

CHARACTERS:

ANNIKA, 34, and INGA, 32: two sisters who live in the Swedish coastal town of Oskarshamn.

SCENE 1:

ANNIKA enters, wearing smart office clothes - above the knee skirt, low heels, work blouse.

ANNIKA: It was a Tuesday. There was nothing unusual about the day – the sun was out, I was in a bad mood before I even got to the plant. I got a steam scald from my new coffee machine that morning – I don't even like cappuccino! – so my arm hurt, and well, I was still fuming from seeing Inga the night before. My sister?

INGA enters. INGA is wearing much more relaxed clothes than ANNIKA. They both look up at the sky.

INGA: It is visible with the naked eye.

ANNIKA: Just not mine.

INGA: Maybe we're not looking in the right place.

ANNIKA: Or maybe whatever crackpot you've been listening to this time didn't give you the right data. Time, co-ordinates, direction. All important.

INGA: He did. He was very specific. He said all over the world people will be able to see it, everyone, all together -

ANNIKA: Like Facebook!

INGA: No! Not at all like.... It'll never appear again in our lifetimes. Why can't you appreciate that's important? Special?

ANNIKA: Space is just not my area of expertise.

INGA: It's nothing to do with expertise. It's just glorious...amazing...

ANNIKA: Comets are not significant. They're like rainbows. Pretty but ...irrelevant.

INGA:spectacular....

ANNIKA: Look, I don't mean to be dismissive...

INGA: Really?

ANNIKA: ...but a colleague of mine is doing cutting edge research into how the universe formed. Using precise, focussed data. From space. His work will expand what we know. Spotting this comet won't.

INGA: It's not about knowing. It's about experiencing.

ANNIKA: By standing in your garden staring up at the night sky and seeing a bit of cloud cover and a few stars, I don't feel I'm experiencing much, except the seeping of water into my shoes /...

INGA: I offered boots. Those shoes aren't suitable..

ANNIKA: They're suitable for coming round to your sister's for a birthday drink. Which is what I put them on for.

INGA: I just think that a 4 billion year old comet passing overhead is worth paying attention to. It's the Comet of the Century.

ANNIKA: It's what? Why are you calling it that?

INGA: I'm not. One of your lot -

ANNIKA: What, an engineer? -

INGA: A scientist, called it that.

ANNIKA: 'A Scientist'?

INGA: Well. Excuse me for being aware of the world around me. It's heading for the sun. No-one knows whether it will survive. Aren't you excited?

ANNIKA: No.

INGA: Will the sungrazer be like Icarus and burn up during its vainglorious attempt at circuiting that most deathly, most dangerous of places, hotter than hell, more deadly than Hiroshima.

ANNIKA: Oh, for goodness sake.

INGA: The ancients thought that comets were portents of doom. They would make sacrifices, pour blood libations, wail and keen and rent their hair.

ANNIKA: We could sacrifice Lucca.

INGA: What?

ANNIKA: Your cat. Lucca. It -

INGA: She -

ANNIKA: - crapped on my handbag last month, remember? I've not managed to get the stain out and I've been wondering if I should send you the bill for a new one. I never liked that cat.

INGA: I'm not sacrificing my cat! Is that your idea of a joke?

ANNIKA: Well. On your head be it. You can't just sacrifice something that doesn't matter to you, that's not a sacrifice is it? It's just killing something. Right. I've had enough of standing in the pitch dark -

INGA: Wait! Is that -

ANNIKA: No. That's an aeroplane. They must have got a log jam at Arlanda and the planes are circling. Annoying for them I'd have thought.

INGA: It has a green tail thousands of miles long.

ANNIKA: Inga, you're not going to see it. End of. Now if you won't open the bottle of white wine that is chilling in your fridge then I shall take your kind birthday wishes and bring them out to supper with my new lover.

INGA: That's quick. Where did you meet this one?

ANNIKA: At work.

INGA: Oh god. Two of you. A little nuclear gang. I dread to think what you talk about.

ANNIKA: *[With a glint]* Fusion...

INGA laughs.

INGA: Oh, when are you going to get a new job? Why do you work at that place?

ANNIKA: Not again.

INGA: I just think -

ANNIKA: I know what you think. It's a good job. It's interesting. I believe in it. I know you don't. You don't need to tell me, again.

INGA: You should pay attention.

ANNIKA: To what?

INGA gestures at the sky.

ANNIKA: To queues at Arlanda airport?

INGA: Of course not. To what the world is trying to tell you... Oh, you... You've closed your heart, you only listen with your brain...

INGA sighs extravagantly, throws her hands in the air, turns away.

ANNIKA: *[to audience]* I've tried for years to get through to her. I've read a lot about sibling relationships. Scientific studies on birth order, the nature/nurture debate, gene theory. We are the anomalies that prove the rules. Inga just says our differences were written in the stars. Bottom line? Maybe Mum had a bit of a fling and Inga was the result. Thinking back, a possible candidate for Dad of Inga would be Eckart the fisherman. Very good looking. He was always winking and giving us extra portions of herring, and he had a thing about myths too. I think that might well be the explanation. Because Inga and I, well...

INGA: *[To audience]* She's got no imagination.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Irrational, whimsical -

INGA: *[To audience]* Practical to the point of -

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Feckless.

INGA: *[To audience]* Pompous.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Vague.

INGA: *[To audience]* Suppressed.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Emotionally incontinent. Labile.

INGA: *[To audience]* She's got no poetry in her soul. All she wants is to unravel the rainbows.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Rainbows. Prisms in the sky. Pointless.

INGA/ANNI: *[Together]* If she wasn't my sister, well....

They walk away from each other.

ANNIKA opens her briefcase. She pulls out some papers, which surprise and annoy her.

ANNIKA: Every time!

INGA: *[To audience]* I've tried for years to get through to her, but she thinks that because I haven't got a PhD in Biochemistry I don't know anything. She'll only listen to 'experts'. So, what I do is find a print out that I think will - well, should - interest her, surprise her, open her mind - and I make sure she has to see it. She likes things in black and white. So I slip it in that bloody briefcase of hers.

ANNIKA: *[To INGA, waving the papers]* Fukushima! How often do I have to say it? Fukushima was on a fault line. There was an earthquake. In the ocean. A tsunami. And, an unfortunate level of complacency and corruption amongst the management and watchdogs of the Japanese nuclear industry meant the safety regime was underpowered. That's why Fukushima happened. It's a one in a million, one in a trillion chance. It was unfortunate.

INGA: But it happened.

ANNIKA: Yes. It happened. But it won't happen here. Sweden is not on a fault line. We will not have an earthquake.

INGA: But if we did -

ANNIKA: We won't!

INGA: It's not just... I was reading about this one woman, right, her children can't play outside -

ANNIKA raises her eyebrows.

No, listen - their lives have been affected - radically - the rates of cancer have spiralled, people have had to move away, families have been split up, thousands of people are still refugees...and have you seen the maps showing where the radiation has reached? The currents carry it through the oceans, spreading down across the Pacific/

ANNIKA: That's propaganda! Even Greenpeace says that those maps have been exaggerated!

INGA: What about Chernobyl? That's closer to home.

ANNIKA: Oh, off you go, not again! Still with Chernobyl!

INGA: It's just you that can't accept that there are any dangers at all! When Eckart is pulling fish out of the sea with three heads/

ANNIKA: Really? Three heads? *[Beat]* Look. We can't all be getting our hands dirty in - what are you training for this time? Horticulture? Gardening, right?

INGA: You said you were all for it! Anyway, it'll be different with horticulture... Really/..

ANNIKA: Some of us need proper jobs. Nuclear is clean and safe. It doesn't burn fossil fuels. It doesn't contribute to climate change. You never let your principles get in the way when your tax bill comes in. *[Beat]* Sorry.

INGA: I'm just....worried for you. If anything happened...

ANNIKA: It won't. You wouldn't believe the number of safety measures they have in place. An accident simply can't happen.

INGA: That's the thing about accidents. They're unpredictable...accidental. Of course you can foresee some - tripping over that wire trailing across the carpet - some you can't. Maybe you've got the tripwires sorted. But what about the others?

ANNIKA: Oh, you and your imagination. I wonder where it came from.

INGA: It didn't come from anywhere. It's me. Who I am. It's not a blessing. Bit of a Cassandra thing really. Means that I can imagine what might happen. I've read about Hiroshima -

ANNIKA: A bomb is not the same as a power plant. We've had that discussion.

INGA: I know, I know, but the concept's the same -

ANNIKA: It's not! Really, it's completely -

INGA: Shall I tell you what scares me? It's the burning. The way that their bodies were vaporised, they vanished. All that was left was a shadow on the ground.

ANNIKA: If you're that frightened, move away.

INGA: And leave you here?

Beat

INGA: *[To audience]* I know that the plant where she works is dangerous. I feel that it's dangerous, I feel it in my bones and in my heart.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* 100% safe. Maybe not 100% safe, that would be illogical, unscientific, but as safe as it can be.

INGA: *[To audience]* The explosion at Hiroshima was hotter than the sun.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Shadows! Vaporised into shadows! Honestly.

INGA: *[To audience]* If I could change even one person's mind one little bit about the danger... But I can't even change hers. And she's my sister.

Beat

ANNIKA: So that day, once I'd got into the plant, put a bandage on my scalded arm - it really hurt, that's the thing about a scald, it carries on burning - thrown away Inga's printouts from the outer reaches of internet conspiracy, honestly the things that you can find with a quick Google search, I got on with my work. Everything was normal.

ANNIKA puts on a white coat and picks up a clipboard.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* I was scheduled to supervise a training session, as a voice from the front line. Oddly, the theme was....safety.

[To workers] Good morning everybody. As you know safety is of paramount importance at the Oskarshamn Nuclear Plant. We all know nuclear power is under threat from elements of society – scaremongers who would prefer us to return to the pollutant coal or to harness the wind *[She laughs]*. So, the first point I will make is that we must all strive in every aspect of our work to be professional, clear advocates of the outstanding safety record and minimal danger of -

[to audience] And then it happened.

Alarms sound, like the loudest fire alarms, accompanied by stage lights which strobe on and off. ANNIKA clutches at her head.

Then: ANNIKA is frozen - the alarm stops, she is spot lit, it's a moment in time in her head.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* I couldn't breathe, I was having a panic attack. All I could think was if that's how much a five centimetre steam burn on my arm hurts, what if my whole body is consumed in scalding radiation that goes on and on and on, that can't be put out until all that is left of me is a shadow scorched into the concrete floor. My mind knows that this won't happen. But fear floods my body.

The alarms start up again, the lights start to flash.

ANNIKA: *[To workers]* RUN!!! Run!! For god's sake, RUN!!

The alarm and the lights stop. ANNIKA slumps.

Beat

INGA stares at the sky, through binoculars.

ANNIKA takes off her white coat and moves towards INGA.

ANNIKA: Seen it yet?

INGA: Not yet. Still hoping.

ANNIKA: Can I have a look?

She takes the binoculars.

Beat

I put in my resignation today.

INGA: Did you?

ANNIKA: Did you hear the sirens?

INGA: We heard. All over town.

ANNIKA: Must have been frightening. *[Beat]* I'm not saying you were right.

INGA: No. *[Beat]* The comet might not have been a portent.

ANNIKA: Not if we couldn't see it.

INGA: Even though we knew it was there.

ANNIKA: It's just that... I weighed up the risks. The pros and cons.

INGA: Of course.

ANNIKA: And decided, on balance, thatmaybe... accidents can happen.

They look at each other.

INGA: Maybe the naked eye was too ambitious.

ANNIKA: Oh, I don't know. Once we've got the position. You said it was the first time it's passed this way in 4 billion years. What are the odds? It'd be good to try to catch it.

They stare up at the sky.

ANNIKA: *[To audience]* Accidents can happen. On that day last year, hundreds of moon jellyfish floated into the cooling water intake pipes of the Oskarshamn nuclear plant and shut it down. Floating lumps of translucent glutinous matter, washed in by the currents of the Baltic Sea. Fucking jellyfish. They hadn't reckoned on that, had they, the powers that be. Oh, and the comet? Burnt up. Flew too close to the sun. Just like Icarus.