

He is appalled!

NOEL: Rupert,  
Whom did you love?

*Brooke raises his head with interest. He moves behind Noel and touches her. Sadly, he strokes her hair...*

NOEL: Thank you, friend.

*Noel leans back and exhales gratefully. Virginia and James exchange glances and, with Jacques, are reabsorbed by the Hive.*

NOEL: Rupert, tell me,  
do you remember walking with me, a certain Spring?

BROOKE: Yes.

*The atmosphere changes. We are experiencing a memory: it is a clear summer's day. We are given the sense of a forest. Brooke is in a relaxed state of mind; he sits and closes his eyes. Noel regards him lovingly. She leans into him.*

BROOKE: Lovers in the woods,  
entwined like knotted roots.  
A farmer's son...

BROOKE: Becoming one flesh on the forest floor,  
dry leaves beneath them,  
crackling like flames...

NOEL: And a miller's daughter?

Noel...

*He opens his eyes and focuses on Noel. He reaches out to kiss her hand; coyly, she withdraws it and rises to her feet.*

NOEL: I must go.

*Brooke rises and takes her in his arms. She struggles free.*

BROOKE: Your scent intoxicates me, Noel.  
The colours and the sights of Spring  
rise from your flesh like a vapour...

*Brooke links arms with her. She consents and they walk.*

{ BROOKE: It brings pictures to my mind.  
I see the merging of great ocean currents...  
NOEL: I am not certain I approve  
of that look in your eyes.

NOEL: I think I may go back.

BROOKE: I see the true union of two eternal souls.

{ NOEL: You're just a boy, Rupert.  
and I your model train  
BROOKE: My lightsome glass marble,  
of unclouded crystal  
your toy kaleidoscope,  
your wooden sword...  
shaped in the Orient by hands that have known  
the secret lore of love.

*They sit and begin making love - their ardour gains intensity as the scene progresses.*

NOEL: Rupert, you are confusing love with lust.

BROOKE: Never!

Lust is simple and magical.

{ NOEL: We could be complete strangers then?  
But so long as we *desired* each other,  
our actions would be pure?  
BROOKE: While love is a strangled thing,  
that leaves the heart like shattered glass  
in the lover's gutted chest.

NOEL: We could be those lovers,  
in the woods?  
entwined like knotted roots?  
A farmer's son...



BROOKE: And a miller's daughter.  
 NOEL: He: with the rough strength  
                   common to a life outdoors.  
 BROOKE: His lithe, deeply muscled flesh,  
                   bound in coarse cloth...  
 NOEL: A tiger's eyes, deep, wary and brown.  
 NOEL: A tiger's eyes, deep, wary and brown.

*A concerned expression appears on Noel's face.*

NOEL: Rupert? What's that?

*Consumed by passion, Brooke doesn't respond.*

{ NOEL: It feels like... Oh, God! Oh God! Oh, God!  
 { BROOKE: What is it? Noel? What's the matter?

NOEL: Ants!

*Noel gathers up her clothing, runs wildly off into the forest and is reabsorbed by the Hive. Stricken, Brooke stares after her.*

BROOKE: Ants?

*A Hiving erupts...*

THE RETCHER: Gnats!	THE NAVIGATOR: Bees!
THE RIGGER: Nits!	THE SWABBER: Bites!
THE NAVIGATOR: Ticks!	THE RETCHER: Moths!
THE SWABBER: Flies!	THE RIGGER: Mites!
THE RETCHER: Fleas!	THE NAVIGATOR: Maggots!
THE RIGGER: Bugs!	THE SWABBER: Lice!

THE SWABBER + THE RETCHER: Gnat!  
 THE SWABBER + THE RIGGER + THE RETCHER: Gnat!  
 OMNES: Gnat! Gnat! Gnat!

*Brooke gazes out towards the horizon.*

BROOKE: I shall welcome the wave  
                   and pray it tears my flesh as hard,  
                   and lifts it as brutally from my bones,  
                   as the forces that have ploughed and harvested me.  
                   Too brutally...  
                   Too long...  
 To release this ramshackle ghost -  
                   and the wild charismatic harlequin that is its shadow  
 Then each and every face of the poet -  
                   Rupert Brooke -  
                   will be gone -  
                   bleached even from the longest memory.

## Tableau VII

BROOKE: The Pulchrid is a subtle insect. I am only aware that it has passed through my flesh by the scent of wheat and crushed stems that comes suddenly on the breeze and is gone; like something glimpsed briefly through vines and branches that leaves a lasting impression on the soul. In its presence, you may find yourself thinking of deep fragrant wells and eroding desert sandwalls, of ancient shipwrecks consumed by coral, and fingers stretching lovingly for the touch of a hand. Because it is little more than a thought itself, it can steer thoughts – like glass marbles through the ether. It saddens me that The Pulchrid is by far the least numerous of the marauders here.

*Brooke is seated centre-stage atop a great stack of documents representing correspondence, diaries, essays and articles, etc. Surrounding the stack at a distance are Keynes, Noel, The Editor and Cray. They are frozen in place*

*with their attention set keenly upon the stack.*

KEYNES: What is that you're sitting on?

NOEL: Show us, us, Rupert.

EDITOR: Give it to us, us, Mr Brooke.

CRAY: We'll keep it confidential.

*The Hive freezes momentarily. Brooke regards them.*

BROOKE: Subtle manipulators,  
conspiring in the crevices and cracks

swarming in the woodwork -  
Or am I fevered and hallucinating...  
Not dead at all?

*One by one, the Hive takes a step towards the stack.*

EDITOR: Oh, you're most certainly dead.

CRAY: So, you won't be needing those documents.

NOEL: Won't you show us, us, Rupert!

*No discernible response to Brooke's gesture. As one, the Hive takes a step towards the stack. Swiftly, Noel grabs a document from the pile and beats a hasty retreat. The infuriated Brooke cannot pursue her without surrendering the entire stack. The Hive congratulates Noel with claps and cheers. They bend to listen. Noel reads...*

{ NOEL: Listen: I had such a lust for your fine body.  
I was foolish and wicked -  
I wanted you to fuck!  
EDITOR + CRAY + KEYNES: Such a lust... Your fine body...  
Foolish and wicked... I wanted you to fuck

*The Hive whoops uproariously. Brooke is highly embarrassed.*

{ BROOKE: You are not Noel.  
KEYNES: Morally bankrupt, Mr Brooke.

EDITOR: Yet, it's heady stuff, good reading.  
Have you more?

Didn't we, we, we make an agreement, Mr Brooke?

{ BROOKE: I'll not surrender it to you.  
[ CRAY: You promised us, us your work.  
EDITOR: We, we, we demand it now!

{ NOEL: You said yourself, Rupert -  
'to let them know the poor truths when I die'.  
BROOKE: No! No!

*The Editor dives for a document. There is a scuffle. The Editor comes away bearing a prize. The Hive congratulates her with claps and cheers. Eagerly, they bend to listen. The Editor reads...*

{ EDITOR: Listen: Though women are sometimes a pleasure to behold,  
we should curse the day  
they became aware of their beauty -  
for on that day they began to employ it  
to control men.  
NOEL + CRAY + KEYNES: A pleasure... Curse the day... Their beauty...  
To employ it to control men.

*The Hive laughs uproariously.*

NOEL: Are you joking, Rupert?

{ BROOKE: Leave me be! I said, leave me be!  
[ EDITOR: Or is this what you really believe?  
KEYNES: But we, we, we want it, Sir!  
CRAY: We, we, we want it all!

*The Hive laughs derisively. Noel and Keynes try for documents; the infuriated Brooke fails to stop them. The Hive congratulates them with claps and cheers. Eagerly, they bend to listen. Keynes reads...*

{ KEYNES: Listen: My ambition is to sneak into  
the British Museum  
and embrace a female mummy.  
I've been told that most died of syphilis,  
but I intend to find a clean one!  
NOEL + EDITOR + CRAY: (m) mee (m) mee (m) mee

*The Hive laughs uproariously.*

KEYNES: Extraordinary!

EDITOR: We could call it

'The Love Letters of Rupert Brooke!'

CRAY: 'The Erotic Prose of Rupert Brooke!'

KEYNES: 'Sex and Poet!'

NOEL: 'The Licentious Underbelly of Edwardian England!'

*The Hive laughs uproariously, spitefully. There is another fight for documents involving all. Brooke screams with frustration at the inability to prevent them.*

{ CRAY: Listen: I remember you all naked lying to receive me;  
wonderful in beauty.  
I remember the softness of your body;  
and your breasts and your thighs  
and your cunt.  
NOEL + CRAY + KEYNES: Naked! Receive me! Beauty! Remember!  
Body! Your breasts! Your cunt!

*Hateful, bitter laughter from the Hive.*

CRAY: 'Reflections on My Sexual Destiny!'

NOEL: 'A Poet and His Women!'

KEYNES: Or his men!

{ BROOKE: You'll be damned if one word reaches print.  
[ EDITOR: This will be an unprecedented event  
in the world of publishing!  
CRAY: A veritable coup by all accounts!

*Noel steps forward with a document in her hands. As Noel recites, a Hiving begins; softly at first, building to a horrifying crescendo. Brooke is helpless to prevent them transforming the stack into a whirlwind of paper as they cavort about him.*

{ NOEL: Listen: I remember the agony and joy of our meeting.  
The pleasure like a sea that drowned you  
wave by wave.  
And I love you, more so than ever.  
In all the ways of love...  
[ THE RETCHER: [Rupert]  
THE RIGGER: [Rupert]  
THE NAVIGATOR: [Rupert]

*Brooke walks to the front of the stage...*

BROOKE:

As I pursued my pale existence,

I fell into a snare.

I swam in Byron's pool

and contracted his disease.

Death should render one as solid and as hard as bronze,

but it did not so render me.

Hundreds of images flaked from my image -

and warped as they grew more distant,

melding with the English public mind

and its puerile lusts.

It is an ugly process -  
that destroyed the little I stood for,

annihilated the little sense my poems  
sent wheeling into the future,  
the little love they made...

Listen: The young Apollo, golden-haired,  
Stands dreaming on the verge of strife,  
Magnificently unprepared,  
For the long littleness of life.

*Brooke lets the documents fall to the ground. The Hive have reassumed the positions they held at the very start. A Morse code signal begins...*

THE RIGGER: If I should die. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Think only this of me. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: That there's some corner of a foreign field. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: That is forever England. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: His sons. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: If he had them. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: Would march with more decorations. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Than Lord Nelson himself. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Though he did not die in battle. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: He died as a direct result. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: Of shrapnel! (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Of blood-poisoning! (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Of a mosquito bite! (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
In later times. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: This may be judged. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: As the most pointless. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: And terrible tragedy. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Of a loathsome war. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: En route to Gallipoli. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: With a crew of heroes. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: En route to Gallipoli (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: To mingle his blood. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: With that of his countrymen. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: On the glassy Aegean Sea. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: With the invasion force. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: At sea. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: He died. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: He died. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: He died. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: He died. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)

*The Hive is frozen and silent.*

BROOKE: (looking towards the horizon)	mustering its strength before it strikes,
The wave grows daily.	or whether it surges closer -
Whether it is stationary,	I cannot say.

*A Hiving erupts, the wildest yet...*

THE RIGGER: Rupert Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: The doyen of English poetry. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: The natural successor. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: To Wordsworth. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: And Coleridge. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Is. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: The gifted. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Famous Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)

THE RIGGER: The bard. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: The laureate. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Is. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: The beautiful. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Sad. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: The beautiful. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Poet. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: Is. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Lieutenant (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE NAVIGATOR: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE SWABBER: Rupert. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RETCHER: Brooke. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
THE RIGGER: Is. (deh, deh, deh, etc.)  
OMNES: Dead!

BROOKE: When it strikes,  
                    when the wave strikes,  
                    it will sound like this...

*Cut lights.*

**End**