



Dreaming in Public

Peter Stickland

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For Emil and Cordelia

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“... there are things that only literature can give us, by means specific to it.”

Italo Calvino

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PART ONE

Pursuit

"PLACE your index finger here, between your lower lip and your chin. Now move it around so that it moves the lower lip sideways and up and down. Do it a little faster, but gently. The aim is to completely relax the lower lip."

I can't stop thinking about Julia.

"Excellent. Now I want you to place your lower lip outside of and over the upper teeth. Raise the upper lip just enough so that it will not interfere. Don't grimace. Raise the lower lip sufficiently for the upper teeth to make contact well down inside of it. Keep the lip relaxed. Your face is too tense. That's better. You should be touching the inside of the lower lip against the edges of the upper teeth very lightly. If your lower lip is tightly pressed against the teeth, the air is stopped and the consonant will not be heard."

Since I awoke this morning I have spent every possible minute by the telephone, trying to talk to Julia.

"Move your chin around a little. Just relax in this position. Now, I want you to blow out a puff of air, sufficient for it to be audible. It should sound like a 'v'. A little more, remember this is a voiced consonant. You must add vocal tone sufficient to give the 'v' a vibrant, buzzing sound. Can you feel it?"

I say that I can, but I can't. I must speak to Julia.

"The formation of lips and teeth is an individual physical feature in everyone's facial structure, so each singer must locate the most efficient point of contact between the edges of his upper front teeth and his lower lip. Keep experimenting with it until you have found the exact spot inside your lower lip where its contact with the edges

of the upper front teeth makes the most vibrant, buzzing sound. You will know when the right point of contact is found because there will be a tickling sensation in your lower lip when you are singing the 'v' effectively. This tickling sensation is caused by the vibration of the 'v', and this vibration helps to produce a rich, velvety sound. The libretto for this work is a veritable celebration of the 'v' so you simply must master the delivery of it. A relaxed, buzzing, vibrating 'v' will give you clarity, vocal beauty and great expressiveness. You cannot afford to be without these."

I am sounding the "v", but with every outlet of breath I am sighing the word "sorry" in my head. "Sorry... sorry ..." I am so sorry to have upset my beautiful Julia.

"Do not start to sing it yet, just use your speaking voice. Let the 'v' buzz for a duration of five or six slow counts... That's good, it is buzzing. Now use your singing voice to sound a 'v' for another five or six counts... Lovely. Now sing 'voice... vision... virtue... valour'... Can you still feel the buzz? Good. So let's do, 'Your beauty invades me.'... Do it again... Try not to spend longer on the 'v' because you have been practising it. Now sing, 'I beg you, don't vanish.'... And again with the buzz... Now try, 'I yearn for your love.'... No, you are singing 'I yawn for your love.' Relax, you will get the 'v' right. Sing it again... Good. Now, so that you get the feel for this, I want you to sing an entire section. Let's start with that beautiful song, 'My voice is my devotion.'... Wait, wait, wait... Start again... OK, stop. Let's deal with how the 'v' connects with the vowels. When 'v' occurs between two vowels on the same pitch, start the 'v' early, using part of the time value of the vowel that comes before it. This means that you sing 'myvv-oice' and 'devv-otion.' OK let's try it"...

I am singing, but the look she gave me when I held on to her, when she wanted me to let go, continues to dominate my vision.

"There, you have it. Lovely. So continue with the song... Stop, stop. We need to go through some more principles about the 'v' and its neighbouring vowels. Listen carefully. When 'v' occurs between two

vowels that are on different pitches, sing the 'v' on the pitch of the lower of the two notes. By this means you will give more resonance to the 'v'. This is very important for your expressive singing. So, let us be clear about the rules. The 'v' must be sung on either the vowel that comes before it or after it, depending on the rise or fall of the musical interval. When the first note is on the lower pitch, start the 'v' early, as in 'avv-ision' and when the second note is on the lower pitch, start the 'v' on the second syllable, as in 'di-vvine.' Try it... Good. Sing it again... Whatever you do, do not sing the 'v' on both pitches. This effort will cause a disagreeable scoop. The 'v' must be sung on one pitch only. So let's do the whole song now."

I have the di-vvine vision of my dancing Julia before me. I think about asking if we will take a short break before lunch. I can do nothing until I have spoken to her.

"You are getting it right, but your singing is not beautiful this morning. Are you concentrating too hard on the qualities of the 'v'?"

I say no and this is true. I can't tell her about my preoccupation. I try to sing but my voice is talking to Julia.

"Well my dear, if this piece is to have any resonance, you must think of the vision of loveliness that you have dancing before you and sing like a nightingale in love. Now, I want to go through the phrase, 'I love you.' It appears so frequently in this libretto that we must pay special attention to it. Although initial 'y' is a consonant, 'v' followed by initial 'y' is treated like 'v' followed by a vowel. Therefore, the 'v' in 'I love you' is sung as a 'v' between vowels. 'I lovyou' is sung like 'I loviev.' Can we practise this? Start with the rising interval and then do the falling interval... Good, let's do that section towards the end of the chase, because there are more 'v's between the vowels here."

"I see your vision nearing, to delight my ravished senses, to revive my deep devotion, to want you as beloved..." My Julia is not with me, so my ravished senses remain ravished senses... I close my eyes and get to the end of the song "... love me, love me, love me."

"That was excellent, but I want to look at the 'love me' some more.

Like the 'v' and its vowels, the 'v' and its neighbouring consonants also have a particular set of conditions governing their delivery. When 'v' is followed by a consonant, you must start the 'v' early, on the pitch of the vowel before it. So, when you sing the phrase 'love me' you should sing the 'v' on the pitch of the vowel 'o'. You tend to add a vowel sound after the 'v', so it sounds like 'lovah me'. Think about singing the 'm' immediately after the 'v', so that it sounds like 'lovvme'."

I sing it again. "To love virtue, to live forever, Lovvme, lovume, lovume. Don't deceivume, never leavume. Lovvme, lovume, lovume."

"Now you have it. You are singing so much better. I need to make a small point about connecting the 'v's and 'f's. When you are singing 'to love virtue' and 'to live forever,' you must connect the two words as if they were one longer word. This is true of all pairs of words when the first word ends in 'v' and is followed by a word beginning with 'v' or 'f'. In the first case, you should sing a long continuous double 'v', so that it becomes 'lovvirtue'. In the second case the one word will be 'livforever' ... Let us sing it through again."

I sing it through to the end and then look for her approval. I pray that we will have a break before lunch. I'll die if I can't talk to Julia on the phone soon.

"One last point about the 'v'. When 'v' is followed by a pause, be careful not to add a vowel sound. Do not sing 'What is lovah?' You must stop the voicing of the 'v' before the lower lip leaves the upper teeth, not after, this will help you end the word cleanly. Is this clear for you? Good. We will practise these things more as the rehearsals progress. Let us take a short break now. Afterwards we will look at how the songs support the narrative structure."

She leaves the studio. Her energy and her tuition amaze me and yet all my thoughts remain with Julia. I run to the students' common room, pick up the phone and dial. The phone rings and rings. She is not there. I put down the phone and hit myself. Why did I overwhelm her with my desires? I knew at the time that she was uneasy, but wanting her made me blind. I want her to love me. 'Please make her love me'. 'Please make her love me.' I repeat this as an incantation as I walk about the common room. I do this for ten minutes

until a group of other students enter the room. I go back to the phone and dial her number once more. Ring ring, ring ring, ring ring, ring ring, ring ring, ring ring, ring ring, ring ring... No answer. I put down the phone and return to the studio.

"Ah good, you are ready. Let's get started. I want to focus on the music and say a few words about movement. It is such an important aspect of this piece of work. The first thing to emphasise is that the sequences of notes are perpetually on the move. Listen to this... and this... can you hear that? Away it goes, as if it were leaving us and flying out of the window. Even when it is slow the music seems to flow in a direction... You can't listen to this and not think of movement. Our ballerina dances ahead of the music, but you, you are in pursuit of both the music and her. The libretto is constructed around the chase, so your vocalisation must give expression to it. There is a lot of work to do on this aspect, but for the moment I want to concentrate on the essential quality of the theme and how it changes. I also need to say something about your posture, your movements and how your voice must be projected in various directions."

Oh my love, my beautiful Julia, please be at your desk at lunchtime. Please let me tell you what a fool I am, how sorry I am to have upset you.

"For most of the time you stand centre stage. The dancer flies in every direction around you, so you continually twist in her direction. This means that your voice is thrown in every direction. There are many difficulties here, but it is crucial that you succeed at making your voice fly around after her. If the work is to read as a pursuit then the quality of the chase must be the measure of its success. We must determine which phrases are best suited to being sung more loudly so that we can sing these when you are facing away from the audience. When we are looking at how the duet connects on Thursday we will start to finalise the dance positions in relation to these phrases."

Why did I have to let my desire overwhelm your romantic evening of dance? I promise, my Julia, never to do this again. As long as I have you near me I will never do anything to upset you again, ever.

"After lunch we are going to run through the entire libretto without any interruptions. Before then I want to give you a few pointers about the narrative and how the structure of the singing develops alongside it. It is always important to give great emphasis to the formal components that give a work its shape. Lose this and you lose everything. This shape is usually about narrative development and we must be clear about its musical qualities. You must differentiate between the three very distinct stages in the work. The beginning and end sections are both short and their character is very clear. They have a singular mood. This is very different to the middle section, which concerns itself with a gradual process of change. Let's start with the beginning. At the point of entry you have just killed Python. You are elated and completely full of yourself. You are Apollo, the pride of all the land. Byron calls him, 'The sun, in human limbs arrayed...' You are full of light and you must fill the world with your voice. You must arrive onstage with a certain swagger and bounce for it is your swanky self-confidence that is your downfall. In your song, 'I offer Jove my victory', you must boast about your exploits with a level of garrulous conceit that is greater than anything you have ever heard. You are sickeningly self-confident. Listen to this. 'Evil revenged by valour, the villainous serpent slain, his vast vindictive body, vanquished from the plain.' Can you hear that? Can you sing that and think about swimming in over-indulgent vanity?"

I tell her that I hear it, but I have no idea how I will adopt this position today, or any day until I have captured Julia's fondness again.

"When you see a boy shooting an arrow from his bow you burst into a laugh and ridicule him. You have no idea that this is Venus's boy, Cupid. Full of bravado, you tell the boy that he should leave warlike activity to a hero like yourself. You must have insult in your voice and heartlessness in your laugh. You do not even honour him enough to address him directly. You direct your song at the audience as if you are inviting them to share in this humorous event and join you in laughing at the boy. You do not see Daphne running across the stage. Daphne is

a mountain nymph who excels in woodland sports, so she is both fast and silent. You are still getting the admiration of the audience when the cheeky Cupid lets loose from his bow the arrow that hits Daphne. She immediately stops her chase and hides behind a tree in a state of deep self-consciousness. The arrow has made love a repellent thing to her and she is no longer innocent of its dangers. Cupid then fires at you the arrow that causes you to fall hopelessly in love with her. Your jokes and your vanity are at an end. Daphne, realising the danger, tries to escape, but you turn and see her. This move away from the audience is the last time that you will look at or engage with them. You become totally fixated on Daphne. You are awestruck and dumb without any songs to sing. This shift in orientation from the audience to Daphne is crucially important. You have to understand its potential and believe in the possibilities that the drama can afford you."

I nod my head. No one feels more sharply than I how dramatic shifts in orientation can be. Within seconds last night I changed from a state of bliss to one of utter remorse.

"The middle section is long and has a rather complex structure. It is characterised by opposites and extremes. The dance at the beginning is frantic. From this highly energetic pace it gradually slows right down until, at the end, Daphne is making a desperate attempt to deal with exhaustion. You, on the other hand, overwhelmed by her beauty, start the middle section in stillness and silence. When your songs eventually start to flow, your voice is like that of a boy, wide-eyed, open and innocent. Slowly your songs get stronger and the clear expressive poetry that we were dealing with earlier becomes their main characteristic. Remember, you will never catch her in the chase, so your beautiful songs are your only means of winning her. You may be, as Byron suggests, 'The Lord of the unerring bow,' but you are, first and foremost, the god of music and poetry. These are your best attributes and their combined presence in the songs is what makes you shine."

Oh Julia. How sweetly would I sing of my love for you were you here with me now.

"You long for Daphne and follow her endlessly. She flies from you whenever you manage to get near her. Initially, your need for words is to convince her that you mean no evil intent, but you also have to express the quality of your love. When you sing, 'It is for love that I pursue you,' this has to be the most tender, sonorous love song that you have the heart to sing. Listen to it... Can you hear how fresh it is? Like love in the first bloom of spring. It is light and tender, completely different to the grand tone that you employed in the first section. You are upright and your songs are uplifting. With each new sequence your movements and posture will change. You will bend your body lower and stretch more and more towards her as she continues to evade your advances. With each new song the emphasis of your voice turns more and more towards the plea and your vocal tone becomes more and more tragic. This development will only read if the early songs have lightness and a tonal clarity that registers with the audience. If you have ever been in love, remember how you felt, take it into yourself and use these feelings to become the lover in your performance."

Her words pierce my heart just as Cupid's arrow pierced Apollo.

"In the final phase of the middle section you start to plead with Daphne and your phrases are left half complete as she flies away from you. Slowly, as her strength begins to fail, you begin to hold her in the sway of your words more and more. You must think of captivating her with your song. When you manage to grasp pieces of her flowing garments or locks from her unbound hair, you must hold them as if you were holding the whole of her in your arms. Remember you have nowhere to go and no other props to work with. It is just you, centre stage. The more your songs search her out the more her fleeing dance will appear to be real. We must be able to sense the dynamic tensions and oppositions of your feelings for each other. You are both desperate."

I am desperate, but my Julia, I think, is not. Has she already decided to finish with me?

"You are truly fortunate to have such a beautiful partner who

dances so expressively. Her dancing of this role is quite magnificent. I am sure that you are delighted and charmed by her, but do not let her beauty fool you into thinking that there is little for you to do. You have a major part to play and your acting must match her skills or the partnership will appear unequal. Do you remember, towards the end, when she slows down her run and pretends to be pulling away without moving from the spot? They are extraordinary gestures, beautifully considered and executed perfectly. You will have to make your reaching movements match her level of sophistication in some way. This isn't easy and we will have to rehearse the position that you are going to sing in. You must take great care at this point that your movement towards her remains open. You are still inviting her to join you, not capturing her. Reaching out is not grasping. You are not making a rude intrusion upon her. She is within reach and you must attempt to hold her without showing any signs of force. This is the place where you are finally together. You do not want her to feel that you have captured her. It is better that she presumes that fate has brought you both together. You need to meditate on this and try to imagine what it means to you and how your body can respond to it. We must also consider your vocal tone with some care. It should again be characterised by charm and gentle tenderness. Listen to how the music goes... The percussion has ceased and you are accompanied only by the piano when you sing 'On the wings of love, my precious bride.' You hardly need to touch her with music like that. We will discuss the choreography of this with Charles when we are all together on Thursday. For the moment, I want you to have these things in mind when you are singing this afternoon."

Oh Julia. Why could I not have been content with dancing your waltz?

"Now we are in the final section. You are shocked into silence for a second time when you hear the entrance of the violins. Listen... It is quite a long passage and your gestures are very important. You know that she is calling to her father, Peneus, the river god, pleading with him to change her form in order to escape from you. When the

cello comes in and her subtle limbs become seized with stiffness, you become frozen in utter amazement. You must indicate that something of horrendous proportions has occurred by the power of your acting. You have no words for it. The nymphs enter and place the branches in her hands, fix the headdress of leaves on her head and cover her body and her legs in a bodice of bark. Daphne having been transformed into a laurel tree must from now on be as rigid as if her feet are roots, stuck fast in the ground. You cannot help yourself. You are driven to caress her body, or rather her trunk, but you must do this with incredible gentleness, taking great care not to throw her off balance."

Oh I will be as gentle as a lamb. I will caress the air around her and weep.

"This final section is a lament and hearts should ache. You cannot sing loudly here. 'I will wear you for my crown,' has to be a cry of remorse and as delicate as a flower. Let me sing it for you. 'Live forever, woven on my brow, Forever green, knowing no decay...' These are words of loss that must be sung with the strength of those who know death. Do you have enough love in you to sing this?"

What words are these? Without hesitating I say "yes".

"Excellent, I will see you after lunch."

I know my love for Julia. Sarah, my lovely partner in this duet, will dance Daphne believing that she is the most adored woman in the world, but it will be Julia who will be before me, in my mind's eye, inspiring every moment and every song of my performance.

I remembered this particular morning with such vivid clarity, that I am startled by my memory. I remember running to the phone to dial Julia's number. I remember my delight when she answered, my enthusiastic greeting to her and my apology for the way that I behaved. I promised that I would be gentle and considerate to her in future. I can hear Julia's laugh... I can hear her saying that my apology is accepted... I couldn't believe that it could be that simple... Before I knew it I was

forgiven... I chatted with her and told her how delightful she was. I think we made an arrangement to meet.

I can remember what Julia looked like, how she made me feel; the qualities of her laugh, her walk and her way of conversing. I can remember how electric it was to kiss her and to hold her in my arms. I had to apologise to her more than once for being over aroused by her. I was passionate about her, but the extraordinary thing is, I have absolutely no idea how we drifted apart. How is it that memory works like this? How is it that at this time I spent all my days pursuing her and yet she slipped away from me? How, when or where this occurred I do not know. I can't even remember if we ever seriously discussed our relationship. We didn't end it dramatically with a major row. We didn't write passionate letters to each other and we didn't, as far as I remember, have any sense of remorse at not being together. I have no idea how I knew that our relationship was not going to continue. Did she just disappear? At some point in our lives, we were simply doing different things in different places. I wonder what became of her. I wish she were with me now. I can't stop thinking about Julia.

Partners

“OK, OK, let’s start, ten seconds after a clap.” CLAP.

One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.

The place is full of young men and women and I am one of them. In response to our instructions we start to career around the room, flying in every direction, like disturbed ants. We dart this way and that way, avoiding contact, but getting dangerously close to collisions as we fly at each other, with shouts and screams of excitement. We swerve our bodies and leap out of each other’s way to avoid crashing together. Before long, two bodies collide, landing on the floor and, almost immediately, a third body, which is unable either to stop or change direction to avoid the couple, joins them on the floor. All three are under attack from the mobile ones. We dart around or hurdle over them as they struggle to be vertical, making sure that we do not engage in any form of contact.

After a while, the action begins to change. Some of the mobile ones stop their action in mid dash and hold their position in a freeze, arms and legs balanced like ice-skaters caught in a painting. Meanwhile, the trio on the floor, having recovered from their accident and the onslaught of the group, are back in action again, continuing the mad dance. Neither their speed nor their enthusiasm is impaired by the crash. Progressively, more of the active ones halt their darting about. Like their predecessors, they also stop in the middle of their actions, as if responding to a pause button, and hold their positions in a freeze.

The original frozen ones have moved gradually to an upright position. They are now moving very slowly and sharing sentences as

fast and as loudly as they are able. The energetic ones, including me, continue to dart around each other and fly at those who are frozen or moving imperceptibly. Before long, out of sheer exhaustion rather than a willingness to stop, I force myself to try and hold a fixed position. Like all the late arrivals to the freeze, I breathe heavily and look like I have run a marathon. The elegant ice-skating gesture is impossible for me to hold. Once I am breathing evenly again, I move into an upright position, as the others had done and engage in the modest movements and continual cacophony of words that now fills the room.

"Very good. Very good," calls the man who initiated this excitable activity. *"Now we will do an interaction exercise. Find a space. Put your arms out. You should be able to touch the fingers of your nearest neighbour. Try to be evenly spaced. Now, using any words and gestures that you wish, I want you to address one of your neighbours for about thirty seconds. Then you must turn around and address another neighbour for thirty seconds and so on until I call stop. It does not matter if your neighbour is facing you or not and you do not all have to change at the same time. OK...? Let's begin."*

Some address each other head on and others address the side or the back of other players. Some move without speaking anything that could properly be called a sentence. Some talk without carrying out any gestures worthy of that particular designation. Some keep moving around without following the thirty-second rule at all and some turn around and watch others in the hope that they will get an idea of what to say or do sometime soon. Nobody agrees on how long thirty seconds is so, within two minutes, every variation of position and possible combination of address is being expressed. It is mayhem.

I pay as much attention to watching the activity of the other performers as I do to carrying out my own. I am talking to a woman who is talking to the back of a man. He turns round to talk to her and she then turns to talk to the profile of a woman who is talking to another man. The man addresses the man next to him and he then turns to address another man, who immediately turns to address the profile

of a woman who then turns to address him. These two continue to talk to each other for the remainder of the exercise, obviously enjoying their exchange.

I am whispering to a woman in a red dress and she is shouting and waving her arms about as if she is attacking the man opposite her for some offence that he has caused her. He is making a gesture of pulling on his hair with both hands and screaming silently, before turning to a man who is sitting on the floor. He berates him for doing this and waves at him to stand up. I then turn to the back of a woman with a mass of black hair, held tentatively in place with a giant comb, who looks like she is trying to explain to the back of another woman what Mozart sounds like. The other woman appears to be putting on her makeup and talking to herself in the mirror. I make a move towards a very attractive woman who is positioned outside of my immediate group. I stand to the side of her, go down on my knees and repeatedly make proposals of marriage to her. When she turns to face me, I offer her my undying love and she appears, by her smile, to be intrigued and certainly amused by this conduct. She performs acts that indicate how her heart is touched by my intentions until she turns her back on me and addresses another man in a manner of outrage, while pointing to various items of his clothing. I also turn away but almost immediately I turn back to her again. I go through a series of gestures that express my overwhelming appreciation of her beauty.

"OK, OK, everyone, that's great. We are going to take a break now. Help yourself to a drink in the next room. We will start again in about twenty minutes."

The next room is soon crowded with people waiting to help themselves to tea or coffee from thermos flasks that will only release their liquid if a particular spot on the lid is pressed in a particular way. The milk and sugar are in the middle of the table and the biscuits are at the back, so the space above the table is filled with arms reaching above, below and around each other.

Some practise the art of pressing the flask for liquid and get nothing. They have to rely on those who have developed a particular skill for filling the cups from these containers. Some get tea when they want coffee, some get coffee when they want tea and one character has so much of his preferred beverage that the cup overflows and is swimming in a saucer full of it. He cannot think about getting a biscuit until he has emptied the saucer and part of the cup's contents into another cup on the table. He wipes them both with a napkin, adds some milk and then grabs as many biscuits as his hand will hold. Another fellow finds himself in the same position, but is too far from the table to pour away the excess liquid. He drinks from the cup without lifting it until he has created enough space for the contents of the saucer to be poured into the cup. He then consumes more of the black liquid from the cup and hands the cup and saucer over the heads of others, to someone at the table, who is asked if they would add the milk.

The kindly ones, who have mastered the craft of thermos-pressing, remain at the table and serve others, who shout their questions and receive answers about choices and the amounts preferred. Soon the dance of arms moves from the space above the table to the space between the table and the crowded room. It is not long before the plates of biscuits become properties in this dance and not long before one plate, the angle at which it is delivered being too steep for gravity to keep hold, releases its load and the biscuits fall to the floor.

The place is full, the activity hectic and the process of getting a drink slow. The people at the back of the room are still intent on receiving refreshment so they do not provide any space for the people at the front of the room to leave the space. Nobody moves anywhere and, as the buzz from the previous activity is still going through them, they chatter away, across and over each other, having the room to move little more than their heads and mouths. Suddenly, a voice from the doorway tells everyone to finish up and, without further prompting, the previous activity is put into reverse. The participants hand their

cups back on the table, begin vacating the room and return to the performance hall.

As far as I can remember this is how the day began. It was the first day of a three-day Performing Arts Workshop. Mostly, it attracted students, probably students of drama, but there were a few older-looking characters, appearing decidedly unattached. I was not a student at this time, although I had studied some drama as part of my course. I did not have any work to occupy me at present. My only commitment was playing the piano three nights a week in a hotel lounge. I decided to come to the workshop on the spur of the moment, to give myself a change of scenery and a bit of stimulus. At this point in the day, I was not sure that I had done the right thing.

Once we had gathered together again, we were told that we had to carry out a performance based upon instructions. These instructions governed how the words could be used and what to do with a prop. We were asked to form ourselves into groups. There were six people in our group, three men and three women. Each group was to choose by chance a male and a female performer. They had to create a performance by carrying out the instructions. Two verbal instructions and two prop instructions were handed to us on two pieces of card as follows:

The verbal instructions.

1. Give instructions to another performer by using short sentences.
2. Say anything you like about a single topic and talk continuously.

The prop instructions.

1. Find a prop that you can work with continuously.
2. Use a prop that will keep you off the ground.

We cut up three pieces of paper; put a cross on one of them, folded them up and distributed them to the men and women separately. This is how we selected the performers and I was not one of them. The

lucky winners then had to choose a verbal and a prop instruction. It was agreed that the man should have the first set of instructions and the woman should have the second. Consequently she had to speak continuously and the male performer could only speak by issuing instructions. The female performer had to find a prop to keep her off the ground and the male performer was required to find a prop that engaged him in work. She chose a free standing ladder and he chose a broom. Each of the onlookers was required to record a different aspect of the performance. I cannot remember exactly who did what, other than I know that I documented the woman's actions.

Soon after the start of the performance the man gave his broom to the woman who was high up on the ladder. It should have been his job to work with this prop, but he never instructed her to hand it back, so she kept it for the duration of the activity. Initially, he instructed her to sweep away the cobwebs from various sections of the wall and ceiling and, when she had brushed every surface within her reach, he instructed her to hold the ladder tightly while he pulled it to another position along the wall. After a few more instructions about clearing the cobwebs, he obviously decided that moving her around on the ladder was more interesting and it was not long before this became his sole activity. He stood between the two legs of the ladder, pushing it around the room, while she, like Don Quixote, with broom for a lance, astride the unsteady horse, followed his instructions to do battle with a great number of demons that he conjured for her. During this activity the woman spoke more or less continuously, relating, if I remember correctly, a history of her family and relations.

When the master of ceremonies called time I felt rather bombarded by the activities of the morning. I wanted to get away for a while, but everyone else was keen to talk about the performance. I have no memory of what was said. I decided to go out for my lunch rather than remain with the group. I walked down to the shops, bought fish and chips and sat outside on the green to eat them. As I was walking back, I saw the beautiful woman who had been the subject of my declarations

of undying love earlier that morning. She was standing with a few others next to a bench outside the building. I stopped next to her and sat down on the bench. I could tell that she remembered me, for she smiled knowingly when she saw me. I was now sitting very close to her. There was something about her that completely overwhelmed me. She was too beautiful for me to remain silent. I put my arm on the back of the bench and when she glanced again in my direction I invited her to sit next to me. She half smiled and shook her head, clearly indicating that I was being foolish, which of course I was. She turned to her friends. My desire to touch her was uncontrollable, so I reached out for her arm and gave it a little tug. She turned and looked at me in a meaningful way, which told me to behave. I remember her look. It was very decisive. I just looked at her. I was breathing her in. I remember exactly how she looked.

Soon everyone was returning to the hall for the afternoon session. I walked up beside her and asked if we could arrange to be in the same group. Unbelievably, she agreed to this, but upon our return, we were told that we had to keep to the groups that we had established in the morning session. This upset me. I was cross at losing her for the afternoon. Not only were we in the same groups as the morning session, we were also required to work with the same instructions. We were told to use two different performers and again the choice was the result of a game of chance. This time, I was to be a performer. A tall woman with mousy coloured hair was the other performer. I was required to talk continuously and she could only talk by giving instructions. I had to find a prop to work with and she was required to find a prop to keep her off the ground. She chose a chair and for some reason I chose a chair also. I think that I was so preoccupied by the task of talking nonstop that the prop exercise seemed to be insignificant. I had no idea how I would work with a chair, but I was more seriously at a loss to imagine what I could talk about. I certainly could not relate a family history as my predecessor had done.

The requirement that one of the participants had to perform off the

ground provided the inspiration for my speech. The image that came to me was the result of panic, but it came to me as fresh as a dream that I might have had the night before. My thoughts were, in fact, a memory of a real day in my life, when I was about eight, or maybe ten, or even twelve. I cannot remember when exactly. There was so much energy in this remembered image, that once I started to talk, I had no problem continuing. I feel now as I felt then, that I could talk about it for days without exhausting the repercussions that it has for me.

It was soon after breakfast on a day when we were not at school; probably a weekend because my father was about the house. I did not know what to do with myself and there was talk about going to the park or going out for a walk. I wanted to avoid doing it, whatever it was. There was no one in the living room so I turned on the television and reduced the volume so as not to attract attention. The image that arrived on the screen was the head of a Mexican boy, not much older than I was. Sweat was pouring from his face and he was under considerable strain. He was holding onto two boots, one on each shoulder. As the camera shot panned out, I could see that he was balancing someone on his shoulders. The shot panned out further. The person who was standing on his shoulders had his arms tied behind his back, a bandanna over his eyes and a noose around his neck. The noose was attached to a branch of a tree. Two cowboys were sitting on horses near by. One of them said to the boy, 'if you're lucky someone will come and rescue your old man before you fall down.' They both laughed and rode away. They were in a desert landscape, in the middle of nowhere. The camera returned to the boy, struggling to prevent his father from hanging on the noose.

At this point my father entered the room. I turned off the television and ran out of the room before he could tell me to turn it off. I acted as if I was embarrassed by what I was looking at. I could not allow him to see the images. They were too intimate. I ran downstairs to a little place in the basement under the front door. It was a storeroom, but I thought of it as my workshop because the tools were kept there. It was

a place where I made things. I sat down in semi-darkness and the full impact of the film fragment hit me very hard. I had not experienced anything quite like it before. I could not comprehend how it was possible for the two cowboys to do such a thing. I did not believe that anyone could deserve such a punishment. I was desperate to find out what was going to happen to them in the film, but I had no way of telling my father how important it was for me to put the television on again. I wondered how long the son could stand there before the weight of his father caused him to drop to his knees. When it struck me that the boy was actually balancing his father on his shoulders, I knew that it would not be long before the father toppled over.

The longer I sat, the more distraught I became. It was so unfair being delivered this unbelievable image and then have it taken away from me before I could see how it was resolved. Would the boy feel responsible for his father's death? If he fell, would he run away or stay and watch his father die? What was his father thinking about? I ran from the television room because I could not share this image with my father, and yet I longed to be able to share things with him. I could not get the Mexicans out of my mind. I could not stop seeing the boy's sweating face as he balanced his father on his shoulders. I wanted more than anything to resolve the dilemma for them and also for me. I wondered what I would do if I had my father hanging from a noose above my head. I tried to think about him. Would my feelings for him change if I were in that situation? I tried to imagine having great love for him. What would it be like to be responsible for his life? How sad would I be if he died? I did not know what to do with all these questions.

I sat there for a considerable time and then I went to my bedroom. I was inspired to go in search of two cowboys. I wanted to find two plastic figures that I could use to re-enact this terrible scene. Of course I did not have a hanging man or a boy with his arms up by his shoulders, but I did have a cowboy with arms out, ready to draw his guns and another one with his hands up. The 'draw your gun' cowboy

could be the father. I would tie his hands to his body. The 'hands up' cowboy could be the son. I would tie his hands to the legs of the father. I thought about how I would achieve this and settled on using wire to tie the limbs together. I knew that I needed something strong to force these plastic figures into their new positions. With my cowboys in hand, I went to the garden shed for the wire and then returned to the workshop.

My first task was to make the cowboys look like Mexicans. I had to file off the guns and holsters and cut off and file away the cowboy hats. This was a delicate activity. The bits of plastic remaining on their heads did not look like hair, but I accepted them as they were. I then started to tie them together, but this was a very difficult operation. The plastic was much stronger than the wire and after I had wrapped a considerable amount of it around the figures, the arms were still bursting to be free. I decided to proceed with ways to support my figures in standing positions and return to the wire problem later. I found a tile to use as a base and began to look for some glue. I imagined that I could also use the glue to hold the figures together, and to fix their arms to their bodies, thereby reducing the amount of wire that I had to use. There was no glue to be found in the workshop, so I decided to go back upstairs to ask my father if he had some glue that I could use.

I prepared myself to tell him about the sculpture I was making should he want to know why I needed the glue. I was even prepared to invite him to help me if he wanted to supervise the activity. When I got to the top of the stairs, I almost bumped into him. This was a shock and our exchange of words was typical of our relationship. It caused further division and frustration for both of us. He wanted to know why I was not going to the park. When I told him that I was making something and I needed some glue, he exploded. He said some exercise would be better for me. I was always moping around, sticking my fingers together. I ran away from him for the second time that day and returned to the workshop. I threw the bolt across the door and gave it a hard kick. I could hear my mother telling him to let me be if

I was busy doing something. I could also hear him grumbling about me being tied to her apron strings and asking what was to become of a boy who could never do what was asked of him. It took me a while to get my bearings again. For the last hour I had been saving my father from certain death and now he was my enemy. I needed him to be vulnerable, balancing precariously on my shoulders. I could not work with the image of a punishing and impatient father.

I put my real father from my mind and the problems of my sculpture soon preoccupied my thoughts once again. I decided to cut myself a wooden base to support the figures. I found the wood, cut it to size and made two holes to receive the legs of the lower figure. I now worked slowly and carefully, as I knew that if I made the holes too big I could not fill them again. Needless to say, I did not get the size of the holes right, so I had to bang little pins into the toes of the boy to achieve some degree of stability. I liked the idea that the boy was sinking into the ground under the weight of his father. I tied string across the father's eyes in imitation of the bandanna, but the knot at the back was ridiculously large. Even here, the absence of glue made life more difficult.

When my mother called me for lunch, I hid my work behind some boxes and went upstairs to the kitchen. I washed my hands, sat at the table and ate up my food as fast as I could. I did not want to be noticed and I certainly did not want to be spoken to. I wondered what I would tell my mother, if I had failed to save my father from hanging. I thought of the Mexican father. I thought of him as being everything that my father was not. I imagined that he would tell his son to let him drop and insist that he run for his life, but I knew that the Mexican boy would not let his father die. I felt driven to think of a scenario that would save them both.

Before long I was back in my room, ready to put my figures to trial. I was grateful that I did not have to answer any questions about my activity. Maybe my parents knew more about me than I suspected. Over lunch I had decided to cut the son under the armpits and the father

across the shoulders to enable their arms to rest closer to their bodies. To achieve this, I took the whole construction apart and rebuilt it. Now the wire did its job and the figures no longer had the inappropriate appearance of being bound up. I pushed the feet of the lower figure into the holes in the wood and pinned them again, but the sculpture failed to stay in place for very long. Depending on the centre of gravity, it leaned one way and then another.

I spent a considerable amount of time pushing and balancing the figures and feeling frustrated. I then had the inspiration to hang them both from a noose that was tied to a tree. It would be easy enough to support both figures from above, but I had to think about it for a while. I wasn't certain whether this would spoil the effect of the heavy father standing on his young son. As long as the bottom legs touched the ground it must work, I thought. Then I became worried about including the noose. The image was too real, too figurative. The idea shocked me. Even as a model it had too much presence. I considered what my parents would think if they found it. Eventually, whatever my fears were, I agreed with myself that I did not have a choice in the matter. The sculpture had to succeed and I had to save the Mexicans. I found a saw and went up to the garden in search of a suitable tree. Without being discovered, I cut off the end of an apple tree branch, pulled off the leaves and distributed them around the garden so as not to draw attention to my act of vandalism. I returned to the workshop and nailed the branch to the side of a large, brick-like piece of wood. I made a noose out of string and then hung the father and the son from the branch.

It took some time before the length of the noose was right. If the figures were to remain vertical and not swing or droop, the legs of the son had to touch the ground perfectly. Some precision-tying and the use of a little plasticine, which I placed under the boots of the boy, were required before I completed my act of reconstruction. Now I could begin to formulate my strategies for ending the story to my satisfaction. I looked at my work with pleasure, but the length of the noose bothered

me. It was longer than the noose in the film. I knew immediately that I had to make a new tree for my figures. The father being closer to the branch could have a significant impact on the decisions that I made to complete the story. Maybe it would be possible for the son to run from his supporting position, climb the tree and pull his father up to the branch before strangulation reached its dreadful conclusion. I could see the face of the boy trying to figure out what his chances were, given that time was running out.

At this point in my narration, there was a call to end the performance. When this event actually happened, I had plenty of time to consider my schemes for returning the world of justice to the Mexicans, but the interruption, like the ending of my television viewing, had come from nowhere and at a completely inappropriate time. I could not relate my visions for ending their suffering. The other members of the group gathered together and started talking about our activity, while I remained on the floor, unwilling or incapable of moving.

In retrospect, the actions that accompanied this story had an extraordinary poignancy, but during the performance I felt uncomfortable with what was happening. When our performance commenced, the woman with mousy hair sat on her chair facing the four members of the audience. Her feet were on the horizontal bar at the front, her elbows were on her knees and her head was in her hands. I assumed the same pose on my own chair, probably for the same reason that I had chosen the chair in the first place. Compared to the task of relating a continuous narrative, the decisions about props and movement were not important. They had to be so simple that I did not have to think about them. I started my story immediately.

The woman's first action was to stand on her chair and her first instruction was that I should take my chair and place it next to hers. She stepped from her chair onto mine. She then directed me to move her chair to the other side of the one that she was standing on. When I had completed this move she stepped onto her original chair again. After repeating this set of instructions a number of times, I had facilitated

her move across the room. She was now standing on a chair by the wall on the other side of the performance space. Our audience of four followed us, writing down everything that was happening.

The woman then instructed me to take the chair that was free and to place it in the middle of the room. I did whatever she asked of me without thinking. I had no notion of questioning her instructions. I was fully engaged with my narrative of the Mexicans. Her next instruction directed me to stand next to her chair with my back to her. Without any warning or new directions, she leaped onto my back and assumed the 'piggy back' position. We remained in this position for some time. I began to think that she imagined that she was playing the father in my narrative. This was not a light body that I was carrying on my back and her arms around my neck were uncomfortable. With some effort, I continued with my story and tried not to think about this new change of events.

After a while she told me to carry her to the other chair in the middle of the room. This I did. I was thankful for the opportunity of placing her back on her own feet again. She then asked me to take the chair by the wall and place it over by the opposite wall. I knew that sooner or later she would direct me to carry her to this new position. By directing me to carry her she was giving me a trial similar to the one that the Mexicans had received from the cowboys. By being on my back she was also the Father. It struck me that she was playing both roles and this seemed very wrong to me. She should not be playing the villain and the victim in the same role. Only my real father could do that. When she instructed me to take her to the other chair, I began to lose my sense of the narrative. I stopped my monologue and delivered her a look of incredulity. At least that was the intention of my look. Whether she misread my expression, or she simply did not care to read it, I do not know, but she gave me a very broad and knowing smile. I became confused. I did not like playing the Mexican boy while she was playing the father. She re-interpreted this character as someone who was smiling derisively on my shoulders. She had shifted the dynamics

and was disrupting the story, robbing me of its meaning and making me the victim of her cruel joke.

With each new instruction, I carried her back and forth across the room. I was intent on keeping up my continuous narrative and determined to concentrate on the story rather than on the load that I was carrying. Slowly, halfway between chairs, I came to a halt and dropped to my knees. With the woman on my back, I could not sustain this kneeling position for very long. She did not appear to be interested in adapting the role that she was playing and I had no way of convincing her that she should be something other than the bossy pile of luggage that she had become. I put my arms down on the floor in order to support her weight. I was now in the position of a donkey. Gradually, she moved out of the 'piggy back' position and sat on my back as if she were riding me sidesaddle. I did not move and she did not instruct me to do so. I continued talking, but my sentences became slower and the gaps between them grew longer.

Eventually, the strain on my back, arms and knees was too much. I could not support her like this any longer. My only option was to lie flat on my stomach. I did this carefully, giving her enough time to adjust her position without falling and touching the floor. Her bottom was on the top of my back and her feet were resting on my legs. I remained there, static, pinned to the floor. She gave no further instructions and sat very still. I tried to continue with the narrative, but my voice became quiet and strained as I coped with the weight that was bearing down on my chest. I felt like a survivor in a collapsed mineshaft, my only means of communication being my small voice to the rescue team.

'Maybe ... it would be ... possible ... for the son ... to run from ... his supporting position ... climb the tree ... and pull his father ... up to ... the branch ... before strangulation ... reached ... Its ... dreadful ... conclusion ... I could ... see the face ... of the boy ... trying ... to figure out ... what his ... chances were ... given that time ... was ... running ... out.'

Then came the call to end the activity. The woman got off my back. I

put my head in my arms, closed my eyes and lay perfectly still. I could never have realized then that she and I would engage in a relationship and live together for a considerable time. I have no idea how this happened. I must have been somewhere else at the time. Our years together can be characterised by the pattern of behaviour that we had established that afternoon.

Home

THE sun is setting ... I have been here since ten o'clock this morning ... I am stuck to the window ... I am staring down to the street below ... gazing at the place where I saw her ... walking away ... She is probably home by now ... I want to move away from the pane of glass to which I have become attached, but I stay put ... When she first arrived I was a bit taken aback by her ... she was very direct ... after I had been with her for about fifteen minutes, she asked me what I was going to do for her. It was only then that I realised that we were alone together. It was a shock ... Given what I was expected to do for her, it was a shock that left me feeling distinctly nervous. I had no idea why the other two guests had not arrived ... The whole day has been too much for me ... I am exhausted ... I wish I had not drunk so much ... I wish I had not stayed up so late ... I must release myself from this window ... I have to pack everything in the van and return it ... I am not able to move just yet ...

I borrowed this studio for the day from a painter and spend nearly the whole day cleaning it. By the time I have finished it is almost time for my guests to arrive. At this point I decide to open the bottle of wine that I bought for my guests. Having consumed a pack of lagers that were in the fridge, this is the only alcoholic option available to me. I need at least one. I pour myself a glass of wine, sit down in the chair and wait. I could easily sleep now. At five past three I am sitting alone, waiting for three members of a panel who are going to decide whether or not to make a film of my performance. I desperately need this to happen. It is the only thing of any importance that has occurred in ages. I am completely overwrought and more nervous than I thought

possible. I wish that I had not agreed to do a live performance for them, but it is too late to show the video. I have no equipment here to play it on. It's a horrid video anyway. At a quarter past three the doorbell rings. I press the buzzer to release the door and wait for them to arrive. Patricia Povey walks in. She is very smartly dressed. She introduces herself formally and asks where the others are. I tell her that I haven't heard from them and, as yet, they have not arrived. She is obviously annoyed by this. Her manner suggests that she expects everything to proceed in a particular fashion. I know what it is, she has a minimum standard; a minimum, I suspect, that is pitched rather high. Apart from a few questions about the place we are sitting in and the place where I work, the late arrival of the assessment team remains the focus of her attention. She repeatedly tells me that their absence is extremely tiresome. Suddenly she asks, "What are you going to do for me?"

This question makes me very conscious of the fact that she and I are alone together. I tell her that I am going to do a performance and then wish that I had said something else.

"Fine," she says. "Can we get started? I have to be away promptly. I will explain things to the others later."

I hate the idea of performing this piece to an audience of one. I know nothing about her or what she is interested in. It is obvious that she knows nothing about me, or the kind of work that I am doing. For some reason, I feel certain that she will hate the performance. I hate it myself at this moment in time. The atmosphere in the studio is nowhere near the level where a performance has any chance of flourishing and I have no idea how to take it there. I am completely vulnerable. I feel caught, but I am not about to share my self-conscious jitteriness with this guest of mine. Patricia Povey is sitting in a chair waiting for me to begin. I am standing in the performance area. It is about four metres square and bounded on three sides by walls. The forth side is open to the rest of the studio. This is where my audience of one is now sitting. She takes out a pad and a pen from her bag.

I walk over to the cabinet, pick up the bottle of wine and put it on a

table in the centre of the performance space. I place it next to the tape recorder. At the start of the performance I turn on this tape recorder and a pre-recorded tape starts to play. My action has to coincide with the sequence of sounds that the tape delivers. I look at the machine and consider whether I should stop performing when the others arrive. This means stopping the tape. I turn to Patricia Povey to explain the problem, but she shows very little interest in it. I ask her if she would mind holding the machine so that she could press the pause button when the others arrive. I suggest that she might want to stop it herself, for some reason or other. I can tell that she is not happy about this, but she says nothing, simply holds out her hand, receives the tape recorder and places it on the floor by her feet. I remind her to turn on the tape machine when I enter the performance area and she nods her head by way of response. Her eyes are fixed upon me as if I were already performing. I feel sick. I walk to the other end of the studio, take a few deep breaths and walk back to the performance space. Now I am performing.

I pick up my props, walk across the performance area and stand in the rear, right-hand corner. I am looking diagonally across the space facing the back of an armchair that is in the middle of it. Next to the chair is a square coffee table covered with objects. I have a broad smile on my face. I am holding a coat over my right shoulder. My index finger is through the coat hook tab and I am holding a woman's scarf in the same hand. In my left hand I am holding a travel bag and between my arm and my body I am supporting a large, gift-wrapped box. I am leaning forwards as if I am flying into the house. I hold this position in a freeze until I hear the sound of a door banging shut, a sound that comes from the tape recorder.

"Bang."

I hold my coat up to the wall and it falls to the floor. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I move to the back of the chair, lay the scarf over it, and swivel it, on its back leg, turning it through ninety degrees. I hold out my big present. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Dung."

The tape recorder plays a very low note from the piano. I let the present fall to the floor. I pick up a rose, smell it and put it in my buttonhole. I move across the front of the space and pretend to hit something, saying, *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* I turn, go to the chair and take up a newspaper that is on the seat. I sit down and read the newspaper on the floor. *"Ta, tee tum, tee tum tum tee tee."* I scan through the pages and then stop to read something in the bottom right-hand corner. I tear this corner out of the newspaper and hold it. *"Ta, tee tum, tee tum tum tee tee."* I stand up, leaving the newspaper on the floor. I put the piece of paper into one of my jacket pockets and sit down in the chair. I take a pill from a bottle that is on the table. I put it on my tongue, pour myself a glass of wine and use the drink to swallow the pill. I can feel the effects of the alcohol and I realise that I have put the real bottle of wine on the table rather than the performance bottle. The bottle with grape juice in it is still in the fridge. I dare not think about this. I drink all of it, stopping only to throw back my head in an effort to get the pill down my throat. I do not succeed. I take the pill out of my mouth and put it back on the table. I place my empty wineglass next to it. I must not think about the bottle of wine. I will be fine. I swivel the coffee table through ninety degrees, so that its corner meets the corner of the chair as it did at the beginning of the performance.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. I look at the handset quizzically and replace it on its base. I run my fingers through my hair, pick up the handset again and dial a number.

"Brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr."

A phone is ringing on the other end of the line. I give up on the phone and replace the handset. I pick up the scarf, the bag, and the coat and go to the rear left-hand corner, where I repeat my initial,

arriving home freeze with the big smile. I hold my coat up to a wall that has no hook and it falls to the floor. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take out a newspaper and an identical but smaller gift-wrapped box from the bag. I move to the back of the chair, place the scarf on it and drop the newspaper onto the seat. I turn the chair through ninety degrees and walk on. I hold up my present and offer it to the empty space in front of me. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Bung."

The tape recorder plays another low note from the piano. I drop the box on the floor. At this point I need a laugh. It is supposed to be funny, but I am not getting anything from Ms. Povey other than the odd shuffle that she makes in her chair. Performing in conditions like these is punishing. I am now in the front right-hand corner of the space. I take my jacket off and throw it to the rear right-hand corner. I head in the direction of the jacket and, as I do so, again make a gesture with my arm to indicate that I am hitting a door. I say, in a voice that is not loud enough to be convincing, *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* I pick up the jacket from the floor and take from my pocket the newspaper fragment. I take a book and a pen out of another pocket and drop the jacket on the floor. I write something in the book. *"Ta, tee tum, ta rom pom pom pom."* I put the fragment in my trouser pocket and put the book back on the table. I pick up the bottle of pills and take another pill from the bottle. I put it into my mouth. I fill the glass with wine and take several gulps, again making hard work of an attempt to swallow the pill. I spit the pill out and put the empty glass back on the table. I pick up the newspaper from the seat of the chair and open it. I glance through it and then drop it to the floor. I move the table through ninety degrees. The furniture is in its starting position, but it is now facing in the opposite direction.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. I look at the handset quizzically and

replace it on its base. I walk away from the table and stop. I check my watch and return. I pick up the phone again and dial a number.

"At the third stroke it will be eleven eighteen and fifty seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I put the phone down, pick up my things and assume my arriving home freeze in the front left-hand corner. I hang up my coat. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* From the bag I take out a newspaper and a present, put the newspaper in my mouth, dog fashion, and look in the mirror. I brush back my hair with my hands, wag my head and growl at myself. *"Grrrr."* I go to the chair, drop the scarf on the back and the paper on the seat and turn it through ninety degrees. I hold out my present. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Dong."

The tape recorder plays a piano note an octave higher than before. I drop the present on the floor. I undo the knot of my tie, take it off and throw it to the front right-hand corner. I rush across the back of the space and this time with some determination I make an elaborate gesture of hitting a door. *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* I am in the rear left-hand side of the space. I turn, move into the centre and sit in the chair. I am partially hidden from my audience's view. I pick up the bottle and pour myself another glass of wine. I take another pill and try swallowing it with my drink. I put the pill and the glass back on the table. I take the fragment of newspaper from my pocket. I pick up a lighter and set light to the newspaper. I drop the flaming paper in an ashtray. I pick up a cigarette and put it in my mouth. I pick up a cigarette pack, open it, take the cigarette out of my mouth, return it to the pack and put it down again. I stand up and carefully move the table through ninety degrees. I start to sway a little so that it appears that I am drunk. Actually, ha, ha, ha, I am a little drunk.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press

the reset button and listen again. I look at the handset quizzically and replace it on its base. I walk away from the table and stop. I check my watch and return. I pick up the phone and dial a number.

"At the third stroke it will be eleven twenty-five and ten seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I replace the handset, pick up the newspaper, open it out and throw it on the floor. I pick up the scarf, my coat and my bag and assume my arriving home freeze in the front right-hand corner. I hang my coat up and it falls to the floor. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take out a newspaper and an identical but now even smaller gift-wrapped box from the bag. I put the newspaper in my mouth, look in the mirror and brush back my hair with my hands. I wag my head and growl at myself, *"Grrrr."* I turn back across the space and shout, *"Come and get me."* I laugh as if this is a joke, *"Ha, ha, ha, ha."* I drop the newspaper on the chair and leave the scarf on its back. I move the chair through ninety degrees and, with my arm out, I present my gift to the empty space. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Bong."

The tape recorder plays a piano note an octave higher than before. I take off my shirt in the right-hand corner and throw it to the front left-hand corner. I follow after it, making the door bashing gesture, *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* My arm pushes through the space and then returns to point behind me, indicating the presence of the fallen door. I go to the table and turn it through ninety degrees.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. I look at the handset quizzically and replace it on its base. I search among the objects on my table and find the little address book. I search through it, find my page and hold the book open while I dial the number.

"Brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr."

The tape plays a phone ringing on the other end of the line. I pick up a woman's shoe from the floor and study it. "*Ta, tee tum, ta rom pom pom pom.*" I put my hand in it to admire it. "*Ta, tee tum, tee tum tum tee tee.*" I imitate it walking along, my hand pretending to be the foot. I use the shoe like a telephone, matching the real one that I have to my other ear. I drop the shoe on the floor; replace the handset on its base and the ringing stops.

I pick up the newspaper, open it and throw it on the floor. I pick up the bottle of wine and pour myself another glass. I drink most of it and return the glass to the table. I pick up the pill bottle, take out a pill, throw it over my shoulder and put the bottle back. I pick up my scarf from the chair, my coat and bag from the floor and return to my original position in the rear right-hand corner. I hang up the coat and it falls to the floor. "*Hello Bee, I'm home.*" I take another newspaper and present from the bag. I put the newspaper in my mouth and look in the mirror. I run my fingers through my hair and growl at myself. "*Grrrr.*" I turn back and call out, "*Come and get me.*" I laugh, "*Ha, ha, ha, ha.*" I pick up the woman's shoe, admire it and shout, "*It's me, Bee.*" I throw the shoe to my right. I drop the paper on the seat of the chair, leave the scarf on its back and move the chair through ninety degrees. I walk past it and lift my hand up to offer the small gift box to no one. "*Are you there, Bee?*"

"*Pang.*"

The tape recorder plays a piano note an octave higher than before. I drop the present to the floor and stand, looking at it, doing my best to look forlorn. A recording of the music that I have been humming can now be heard on the tape recorder. I take a wallet from my back pocket, check the contents and return it. I pick up my shirt and put my arms into it. I charge across the front of the space, shouting and waving my arm. "*Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.*" I pick up the newspaper, open it out and throw it on the floor. The floor is now covered with the debris of the performance. I pour myself another glass of wine and drink at it greedily. I want to

drink everything. I pick up the pill bottle, look at it and place it back on the table. I shrug my shoulders. I half whistle and half hum my tune, while doing up the buttons on my shirt. *"Whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo, whoo..."* I am pretending to look at myself in the mirror and I am finding it difficult to do up my buttons. I twist around before I have finished tucking my shirt into my trousers and then I move forward before I have finished turning round. I lose my balance and fall headlong into the chair. I end my move spread out on the floor. I have fallen heavily on my knee and it hurts. I turn the table through ninety degrees from my position on the floor. I hold my hand to my knee. The kneecap is still moving. I stand up slowly and shake my leg very gently.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the telephone ringing. I lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. I swear at it and replace it on its base. I put my hand on my knee again and rub it vigorously. I limp away from the table and stop. I check my watch and return. I pick up the phone and dial a number.

"At the third stroke it will be eleven forty and ten seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I put the phone down and pick up the scarf, the coat and the bag. I assume my arriving home freeze in the rear left-hand corner. I lift the coat to the non-existent hook and call out, *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take another newspaper and present from the bag. Putting the folded newspaper in my mouth, I wag my head and growl at myself in the mirror. *"Grrrr."* I turn and shout, *"Come and get me."* I laugh, *"Ha, ha, ha, ha."* I pick up the woman's shoe, study it and say, *"It's me, Bee."* I throw it to my right. I hold up the scarf that I have been carrying and say, *"You dropped your..."* but I give up on the sentence. I go to the chair, throw the paper and the scarf on the seat and turn the chair through ninety degrees. I offer up my little present. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Tang."

The tape recorder plays a piano note an octave higher than before. I drop my tiny gift box on the floor. The music that I have been humming starts again on the tape recorder. I take the wallet out of my back pocket, check the contents and throw it over my shoulder. I pick up my tie and put it round my collar. I should be flying through my next move, but I hop and stumble painfully. I throw my arm extravagantly as I shout, *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* I stop and turn, very carefully this time, and go back to the table. I move it through ninety degrees without bending my knees.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I look at the phone in disbelief and then lift the handset. *"Hello."* I listen to it. I tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. I bash the phone down and kick the chair. I pick up the little address book from the table. I search through it until I find the correct page. I hold the book open while I dial the number.

"Brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr."

The tape plays a phone ringing on the other end of the line. I listen to the phone while I tie a knot in my tie, making a horrid job of humming the tune. *"Doo, dooo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo, doo."* I pick up the bottle of wine, pour some into my glass and then drink from the bottle. The phone is still ringing. I giggle and brush at the wine that I have spilt on my shirt. I take hold of the pill bottle and shake it to the rhythm of a Salsa beat. The phone is still ringing, but nobody answers it. I pick up the newspaper and throw it into the air, scattering its pages everywhere. I bend down, pick up more paper and throw that into the air. The tape-recorded rings stop at exactly the same time as I replace the handset.

I pick up my things and return to the arriving home freeze in the front, left-hand corner. The music starts again. I hang my coat on the non-existent hook and call out, *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take another newspaper and gift-wrapped box from the bag. I put the newspaper in my mouth and look in the mirror. I run my fingers through my hair,

wag my head and growl at myself. "Grrrr." I turn and shout, "*Come and get me, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha,*" but I cannot remember what to do next. I panic. I go to the chair. This is wrong. I turn and take a step back. I am lost. "Shhh..." I don't say it. I see the shoe on the floor. I pick it up and say, "*It's me, Bee.*" I throw it to my left. I turn and hold up the scarf. "*You dropped your...*"

"Ping."

The tape recorder plays a piano note an octave higher than before. Shit. I am nowhere near offering her my gift. What do I do now? I have to carry on. I go to the back of the chair, drop the paper and the scarf on the seat and move it through ninety degrees. I offer up my ridiculously small present and drop it on the floor in a single move. "*Are you there, Bee?*" I pick up the jacket and put it on while I hobble across the space, screaming. "*Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.*"

The music starts again. I don't know where I am or what to do next. I have no idea if I am completely out of sync or which scene I am supposed to be in. I stare at the furniture and nervously pat the pockets of my jacket. I take a wallet from the breast pocket, open it and throw its entire contents, piles of receipts, into the air. I put the wallet back. I pick up the newspaper and throw it across the space. I go to the table, pick up the pill bottle and suck at it like a baby drinking milk. I pour myself a glass of wine and drink it in large gulps. I take a coin out of my pocket, spin it in the air, catch it and place it on the back of my hand. I offer my hand to Ms. Povey, inviting her to choose heads or tails. I flick the coin away and move the table through ninety degrees.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I lift the handset. "*Hello.*" The music starts again. I listen to the phone. I hit it against my hand and listen again. I look at the handset with hatred and replace it on its base. I take a few difficult steps away from the table and stop. I check my watch and return. I pick up the phone and dial a number.

"At the third stroke it will be twelve sixteen and thirty seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I replace the handset, grab the scarf, the bag and my coat and stand at my entrance position in the front right-hand corner. I don't remember the music starting at this point. I hang up my coat. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take another newspaper and the tiniest of presents from the bag. I put the newspaper in my mouth and growl at myself in the mirror. *"Grrrr."* I turn back and shout, *"Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha."* I pick up the shoe and call out, *"It's me, Bee."* I throw the shoe to my right. I hold up the scarf, *"You dropped your..."* and without finishing, I point the scarf in the direction of the entrance. There is an envelope on the floor in the place where the doormat should be. I pick it up and open the seal. I put the scarf across my eyes and ask, *"Is this a surprise?"* I drop the unopened envelope onto the chair along with the paper and the scarf. I turn the chair through ninety degrees and offer up my miniature present. *"Are you there, Bee?"*

"Ting."

The tape recorder plays the highest note on the piano. I let my tiny pearl-like present fall to the floor. I take the rose out of my buttonhole and throw it over my shoulder. Without any enthusiasm for either the action or the words I say, *"Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges."* I have definitely twisted something and travelling at speed is now almost impossible. I return to the chair, pick up the newspaper and send it flying in every direction. There is hardly one bit of floor that is not covered with the debris of my performance. I take the wallet out of my jacket pocket. There are dozens of credit cards inside. The music has stopped, which throws me, as it should accompany me as I throw the cards into the air... I put the wallet back into my jacket. Oh dear, I am completely drunk. I go to the phone, pick up the handset and dial a number.

"At the third stroke, it will be twelve twenty and ten seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I replace the handset. I start to walk out of the space but the pain in

my knee is killing me. I stand still for a moment.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I limp back to pick up the handset. I shout, *"damn,"* and bang it down again. I turn in every direction. I don't know which way to go. My hand goes to the table, so I pick up the bottle and pour myself another glass of wine. I lift up the glass and spin it gently, to admire its contents. The music starts again. I hold the glass to my nose and breathe it in. I close my eyes and drink it slowly. I forget to concentrate and end up in a haze. I put the glass down and take up the scarf from the chair. I pick up my coat and bag from the floor and take up my original starting position in the rear right-hand corner. I am arriving home. I am fully dressed and I have the same broad smile on my face. I am ready to begin again. I am waiting for the sound of the door banging shut, but it doesn't happen. I can't remember whether it starts this scene or not... I don't know if I should start my move now or wait... What am I to do? The music has stopped... I wait...

"Bang."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a door banging. I hang up my coat and it falls to the floor. *"Hello Bee, I'm home."* I take a newspaper out of the bag and put it in my mouth, dog fashion. I look in the mirror, brush back my hair with my hands, wag my head and growl at myself. *"Grrrrr."* I turn back and call out, *"Come and get me."* I laugh, *"Ha, ha, ha, ha."* I can hear the music again. I pick up the woman's shoe, study it and shout, *"It's me, Bee."* I throw it to my right. I hold up the scarf that I have been carrying and say, *"You dropped your..."* but I give up on the sentence. I point in the direction of the entrance, see an envelope that is lying on the floor where the doormat should be and pick it up. I turn, put the scarf across my eyes and ask, *"Is this a surprise?"* I walk to the chair and take the letter from the envelope... I read it... I drop the letter, along with the newspaper and scarf, onto the chair... I turn the chair through ninety degrees, walk past it and ask, *"Are you there, Bee?"* I slump dejectedly to the floor falling heavily on my wounded

knee. I pick up a wallet from the floor and throw it away. I take another wallet from my jacket, pick out a great quantity of playing cards and throw them into the air. I see my rose on the floor... I pick it up and stroke it... I put it to my lips and kiss it... I sniff it in time with the music. *"Sniff, sniff, sniff."* I rise to my feet with difficulty and put the rose in my buttonhole. I walk through the sequence where I knock the door off its hinges without saying a word. The music stops. I go to the table and move it through ninety degrees. This hurts. I pick up the pill bottle and throw it to a far corner. I check my watch, pick up the handset and dial a number.

"At the third stroke, it will be twelve twenty-six precisely. Beep. Beep. Beep."

I put down the handset, pick up the bottle of wine and carry it with me as I walk out of the space. I stand by the wall at the front of the performance space and gaze at the debris that fills it. I take a drink from the bottle.

"Ring, ring, ring, ring."

The tape recorder plays the sound of a telephone ringing. I stare at the phone and take another drink from the bottle. The phone continues to ring. I shake my head at the phone in disbelief that anyone will be on the line. I take another drink from the bottle. It is now empty, so I hold it over my mouth to collect the last drops. The ringing does not stop. I walk slowly towards the phone. I stand over it. The ringing continues. I put the bottle on the table and lift the handset. It stops ringing. I hold the phone to my ear and listen. *"Hello Bee, I'm home..."* I want to tell her everything, but I can't say a word. I give her a friendly growl instead. *"Grrrr..."* I concentrate on listening to the phone as I limp to the edge of the performance space and then I say, *"Come and get me,"* and I laugh, *"Ha, ha, ha, ha..."* I walk towards Ms. Povey. *"It's me, Bee..."* I walk past her holding the phone, *"You dropped your scarf on the..."* I am now by the door. I open it and walk outside.

As I close the door I ask her,

"Is this a surprise?" and I say no more.

I stand silently in the hallway... The performance has ended... I come back in through the door and look directly at Ms. Povey. She claps her hands. I walk back to the performance table and put the phone down. I turn to face her and smile. I give her my best formal bow. She claps her hands again. I sit down in the performance chair. I pick up the bottle of wine, look at it and return it to the table. I laugh, "*Ha, ha, ha, ha.*" I stand up, take my jacket off and drop it on the floor. I run my hands through my hair and sit down again. My head is spinning.

Patricia Povey breaks the silence.

"I loved it when you sniffed at the rose in time with the music."

I nod my head. I can't say anything.

"I enjoyed it. It was funny. Your timing was excellent."

I remain silent and smile.

"The repetition was a bit difficult to live with though. For some reason it made me feel embarrassed, especially at the beginning. Why do you want to show us so many episodes of the same thing? You must know that it's annoying."

I shake my head. She says, "Well I don't know. It is difficult to know what to say about it. Do you see it as a tragedy?"

"A tragedy?" I cry, just a little too loudly. "You make it sound like a play in the theatre. It's a performance. I'm a boy in a box, not a character in a play."

She laughs and shrugs her shoulders. Her collarbones are beautiful.

"So how should I talk about it then?"

"Think of it as a dance."

"Well, I could, but even as a dance it goes over the same territory that was established previously."

"That's not true. It is always different."

"It is, but the differences are only shifts in emphasis or orientation... I think that you expect your audience to be surprised by the logic of this difference as if it were an unpredictable thing. In fact, when one gets to the end of the performance, one recognises that the journey

leads nowhere. It stays where it is."

"But it's not a journey. The action is displayed in different ways, that's all."

"That's what I mean. The drama doesn't change. The sequence of actions and words are not constructed to tell me anything more about the character. He is the same at the end as he was at the beginning. Surely you know more about him than this?"

"Well I don't actually. He is a product of the structure."

"But are you making a performance just to point at its structure?"

"Yes, I think so."

"Oh are you. So you are inviting us to consider this performance on the basis that there is a geometry that holds the drama together?" I nod my head. "Do you think that the recognition of this is enough to keep the audience entertained?"

"Sometimes it is. Of course it is."

I stand up and walk over to her. I sit in the chair next to hers. I stretch my wounded leg out straight and stroke my knee as I talk.

"I love it that you use the word geometry. It isn't exactly accurate, but it's a much better term to use than tragedy. It has a sense of space about it. The performance plays with space. It's just a dance with a few words. That's the only logic that governs it. I like this better than I like descriptions of context or solutions for tragedy."

"OK, thank you," she says. "I am not actually a drama critic in search of a play. I never said that you had to analyse the nature of tragedy, or that you should offer me ways of avoiding it. I like him, this boy in the box as you call him. I like him very much, but when you spend the entire performance asking yourself, 'what is he going to do next?' as I did, then you are hoping for some kind of answer. The answer that you give is always the same. Nothing. He is not going to do anything, other than arrive home."

"Sometimes, getting oneself home is an achievement of considerable proportions." I say this it as if I have said something funny and I laugh, "Ha, ha, ha..."

Patricia Povey laughs. There is something very attractive about her... I am looking at her neck, her collar bones and her shoulders... A heaving rhythm starts to beat in my chest... This can only be possible if Patricia Povey has a heaving rhythm beating in her chest. My feelings about her have changed... dramatically... I am now filled with desire for her... I start to feel nervous about my feelings... we are gazing at each other without saying a word... This lasts just a little too long... Suddenly we break eye contact. She looks at her watch and stands up.

"I must go," she says. "I would love to stay talking to you for longer, but I have people coming for supper. I will talk it through with the others. I think we should all watch the video together and see where we can take it." I stand up next to her. We are very close. I almost touch her hand.

"Stay and have a drink," I invite her. My words sound more like a plea than an invitation. I don't even have a drink to offer her. She puts her things into her bag.

"Thank you," she replies, "but I must get along."

She is moving towards me. She lifts her arm towards my shoulder. She is going to kiss me. I lean my head forward. She kisses me on the cheek. I can feel it like velvet. She has kissed me. She stays close.

"Thank you for the performance. Give us some time to discuss it and we will get back to you. Don't worry, I haven't set my heart against it. I have an argumentative style, that's all."

She takes a tissue out of her handbag. "Come here. Now you have lipstick on you." She licks the tissue and rubs my cheek with it. I remain completely still. I am looking at her face as she concentrates on her task... Slowly and purposefully she places a kiss on her finger... then she presses her finger gently against my lips... I am silent and very still... Not even my eyes are moving... I think my lips have used up my entire potential for sensory experience.

She addresses me in a whisper, "It was very exciting having you to myself... I must go now or I will be late... Goodbye."

I have a lump in my throat. She walks towards the door. She turns her head and moves her fingers gently, waving at me. She leaves the studio and closes the door behind her.

I take a few steps forwards... then I take a few steps backwards... and then I fall into the chair. I let out my breath... Heavily... I look about me... I need someone to verify what has taken place here. I run my fingers through my hair. I look at the bottle of wine, lift it to confirm that it is empty and then I growl at it. "Grrr ... " I pick up the scarf and wipe my face with it. I look at my watch... I jump up... I feel the pain in my knee. I don't know in which direction to go. I hobble to the window. I try to lift up the lower section but it does not move. I pull and pull on the handles and then I feel my back go... it's a kind of click... something dry and innocent, but I know what it means... I hold myself completely rigid in case my fears are confirmed... I see Patricia Povey walking down the street... I watch her until she is out of sight... I stay at the window... I stare at the space in the street that she inhabited... I have been doing this for so long now, it simply doesn't make sense any more... I don't suppose it ever made sense... I stroke my lips with the scarf... I must get on... I should try to take a few steps... I have to clear up and go... Nobody else is walking about now... It has become very quiet... The sun is setting... I am stuck to the window... "Come and get me... Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha..." I must get home.

PART TWO

Returning

"BUT that's Abi."

"Yes, but not Abi, the other Abi."

"The running one."

"No she's Abi, but the other Abi. There are two. There are two Abi's. There's Abi, you know, who came to the classes. You know drama, well, that Abi, and then there's the other Abi, she's Abigail actually. So there are two Abi's and the other Abi is quite, you know, quite weird actually. You know when we go swimming, it's weird, she always gets out first. I am always last. Well, her, that Abi. She doesn't come to drama. She's going to be in Helen's class. Well, in the playground. You know, not the inside space, but outside the inside space. She said that we were not allowed to skip there because the ground isn't strong enough. And we can't play ball or hopscotch either. That's weird and I don't believe it, do you?"

"No, the playground is the ground. You can do anything you want on the ground and it will not break".

The children are sitting at the kitchen table. Adelia cuts up some raw carrot, puts the pieces in a bowl and adds a little olive oil. She walks to the table and places the bowl on it, next to the olives. She invites the girls to eat these while she prepares the spaghetti. Adelia walks over to the cooker, stirs the sauce, tastes it and takes the pan off the heat. She crosses the kitchen to get a large pan, returns, switches on the kettle and then goes back to the cupboard for a new packet of spaghetti. Adelia is the 'au pair' and at five o'clock she prepares the children's supper. While the children eat their spaghetti, Adelia collects up the pans, takes them to the sink and begins to wash up.

When Adelia is in the kitchen she continually glances back towards

the front door. She is praying, as she does everyday, that Jack will visit his nieces this evening. Her hopes are for her benefit rather than the children's. She is always nervous at this point in the day, when the possibility of seeing him is beginning to diminish. She lives for these brief chance encounters. When she and Jack first met, his eyes lit up as he entered the kitchen. The connection between them was so direct, so fast and so dynamic that they both turned away from each other instantly. Jack turned to look at his sister, to register if she had noticed their brief encounter. Catherine did not display any sign that she had witnessed a momentous event having taken place. She introduced them to each other.

After the children finish their supper, Adelia clears away the plates and finishes the washing up. Jack did not visit and Adelia returns to her room. She rearranges her objects.

"Don't worry sweetheart, it's all right, you can sit on your special car seat. 'Whaa, whaa.' You don't have to cry. It's all right, we're just going fast. 'Vroom, neaaaar. Beep, beep. Mummy, mummy.' You can go on the motorbike if you like it. 'Vroom, vroom. It's OK sweetie. Look at this, you can go as fast as your sister. We will be at the seaside soon."

"Can I go on the beach in my car? Oh mummy, I'm scared of the waves coming in. Don't worry, we're going too fast for the waves to catch us."

"Here's the sandcastle and the queen is waiting to show you round the castle."

"Be careful with the queen, because if the sand falls down you will cover all the shells up. The shells are the places where they sit and tell stories. This bit is the bedroom."

"Let's pretend it's time for them to go to bed and we can't find the blankets."

"No, we are going to the party. I have to comb Molly's hair now."

"But that's not fair. Lucinda hasn't got long yellow hair. You cheated."

Adelia walks backwards and forwards across the kitchen, collecting up the spinach, peas and tomatoes, which she is going to add to the

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onions and rice that are already in the pan. She stirs the mixture, turns the heat down low and takes another pleading glance at the front door. She hates this door when it is closed and loves it when it delivers Jack to her. She walks into the garden to tell the children that supper is ready. She dishes out the rice and puts the children's plates on the table. She starts to clear up the various pans and cooking utensils, with thoughts of Jack moving backwards and forwards through her mind. She can describe in minute detail what happened on every occasion that they have been together. Everything she does, she does for Jack. Even her own ironing is an act that she carries out for him.

Jack walks into the kitchen. Adelia is beaming, but it is late, her duties are almost complete and she has no reason to remain in the kitchen. She dries the dishes while the girls finish eating and chatter with Jack. When Adelia begins to make her departure, the children complain. She had promised to do a performance for them after supper. Jack joins in the request for a performance and Adelia agrees, providing that Jack agrees to join in. She gives Jack a pan and a spoon to perform with and chooses a broom for herself. After a few rehearsals they are ready to begin. The children are particularly delighted to see Adelia swinging round with a broom on her shoulder and knocking their uncle to the floor.

For Adelia it is over too soon and she cannot find an excuse for Jack and her to remain together. They both move around each other and fiddle with things on the table. They are both ready to respond to an appropriate excuse, should one be found. They share these few awkward minutes of shuffling feet and broken sentences before making their inevitable goodbyes. When Adelia returns to her room, she draws a big red heart on a sheet of paper and places a kiss upon it. The feeling that she experiences is closer to pain than to pleasure.

"I was going along with Mummy and we had a puncture."

"What's a puncture?"

"It's when you have a hole in your tyre and there is no air left, because it

has all come out of the hole. And we went to the garage and we flew in the air so the man could mend it."

"Can you mend it?"

"Yes, you have to mend it or the car can't go along."

"I had a puncture once."

"People don't have punctures."

"Well I bet you didn't fly in the air."

"Yes we did. The man said you must drive on here and Mummy drove it on that moving thing and we went up higher and higher and we were inside the car and the man mended the tyre. We didn't jump down on the pavement. We jumped onto the tree. Ha ha ha ha. In the park actually. Ha ha ha. Onto the man's ice cream ha ha ha and it went all over us. We were covered in chocolate ice cream, so we had to jump into the swimming pool."

Adelia adds a tiny splash of white wine to the fried chicken and quickly drops the mushrooms and tomatoes into the sauce. She stirs the mixture and tastes a little off the spoon. She constantly looks towards the door. This evening she doesn't hate its closed position as much as usual. After the pain of last night, when her longing for Jack was unbearable, she has found a little delight and optimism to see her through the day. Yesterday she could hear Jack having supper with Catherine and Robert, her husband. Funny stories were being shared and the laughter was hysterical. Adelia desperately wanted to be part of Jack's family and her isolation from him was more than she could bear. Being with Jack was not a thing that she could leave to chance. This morning, Adelia carefully introduced food into her conversation with Catherine, and then talked specifically about her love of cooking. Catherine suggested that Adelia could cook for them on Tuesdays and Thursdays and join them for the meals. In this way Adelia achieved her plan. Soon she would be sitting with Jack at the dining table.

Adelia tells the children to clear the table and lay out the cutlery. She asks them to lay a place for her and adds the tagliatelle to the chicken and mushroom sauce. She stirs it gently, dips her finger into the wooden spoon and tastes the sauce. She places three bowls on the

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table and returns for the parmesan cheese and the grater. Her ability to prepare delicious food is beyond doubt. There is little that she does not know about the science of the kitchen and the art of good cooking. Adelia says that in her country everyone eats together. "We drink, tell jokes, sing and talk about how good the food is." The three of them do exactly that and they all have hysterics about their descriptions of how the food tastes.

When she is again in her room, Adelia writes some thoughts about her new kitchen duties. When she is in bed, she meditates upon what she will wear on her cooking days. She thinks about where she will shop for the most flattering aprons.

"Can I be the mummy please?"

"You can be the big sister and dolly will be your baby sister. Oh please let's do that and you need to be dressed."

"I want to be the little sister who has to have her dinner and you are the mummy and I throw the food on the floor."

"No, I'm the mummy who has to dress you up for the party. It's a dressing game."

"But I want to play the blood game with the tomato sauce. They do use blood in the sauce."

"Yes, I know. So, OK, I will be the nurse and you've got some blood on you and I have to put a plaster on it, or a bandage."

"Yes, this can be your bandage and she's your daughter and she's crying. When I am better we can go to the party and wear our dresses."

"We will go the party, looking very arty. Hey that rhymes. I know let's do rhymes. I'll start. We will go the party, looking very arty. Now it's your turn."

"I like parties. I like smarties."

Catherine walks into the garden and tells the girls to come in and get ready for bed. Adelia is becoming familiar with the task of cooking for the adults. In the beginning, she was nervous and worried herself over the smallest of details. Today she is preparing asparagus with egg and

wine sauce as a starter, followed by fettuccine with parma ham and cream. She always provides generous portions in case Jack arrives. When Jack learns of Adelia's cooking days, his visits, haphazard as they are, coincides with them. She knows in her heart that he finds her attractive, even though he offers nothing but the smallest of gestures to confirm this. In the beginning this did not matter to Adelia, she was happy with her modest returns, but this position is becoming more and more difficult for her to sustain.

Adelia looks at the blessed door when she hears it open. It delivers Jack into the hall. He enters the kitchen, their eyes meet and Adelia, much to her annoyance, turns away. She walks over to the cooker and asks Jack to talk to her while she prepares the meal. Jack says that he is always happy to talk to her. Adelia feels herself rise up, as his words echo through her. She holds onto them as if they are a gift. Jack, with great hilarity, tells her about an early attempt at acting when his portrayal of a lover had catastrophic results. Adelia is wonderfully entertained. She rinses the asparagus, breaks off the tough ends and places the stems in a colander. She feels his eyes on her as she works. She does not need to face him directly, but moves delicately at her task, conscious of her beauty and her performance. She does this for him, giving him time to take her in. She does it for herself, for the sensual enjoyment it gives her. She watches Jack carefully while he eats. She is conscious that one can learn how people make love by the way that they eat. Adelia passes the evening in enchantment.

"There are caterpillars on here; hundreds of them. Come and have a look, it's amazing. You can just have a look."

"I'm busy. My children don't want to go to bed and they are crying. You must go to bed now babies and I'll put the story tape on. Come along darlings, it's nice and comfy in your bed. I have to go on the Barbie bike to get some things for the queen and I have to be very quick. But you can't come with me, it's the night time."

"Oh Adelia, help me, they are still alive. Come here, look and they are all gold."

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And look on here, it's all their eggs and the ants are eating all the eggs."

"Can I have some bread for the queen and some humus. Oh children you are very, very naughty. You can't come here with your night things on. Smelly socks, smelly socks, we don't care."

"Hey, that's my tent. It's a secret club tent. You're not allowed in."

"Smelly socks, smelly toes, we don't care."

Adelia is cooking sausages and potatoes, with basil and tomato sauce for the children. Even when Jack has not been in attendance, Adelia has put her heart into cooking. Now her ability to sustain this enthusiasm is waning as the continual alternation between gaining a little of Jack's attention and losing most of him is beginning to take its toll on her. The children eat happily as Adelia walks back and forth across the kitchen, preparing the main meal. She is making a sauce of tomatoes, onions, celery and carrots, to go with the chicken. She has such an overbearing desire to have Jack with her in the kitchen, that she chops the vegetables at an alarming speed, almost with anger. She checks herself, but she is incapable of presiding over the great clashes of opposing forces that pull at her. She starts to bash the cupboard doors and bang the pans as she storms about the kitchen. It is as if she is trying to wake herself up and out of her impossible reverie. She wants to break down and weep. She has no chance of weighing up her actions. Tempering the feelings that prompted this performance is now impossible. She cannot stop making a space for him, even though this space remains empty. It is a primitive emptiness that she feels and it generates the battle that she is having with the cupboards and the pans.

Adelia stops to see how the children are progressing only to discover that they have already left the kitchen. Before long she is sitting quietly at supper with Catherine and Robert. There are many awkward silences to fill. They congratulate her on her cooking, but the evening is a trial. She wishes that she had made an arrangement to go out with someone after supper, but she never makes any arrangements in case it clashes with an opportunity to be with Jack. The thought of this increases her

frustration, but it does not alter her feelings towards him. When she returns to her room she goes quickly to bed. She breathes in the sense and the pictures that she has of him. She is happy in this place where she can mix memory with desire. The nights are the easiest time for Adelia.

“Once upon a time there lived a elf and what happened was a storm broke out and all his friends runned away for shelter. Then his mother, with his baby sister, said, oh come in, it’s warm in here, we should..., we should celebrate. And then he brought up a secret bag, it was on his shoulder actually, and then he sit down and had a think in his thinking chair. And then his little sister gave him a drink, ‘cos when he was in his thinking chair he always needs a drink, because that’s what he wanted every day was a drink in his drinking chair. And he didn’t know where his friends went and he was by himself. Then he was drinking some soup, because it always warmed him up after the storm. Then his little sister said she would bring him some breakfast. His little sister said to her mother, please can I have some cereal and my brother wants some pink cereal. Ha, ha, ha. And the mummy said, that’s a funny breakfast, but she didn’t know that he was a elf and that he had lost everybody that he loves in the storm.

Adelia is cooking risotto and looking at the door. It is impossible for her not to look at the door. She is feeling completely lost. This morning she went swimming to try and calm her temper. It was the only time that she could remember feeling that she was getting somewhere. The mere fact of pushing herself through the water gave her a sense of achievement, but its effects have not lasted. She remembers the simple days when the sight of Jack filled her with delight. By passing through the kitchen, he could cause her heart to leap and make everything in her day a pleasure. As suppertime draws to a close, she knows that he will not come. She also knows that if he did come, he would not offer her enough to move the impenetrable wall that divides them. In spite of this she still prepares her feelings so that she might enjoy some temporary relief should his unlikely presence occur.

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She ties up the waste sack and takes it to the bins outside. It is not particularly full, but she uses it as an excuse to see if Jack's car is parked outside. It is. The small fact that he is at home and near by is enough for her. She drops the sack in the bin, makes her way to the car, draws a heart with her finger in the dusty windscreen and returns to the kitchen. The car is both a means of communication and a symbol of potential for Adelia. When she walks to and from the house, and the car is absent, she keeps an eye out for all similar Volkswagen cars, in case one of them is Jack returning home. At these times, the sight of any car with a VW insignia on it is enough to give her spirits a momentary lift.

She puts a new sack in the kitchen bin and walks to the sink to wash up the pans. She ambles about the kitchen, rigorously doing nothing. She abhors it when this thing gets the better of her, when it takes over and directs her every move. She hates not knowing when her obsession will rise up again and yet she knows that she wanted it, that, in some way, she willed it. She blames herself for these feelings that she has created. Later, in her room, she counts the weeks that are left before she is to return to Italy. The possible days for seeing Jack are precious few.

"And then I saw what was weird, it was a plant and it was very funny. It looked like a holiday and then he said how do I believe in all these stars? He was really a magician, kind of. They are star cakes he said, you can take some home to your family. And then he walked on a bit further and he said, oh what lovely flowers. I'll pick some daisies and some violet flowers, and some purple flowers, and some pink flowers and then he rode on a bit further and then he saw some lovely red shoes and put them on. Then he saw some high heel shoes for his mummy and his sister and I think the rose ones will be for my sister for going to the party. The white ones should be for my mummy. He bundled them into his arms and walked off to his house. And then his mother was thrilled to see her very own shoes and his sister was thrilled to see her very own shoes. He gave some flowers to the Daddy because his friend

loved flowers. And he gave some flowers to the mum and the little baby sister, but not to the boys, because they didn't like holding flowers. But he said that they could only hold the flowers if he gave them to them, because then it was magic and it's what the boys needed."

Catherine walks into the kitchen and tells the girls to leave Adelia to her cooking. She then tells Adelia that Jack is not staying for supper. He has only come for a drink before he goes out to a performance. Adelia is devastated. Up to this point, everything has gone well. It is Catherine's birthday and Adelia is cooking for ten people, nine people now, including herself. She has made a heroic effort to prepare a great variety of dishes. The food is almost ready and most of the guests have arrived. She is enjoying her second glass of wine. She can hear Jack's voice in the living room and she now continually glances back to see if he is coming to see her before he leaves again.

Now in the final moves of her performance, Adelia finishes the salad and lays out the prosciutto. Everything is perfect. She opens the oven door, takes out the zucchini dish and rearranges the various pots and casseroles to make room for the plates. She picks up the plates and places them at the bottom of the oven to warm. As the door does not close properly, she opens it again and realises that the dishes on the top shelf are too big. She pulls out the shelf. The front casserole dish is jammed at the sides of the oven and does not move. The shelf moves forwards, the casserole at the front stays fixed and the dish behind it falls off the back of the shelf and down the back of the oven. The contents, fillets of sole in a bechamel sauce with spinach and parmesan, spill out. The sauce turns brown as it cooks on the surface of the oven and is already giving off a smell of burning. She screams... She screams and she screams the best Italian swear words that she knows. She dives into the oven, empties its contents and starts wiping the back and base of the oven with a towel.

"Oh no, oh no, oh no," she repeats as everyone piles into the kitchen to see what has occurred. "Oh no, oh no, oh no," she continues as Catherine asks her what has happened.

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"Oh my God, Oh my God, I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm sorry," she continues as Catherine takes her hand, lifts her up, takes her into her arms and allows her to sob and sob. While everyone addresses the problem of the oven and the food, Jack takes her hand, removes the towel that she is still holding and kisses her fingers. Catherine says, "It's OK, it's OK, it's OK. Don't worry. Don't worry, it's OK."

"But I've ruined everything," moans Adelia.

"It's just one dish, that's all. We eat too much anyway. It's only one dish. We have plenty more. Please don't worry, please don't cry, it's OK, really, it's fine, please don't worry."

The exchange is repeated, but without any sign that some relief is being gained. Catherine, thinking that a change of scenery would do her good, suggests to Jack that he take her with him to the performance. Jack agrees.

"Come with me Adelia, forget about the cooking," he says.

Adelia hears this proposal, but it does not sink in behind her anguish.

"I can't," she says, "everything is in such a mess."

"Don't worry," Jack replies, "just be ready in ten minutes."

Adelia stops her sobbing and Catherine takes her up the stairs to her room.

"Will you be all right now?" she asks.

"Yes," says Adelia, giving a last sob that she no longer needs because it has begun to register with her that she is going out with Jack.

"Thank you," she says to Catherine, who gives her a kiss.

Adelia closes the door and becomes conscious of the 'ten minute deadline' ticking away. She rushes to the sink, washes and starts to apply fresh make-up. She is combing her hair when she hears Jack shout to her from the bottom of the stairs. Adelia takes a last look in the mirror, closes her eyes, kisses the air in front of her and, with the words, 'I'm coming my love,' singing through her, she picks up her jacket and bag and heads for the door. She floats down the stairs and walks to the front door. Jack is holding it open for her. Catherine calls to

them to enjoy themselves. Anyone would have said had they seen the couple leave the house that they looked like a pair of young lovers.

Adelia can hardly believe that she is going in the beloved VW. Jack again holds the door for her. He starts the engine and then strokes her arm. Adelia smiles at him. She is joyous and she is beginning to sense that tonight is going to change everything. She asks him where they are going and he tells her that some friends of his are doing a performance. Adelia wants to know more, but he changes the subject and asks her about herself. Adelia is happy. She tells him about Venice and about her imminent return. She emphasises that it is only three weeks away to give Jack a sense of the small amount of time that they have left. She talks non-stop, relishing her presence in the car. She explains about going with her mother to visit her grandfather's grave, which they do every year on the anniversary of his death. She tells him about her grandfather, who inspired her to act and about what she hopes to do at drama school. Her excited chatter continues, even after Jack has parked the car and they are walking along the street together. She talks until they arrive at the venue.

The performance is taking place in a large studio. Jack and Adelia make their way past groups of people, some of whom are standing and some sitting down. They find chairs to sit on a few rows from the front. They are facing the end of the studio, which is empty, apart from a large sofa and a wardrobe. When the lights are turned off, the room becomes quiet and the audience focus on the space in front of them.

When the performance is over, Jack and Adelia look at each other and smile. The performance was incredibly funny. He asks if she would like a drink and they make their way to a pub opposite the studios. The pub is crowded and all normal conversation has to cease. Adelia is uncomfortable. Everyone appears to know one another and greetings are made in the most enthusiastic manner. Jack waves her over to the corner. He mouths the word "wine" to her and she mouths "red wine" back. Getting anywhere is difficult. Eventually, they are standing next

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to each other. Adelia is aware that Jack is not quite sure how to treat her. He places a hand on her back, between her shoulder blades. It starts as a friendly gesture, but quickly becomes a tender act. Adelia, conscious of every nerve in her body, presses back and tries, without disturbing the contact, to move gently from side to side. Jack leaves his hand there while continuing to talk with his friends.

Everyone refers to the performance enthusiastically but briefly. It seems that many other thoughts and stories have to be shared. Adelia is surprised that Jack introduces her to his friends in such a formal manner. It is impossible for her to sustain more than a few words with anyone, as the volume that this requires is only possible among friends. Jack winks at Adelia in an attempt to make her feel included and she winks back at him. She decides to test his willing sensibility towards her by gently slipping her hand into his. They squeeze their hands together, quickly and automatically, and then separate. They both turn to look at each other. They go straight for the eyes, smile briefly and break contact. They say nothing. Adelia has 'yes' ringing through her entire body.

One of the performers enters the bar and everyone cheers. He has the same beaming smile that he wore in the performance, but he looks very different. People touch him and congratulate him. The good humour is infectious. Jack is still busy talking with friends and Adelia, having found a stool, sits and follows her thoughts. She is puzzled that nobody talks about the performance. She wants to go through everything and hear the reactions of everyone. She feels sorry for the performer. She stares at him as he laughs and jokes. She does not believe that performances need no response. She begins to dislike the crowd and yearns for Jack to take her away. She is desperate for them to be alone together.

The performer notices that Adelia is staring at him and he makes his way in her direction. Jack sees him and they shout each other's name and give each other a hug. Jack pinches both his cheeks, looks into his eyes and tells him that the performance was hilarious. Adelia

is proud of him. The two men hug once more and Jack, patting his friend vigorously on the back, introduces him to Adelia. He asks Jack if he is travelling over this weekend and Jack says that he is. Jack turns to Adelia and tells her that he is off to New York on Saturday. He tells her in a very excited way that he is going to perform in a film. Adelia responds by saying that she is going to Venice. She says this sharply with an air of competition about it. She is shocked by the news and she turns her head sharply away from them. During the brief silence that follows, Adelia is acutely aware that her reply had a strange ring to it. She turns her head back, as if she is about to speak and touches Jack's arm, but her heart is in her mouth. The two men, conscious of her need to speak before they do, wait for her to respond. Adelia bites her lip hard and asks Jack how long he will be away. "Six weeks", says Jack in a tone that is matter of fact. Adelia responds with the word "fine", which she delivers in a cross and almost threatening tone.

She wants to say something more. She believes that she will never see him again in her life. She reckons that she has just lost the best chance she ever had of being with him. She knows that he feels affection for her, but she also knows that he is not going to do anything about it. Her mind goes blank. She now has too much that she wants to interrogate him with, but her explosion remains inside. There is little chance that she can put her thoughts together now. She does not understand how he is capable of this. She stares at him, silently, while the two men talk about New York and where they will meet. When they make their goodbyes Adelia watches the performer as he departs. She stares right through him, believing that he is leaving with something that belongs to her. Now it is jealousy that she feels rather than pity. She turns to Jack and notices that he is conscious of the effect that his news has had on her. He says nothing and appears to be looking around for someone to talk to. Adelia prods him with her finger. He asks her if they should go and Adelia tells him that she wants another drink.

The pub is now relatively quiet and getting a drink is easy. They sit together at a table and Adelia starts to tell him everything that she can

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think of. There is little point in her holding back now. She describes how her feelings for him developed. She tells him how she arranged to cook for his sister so that she could sit with him at supper. She describes the enormous effort she made with the food and with the whole family. She talks of her loneliness and her isolation and tells him of the bewilderment and anguish that she has been through. She tells him about her vulnerability and her anger. Tears come to her eyes, dreadful sobs that shake her, while she continues talking. She cries and tells him about how she drew hearts on his windscreen. She asks Jack if he can believe this and then she begins to laugh. She laughs at herself and shakes her head.

I look at her... I am shattered by her words... I have been listening in silence... dumbfounded... She has been talking to me... I am Jack... I have been listening to this beautiful young woman tell me what she has been through on account of me... I heard every word... and the impression they made on me is devastating... each word seared itself into me... I feel so sorry... she is now sitting with me joking about it... no, I can't believe it... how could I possibly believe it?... and yet I believe her... I want to say "I love you", but she will not believe me... I nod my head in response to her question and take hold of her hand.

Suddenly she assumes a rather exaggerated grown up manner and starts to ask me questions about New York. I talk to her about the film and she listens. I suggest that we return home as it is getting late. I feel greatly relieved that she agrees to this, but I am also deeply saddened. I talk about my work all the way to the car. I feel that my only chance of surviving this ordeal is to keep up a monologue. I talk right the way through our car journey home. Even when she drops a hint about joining me in New York, which she does once or twice, I manage to avoid addressing the remarks. I am not listening to a word that I am saying, so conscious am I of the thoughts running through my head. I know that I should be addressing these thoughts to Adelia.

I was drawn to her from the moment I saw her, but it was impossible for me to establish a relationship with her. I could not help flirting with her. I too felt frustrated and bewildered by the impossibility of taking up the charged emotions that flew between us. I had to fight myself every inch of the way to avoid letting anything develop. I have no way of telling her about my situation; about how impossible it is. I am not free and I have recently been through more trouble than I know how to deal with. My family already have me on probation. How can I tell her about my failures, my penury, my homelessness, the separation from my wife and the loss of my son? She is young, full of optimism and enthusiasm. She thinks the world is just waiting to receive her. She thinks that I am a success because I have performed in public. If she knew the truth she would know that my panic and my misery is all that I have to offer. I have completely lost any sense that I had of myself, I am washed up, floundering, knowing nothing. At the point when I agreed to take responsibility for myself, hold down a job and pay off my debts, I am running off to New York to work on an experimental film. This is what I love doing, I have to do it. I don't care about what happens to me, but I care this much for Adelia. There is no way that I can contemplate running off with my sister's au pair on top of everything else.

I do not know if I am responsible for her feelings, but I hate the idea of exonerating myself because she feels so strongly. I have no desire to hold her at arm's length or even for her to feel that she has been left behind, but I do not know what to do. I want to hug her and kiss her. I want to tell her that everything will work out fine and that we will be together for ever. We arrive at the house, but neither Adelia nor I are ready for the finale. We sit in the car. Adelia asks me why I could not let something happen between us. I freeze. She then asks me why I had not told her about going to New York. I continue to be frozen. I tell her that I cannot tell anybody about going to New York. She looks at me in a puzzled way. She scrutinises me and I want to scream. I want to be released from this. Then she asks me again why I could not let

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something happen between us. All that I can manage is the well-worn phrase about it being the wrong time for me to start a new relationship. When she asks why, all I can do is repeat the same answer, as if it were a litany to get me out of trouble. Eventually, when I can't continue the conversation any longer I tell her that I am sorry. I try to take hold of her hand but she does not allow it. I open the car door, step out and say that I am really sorry in a tone of finality, but it does not stick. Our relationship, such as it is, is not going to end so easily. She gets out of the car, slams the door and walks to the front garden.

I try to put my arm through hers as we walk towards the door, but she pulls away. She stops in the doorway. She asks if we can meet before I leave for New York. I try to think about this, but I have no words left. She waits for an answer, but I cannot speak. She leaves the silence hanging in the air until it is too much for me to ignore. I say that I don't know and accompany this statement with a shrug of my shoulders. Adelia probably reads this gesture as indifference, because she turns her back on me angrily, hits me with her elbow and starts to search her bag for the door key. Never before have I felt in such a dilemma. I want all this to end, but at the same time I want to retrieve the situation. The option of parting as old friends is simply impossible. We cannot end without starting. I hold her arm again and try to turn her round. She tells me, in a very threatening way not to touch her. She turns back to the door, puts her key into the lock and opens it. She steps into the hall and turns to face me again. She says "goodbye" harshly as she slams the door towards me. I put my hand up to stop it from closing and follow her in.

Catherine is still in the kitchen. When she hears us enter she invites us to join her for a drink. Adelia and I walk into the kitchen. We are not looking at each other and we sit down at opposite ends of the table. Catherine is sitting with her two remaining guests and all three women are exhausted with laughter. They all have tissues to wipe their eyes and keep saying "oh dear" as a way of setting each other off on further bouts of giggling. I ask Catherine if she had a lovely birthday

and she says yes, which was part word and part laugh. She pours us both a glass of wine and asks if we enjoyed the performance. I say yes, but Adelia responds by saying that the whole evening was a tragedy in the English tradition.

I can see Catherine and her friends trying to think about what this might mean. None of us say anything in return. Adelia, intuitively sensing that her news could draw some further interesting reactions, delivers her next remark directly to Catherine.

"Jack is going to New York to work on a new film."

"When?" Catherine asks, turning sharply towards me.

"Saturday," I reply.

Catherine's face changes; she has darkened.

"What about your job?"

"I'll get another one when I get back."

"Oh! You will get another one. Just like that. You will need another ten by the time you get back from New York if I remember what happened last time? Are they going to pay you?"

"Well, they are going to pay my expenses."

"Your expenses? Well, that's it. From now on you are on your own. I've had enough. Why is it that we are always talking about you and trying to sort things out for you? Tell me why we do it when you are continually flying off into one kind of trouble or another?"

I shrug my shoulders for the second time this evening. This time I mean it. I am prompted by indifference to these questions. I've had enough as well. It is true that I have caused havoc and my family has responded by bailing me out, but I have done enough penance on account of it. Rather than feel cross with Adelia, I feel pleased with her. Like her, I am relieved to be out in the open. I can't bear having to be devious about doing what I know is right. I feel really stupid at having been caught out, but it is too late now. I start to laugh nervously, because I don't know what else to do. I can see Adelia watching me. She has a look upon her that says, "So who's a naughty boy then?" This causes something to move in me. I turn to my sister and stare directly

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at her. I am staring her out, facing her down, as if by this method I can gain the upper hand in a long-standing family feud.

She can feel my belligerence. She says, "You're crazy, you will never learn."

"I am going to New York for a few weeks," I tell her, "not for the rest of my life..."

She shrugs her shoulders.

"...And while we are on the subject, Adelia is coming with me."

Adelia looks up at me in astonishment.

The others turn to look at Adelia.

Preparation

I clasp my hands together, twist them so that the backs of my fingers touch my chest, and push my hands away, palms first, making my fingers crack. I am preparing myself for the evening ahead. I take a sip of wine, emptying my glass, and wonder what I might do to stop feeling so grumpy. If I could position myself somewhere near my feelings I would do something about them, but they are so well submerged that the prospect of doing this has little chance of success.

I have a theory about my feelings. I believe that they reside in a zone that is situated below many layers of thinking material. I imagine that each time I engage my analytical apparatus, which I do frequently, I deposit another layer of thinking stuff on top of the feelings. This is daft, but I am wired up to think like this. My thinking self assumes that it can survive better if it does not have to take any sensitive internal messages too seriously, so it proceeds to take control by sitting on the sensations. It tells me that this is not a view that I should adopt for life in general, only for work, but this is a trick carried out to gain the upper hand, which it does most effectively. My rational sense of fair play tells me that even if my thinking self dominates life at work, there must be some spillage and shared territory between it and all the feelings that are fighting to get out. On this account, I tell myself that I should not worry about the lack of presence that characterises my feelings, but now and then they simply explode of their own accord and a battle ensues. If there is a battle going on at this moment then it is highly likely that this is partly to blame for my present grumpiness. I say partly to blame, because I know that some of my edginess relates directly to the concerns that I have about preparing for tonight's activity.

Preparation

This evening, I am required to give expression to things that I know I cannot feel, so not only am I unable to locate the right feelings for this task, I have to try to locate feelings that I suspect that I do not have. This may not seem like a difficult task, but I am confused and crabby about it. I am not even in a position to apply my usual strategies and logical steps to wind myself out of this anxiety, because the more I tell myself to do so, the more obstinate I become. To make matters worse, I know that I must carry out tonight's activity with all the grace, charm and sensuality imaginable and I am nowhere near this kind of territory. This is not a job for the cool rational mind and the time is fast approaching when I need to deliver a heartfelt performance.

I drum my fingers nervously but rhythmically on the table, as if I am playing the piano. I try to feel inspired, but avoiding negativity isn't easy. At times like this I need to focus on something stimulating to work with. Stimulation always helps one feel good about oneself. Out of the blue and in the most annoying fashion, I find myself analysing my current situation. In an exhausted way I start reviewing the possibility that the considerable preoccupation that I direct at myself may be responsible for the underlying loneliness that is my constant and nagging companion. Why I am undertaking such a review at this moment in time is beyond me. It is certainly a bad move. I know that whether it is responsible for my loneliness or not, I have no ability to, or intention of changing my behaviour and my solitary condition is inevitable. My sense of being alone is no different to that experienced by anyone else, but this does not prevent me from taking the next step of regarding the condition as being peculiar to me, and neither does it stop me from blaming myself for its existence. I try to detract myself by shifting the blame for my feelings of loneliness on the demands of my profession and realise that I have come full circle. I am aware that my behaviour is plainly idiotic.

To avoid thinking in this kind of sequential quagmire I have to fill the gap pleasantly between now and the time when my evening's work will take over. These internal arguments, born out of momentary

boredom, mundane anxiety and my present churlishness are only serving to make matters worse. I decide to substitute my aimless pondering for vacant gazing and wait for some kind of magic to occur. Did I say magic? I wish I didn't call it magic, but I do not know what else to call it. I feel entirely embarrassed by using this term in relation to how I live my life, but whatever it is called I do, at times, wait around for something to happen to me that will affect the way I feel. I think that something comes to me via the airwaves and the qualities that I receive when I allow it to wash over me affect my life in much the same way that the sound of music inspires one to dance. Music starts the dance, the dance sets me free and, hey presto, I am connected to the world at another level. I am so attracted to this way of thinking that I cannot think about changing it for another way. This is how the magic works. I cross my fingers and wish that something will start to happen for me soon.

Nothing is going to happen this evening until I agree with myself that I am not in a position to eradicate the unwanted end products of my personality. I agree with this and immediately begin to feel better. If I could feel thoroughly good about myself, I might have some chance of getting my preparations underway. It always surprises me how self-approval and feeling stimulated go so happily hand in hand. I take hold of my glass with the intention of getting another drink. Wine is particularly good where nerves are concerned. But am I feeling nervous? Generally I do not admit to being nervous about my own activity. Either I do not pay attention to the condition or I override it. I know intuitively that it is better to consider my moves without enquiring about who I am or what I am doing. I know of no other way of proceeding. I decide to hold back from making a second visit to the bar. Tonight I will be working well into the early hours of the morning and the evening as yet has hardly started. I consciously focus my gaze on the inhabitants of the hotel.

Sitting around, casually watching people as they go about their business is a great source of entertainment for me. I even grade places,

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such as restaurants and hotels, according to the quality of performance offered by the guests. My information about this particular venue suggests that it deserves a place in the premier division so my expectations are high. 'The most delightful world of animated scenery imaginable,' was how one critic described it. I think about being overexcited and grumpy at the same time and feel like a child again. I gaze around the tall, well-proportioned reception hall and entreat this intimate landscape of enchantment to focus my wayward concentration and soothe my perverse sullenness. The lounge is an oasis of exuberance. It is an installation that relishes in the abundance of colour that covers the elaborate decorations. It suggests to me the presence of untold secrets. Tonight I would like just one of them. I focus on the ornate ceiling with its frescoed scenes of embracing figures and breathe in its voluptuous eroticism. Nothing that is depicted on the ceiling alludes overtly to the erotic, but the figures, caught in acts of delicate and restrained caress, have an excited sensuality about them. Please send me some luck I implore them.

Just when I stop thinking about having another drink, I find myself at the bar ordering a glass of wine. I return with it to the side of the lounge and sit next to the piano. From this position I can see everything that happens in the hall. I take a large gulp from my glass and continue to gaze at the panorama before me. I invent for myself intimate scenes that occurred here long ago when the notoriety of this place was first established. It still has an air of confidence about it, as if it enjoys its history as the place for extravagant pleasures. By all accounts, its reputation for exotic public behaviour continues to act as a magnet for those who enjoy the sport of seeing and being seen and it achieves this with little other than a modest restaurant to make the excuse for visiting the place appear sensible.

I am not here to eat and I have little interest in being noticed. My job is simply to watch. I watch what happens and when I am moved by an incident I try to mimic it. Mime operates for me in much the same way as music and dance. Both forms thrive on magic. When I am

attracted to someone, I mimic their actions and in some way I become this person and his or her qualities become mine. I sincerely hope that something happens to inspire me to work in this way soon. I am sitting here ahead of time because I need a sense of how the various moves are configured in this particular arena of display. I am of course an expert in how promises and possibilities unfold between people, but this place is in a different league to most others and it is the context for tonight's event. I know that sitting here, gazing around this forum for romantic assignations is an exciting prospect, but I cannot help wondering how my overexcited condition could have tipped me into such a condition of melancholy and nervousness. I must try to focus my attention on the world before me. I drain my glass and prepare myself to get lost in the games of contact and discreet associations fuelled by the guests.

As yet, there is very little evidence of an ambience of expectation from the guests in the lounge and this makes me anxious. I am so impatient for the evening rituals to begin that I start to invent and anticipate a panoply of events for myself, each more infamous than the last. I dream up many forms of action, from the quietly studied and meticulously rehearsed to the impetuous and diverse expressions of excitable emotion. With an imagination like mine, I do not need much to get me started. I remind myself that my current need is for qualities of sensuality rather than elaborate escapades packed with spectacular gestures and bizarre expressions, but I love it all and I will take anything this evening. My real problem begins when nothing occurs, for then my edginess will get the upper hand and all will be lost. I have of course operated many times without a driving impetus or any clear certainties, so I know how to start things without any specific sense of what my contribution might be, but I have a sense that this is not going to work this evening. Tonight my feeling of nervousness is more acute than I can remember experiencing previously. This may be a novel experience but it is an unwelcome one. It leaves me reluctant to do anything.

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*I'm as rest-less as a will-ow in a wind-storm
I'm as jum-py as a pup-pet on a string.
I'd say that I have spring fever,
But I know it is-n't spring.*

The sound of the piano fills the hall and the rhythm adds a further dimension to the qualities in the Lounge. I will the music to awaken my sensuous memories and charm my romantic instincts. I can only hope that they are lying in wait for a suitable charge to raise them to the surface. The number of bodies that show signs of loitering lovingly in the lounge continues to be precious few. A couple have been sitting near me on a sofa that nestles beside a large and extravagant plant. They have been talking together and looking into each other's eyes. There is potential here for my eager eye and I have my antennae tuned to them. I watch and wait. The woman places her hand on the man's shoulder and strokes it gently. The man places his hand on the woman's knee. The woman takes his hand into hers, pats it and returns it to his own knee. He talks to her as if nothing has happened. He returns his hand to her knee. She allows it to remain. He keeps his hand very still. He is not going to provoke her into moving it again.

*Is - spring not - spring just - spring main - spring
Off - spring fledge - ling change - ling weak - ling
Some - thing no - thing this thing that thing
Fin - ger - ing lin - ger - ing mal - in - ger - ing.*

The play and character of the improvisation seems to respond to the events, gathering them up and distributing them, as if by reverberation, around the sumptuous hall. Maybe, by way of reciprocation, the tender movements of the couple on the sofa are playing to specific moments in the music. I continue to stare, waiting for further moments of intimacy, but nothing develops. Their mutual passion for each other is urgent, but they are reluctant for progression to occur in such a public arena.

Suddenly the man stands up, walks across the lounge and disappears. The disruption that this causes to my concentration is considerable. I look at my empty glass and bite my nails.

When the man returns, I make a plea for tacit caresses, but the woman turns her head and looks at me. I look away, briefly. I must pretend that my gaze is not permanently fixed upon them, but I also entreat them not to make their moves during one of these moments. They talk to each other and laugh, but with each successive advance they continually retreat from developing their passionate ritual. Maybe the activity is too painful to continue. I wonder what is in the background of their lives, what brings them together here and what causes them to romance in public when the frustrations are so apparent. My needs make me too eager for some form of expression from them. I turn away from them and leave them in peace. I am not drawn to sensual agitation and my sympathetic heart beseeches Eros to deal with whatever it is that denies them their opportunity for pleasure in private. They continue to talk, laugh and drink, enjoying each other's company without any further signs of passionate ambition. I think about stolen kisses, unexpected contacts and bodies that touch lightly in passing. The illicit seconds are the ones that best suit the sharp eye and feed the imagination. I think about bodies quietly grazing on one another and try to remember whether I have actually witnessed anything that comes close to the scenes that figure so strongly in my imagination. I haven't, but this does not reduce my anticipation.

*And I feel so gay
In a mel-an-cho-ly way
That it might as well be spring.
It might as well be spring!*

As the tune ends, there is a modest round of applause. This is normal. After a few more numbers the clapping will probably die down to a barely audible patter. There may, of course, be a fan in the audience,

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but this is unlikely. These guests have things in mind other than a need to indulge and announce their interest in jazz piano.

*The sleep-less nights The dai-ly fights
The quick to-bog-gan when you reach the heights
I miss the kis-ses and I miss the bites
I wish I were in love a-gain.*

I convince myself that people are starting to arrive, but only because one couple are greeting each other in an effusive and slightly bizarre manner. I watch the lobby attentively, as another couple, obviously old friends, move towards each other. They call each other's names and hold their arms out in front of them. The man takes the woman's hands and kisses both of them, one, two, three, four times. He holds her hands up and then they hug and kiss each other on the cheeks. Both the woman and the man have tears in their eyes. The man takes out a handkerchief and wipes the tears from the woman's cheek. They kiss again and hold each other in an embrace. I am riveted to them. They continue to hold each other for a considerable time. They separate and stand looking into each other's eyes as they hold hands together. They do not move from the spot. They start to talk and continue to gaze into each other's eyes while they exchange their memories. They are beautiful. He lifts up her left hand with his left hand, puts his right hand on her back and escorts her to a table. Without letting go of her hand, he pulls back a chair. She sits down without taking her eyes off him and he moves the chair gently into the table. He sits down opposite her and they continue talking. Now and then they give laughs of delight. I am transfixed by the performance. The couple inspire me to stay thinking about acts of greeting. In many ways, greeting is the most charming and informative of public gesture. Whether it is carried out as a delicate manoeuvre or as a robust affair attending to it is always a pleasure.

*The - rain in - Spain is - on the - plane
Or - dain and - drain ur - bane cham - pagne
Don' t - strain in - vane re - main plain - Jane
Lets - en ter - tain our - love a - gain*

My fingers follow each note that is played, but my analytical apparatus has kicked in. My mind is racing fast. I think about acts of welcome and leave-taking. I think about opening and closing relationships. I think about elaborate forms of contact and the limitless range of 'hello' gestures that are waiting to be played out. I think about the extraordinary exactitude of these ritualised actions and how they service specific requirements. I want to know what the range of such formal practices are and to what extent they can determine how an evening might be navigated. In some instances certain activities would have to unfold gradually as the evening progresses if desires are to be successfully introduced and brought to a satisfactory resolution. Given my automatic inclination to systematise everything, my memory bank soon responds to this stimulus with typological endeavour. More than anything, I want to describe the family of activities that relate to these acts of greeting and leave-taking and I respond by taking out a pen and a note pad from my pocket. It is an automatic impulse. I think about the differences and similarities shared by actions of greeting. I start with the kissing of cheeks and draw a diagram. I divide the action of saying hello into various contact types. There is the one- two- three and sometimes four-kiss welcome. Each of these varies between the kiss that has no contact and the full contact variety. Because a loud full smacking sound often accompanies the latter, I add notation marks for noises to signify the fact. Then I think about the position and movement of the hands. I love the hands. It is the hands that betray the fact that delicate manoeuvres are at work. Their position and the quality of their contact reveal the full intention of the participants. The face and the eyes verify the success of any action, as they register the amount of pleasure received, but it is the privilege of hands to instigate action.

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The adventures of the fingers are the avant-garde of the desire for contact, for these sensuous implements, full of ambition and artifice, know best how to dance and explore.

*But I would ra-ther be, punch drunk.
Be-lieve me sir I much pre-fer
The clas-sic bat-tle of a him and her
I don't like quiet and I wish I were in love a-gain.*

A gentle patter of hands can be heard in response to the music. I am pleased that audience eyes are not directed at me. Without further visual impetus from the floor of the lounge, I continue to write and draw. I am completely immersed in my world of distracted visions. The pianist continues to play.

*I'm wild a-gain,
Be-guiled a-gain,
A sim-pe-ring, whim-pe-ring child a-gain,
Be-witched, bo-thered and be-wil-dered am I.*

I am eager to annotate the various positions of the hands in their hello/goodbye rituals. I am aware that my ability to fill up endless pages of scribbles as I wait for something to happen is preferable to thinking directly about my current dilemmas. I start by drawing a grid and decide what my co-ordinates will be. I have different columns for the public and private events, the overt and tacit movements and the single and the double-handed gestures. I draw a figure to accompany my chart so that I can take into account the positions on the body where contact is made. I then draw a profile view and a rear view of the upper body. It occurs to me that it is the side or the back of another body that is the most common contact location for the hand. I start with the side of the body and, taking my cue from the co-ordinate headings, I write out a heading on a new page.

'Overt, public, double-handed hello/goodbye contacts with the sides of another body'.

I want to determine a specific set of locations that will provide a notation for the full range of activities that this title suggests. I start to do a quick assessment of the potential by writing on the drawing showing the side view of the body. I decide on two things. Firstly, that the upper arms are the central position and secondly, that the further away the hands are from this position the more dynamic the contact becomes. I number the notation marks. I make the highest contact location the cheeks, followed by the neck, the upper arms and the hands. The line then moves down to the waist and finally descends on the hips. The thighs are not a position for the overt range type. I consider that while both hands on the upper arms is the most common and least expressive of the gestures, it should not be ignored altogether. The effectiveness of any gesture can be varied by the amount of movement in the action, by its intensity and by its duration. It should be possible to enable even this, the most obvious of forms, to figure as something special. A firm squeeze and a gentle kiss can, after all, give an unmistakable message. I add drawings of large and small hands and large and small lips against each location to denote this.

*En-riched, coif-fured and man-i-cured
She itched, de-ferred and then en-dured.
I switched, con-jured, then un-ob-served,
She pitched and cured the un-de-tered*

The wandering musical inclinations flowing from the piano continues to fill the lounge. I attend to the notes as they soar above and around the underlying tune. That this tune can somehow remain intact, despite the extent of its manipulation, is both a mystery and a pleasure for me. There is magic here, but without further thought I write a new heading on another page.

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'Overt, public double-handed hello/goodbye contacts with the rear of another body'.

This category follows a similar pattern of positioning to that of the sides of the body. Contacts with the upper back are the most common and the hands can, depending on how they perform, carry out a large number of activities. I write the words embrace, hug, cuddle, pet, stroke, rub and caress on the drawing of the back. Any form of contact made further down the rear of the body would enter the realms of the tacit gesture rather than the overt, so I leave my meditations here. The tacit mode requires another system of categorisation altogether and I am inclined to have another drink before I think about it further. With the thought of more wine I sense my task for this evening looming large once again. I return to musing about tacit contact modes. I must hold back from making another trip to the bar so soon. I determine that the tacit mode is made up almost entirely of single-handed gestures. If both hands are involved, the participants have to face each other and a tacit gesture is too difficult to achieve in this position. I draw out the bodies again and think about the single-handed positions. The most significant attribute of the tacit mode is that it is difficult to observe, mainly because it relies on lightning speed for its effect. Contact must be achieved either by its speed of delivery or, if the contact is slow, by the cleverness of the participants. Either way, I have no idea how to notate the gestures on my drawings of bodies. A single quick squeeze of the hand on any part of the body has great effectiveness, so the ambition for a notation is probably misplaced. I do not know how to proceed and I realise that my game has ended. The quick hand-to-hand squeeze defies notation and yet it is probably the most frequently used gesture in the tacit mode. Simple, effective and full of charm, it is the most pleasantly reciprocal way of saying 'hello, I love you', that any couple can carry out. I stop writing and again let my fingers move with the music.

*I'll sing to him,
Each spring to him,
And long for the day when I'll cling to him,
Be-witched, bo-thered and be-wil-dered am I.*

How extraordinary it is that fingers are capable of moving with one's feelings, as if enjoying an intelligence all of their own. I love it that they mould desires and express sensuality with such abundant ease. The feelings in my fingers are not hidden or burdened by the negativity and reluctance that dominates my head.

*I won't dance, don't ask me,
I won't dance, don't ask me,
I won't dance, mon-sieur with you,
My heart won't let my feet do things they should do.*

I think about greeting Sophie at the door. I suggest to myself that we could employ a similar sequence of moves to those used by the old couple when they greeted each other, but then I reject the idea. We are new lovers not old friends and we could not replicate this event. As the thought fades, I wonder whether the single-handed version of the hand-kissing ritual could work. It is altogether too formal, but the eloquent gestures of a woman and a man offering and receiving their hands gives me nothing but pleasure. The man lifting the woman's hand and placing it on his lip speaks entirely of his dedication to her, of his love and his promise to honour her. Such an act would, in spirit, correspond to what I have to achieve, but it is completely out of keeping with the narrative. We are not this type of couple and we do not live in times when such a greeting would mean the same. Despite the obvious objections, I dare myself to do it and the idea brings a smile to my face. I want to be the one who determines what happens and I sense that in this way I could melt some of the resentment that I feel towards Sophie. I have done everything that I could possibly do

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for her without receiving any form of recognition in return. I helped her at every step that we took together and with deliberate abandon I showered her with love. She has been the centre of my attention and the focus of my world. I have performed every bit as if I loved her, as if I adored her even. That I made her feel beautiful is beyond doubt and yet her reaction has been to presume that these gestures are to be expected and nothing out of the ordinary. I danced to her tune like an obedient servant, but this position has now started to frustrate me, or worse, for in reality it has started to drive me slightly mad. She didn't even notice that I was doing anything, let alone how much I was doing. The arrogance appals me.

Do - a - dance dis - so - nance res - o - nance con - so - nance
Vi - gi - lance pe - tu - lance sus - te - nance main - te - nance
Coun - te - nance ra - di - ance el - e - gance ar - ro - gance
Do - a - dance take a chance look as - kance just a glance

It is now beyond my resources to give Sophie anything more. I want something in return, some encouragement at least. I want to feel special. I try to remember what I might have received from her, but I can think of nothing. She is so full of her own needs that other lives are seen only in relation to hers. I wonder what she thinks would happen to her if she afforded others the opportunity to think that they might be as real as she thinks herself to be. She trusts no one. I admit to needing attention myself, but no more than any other actor. Whatever my contribution to this situation might be, I now resolve to stop engaging with the charade from this moment on. I feel my blood beginning to boil. I am about to register my exact feelings for Sophie and the exact cause of my grumpiness. I sit up straight and take a few deep breaths. Realising the extent of my feelings towards Sophie is not going to make me any better placed to perform with her this evening.

To be filled with reluctance at this stage in the proceedings is deeply ironic. We have practically completed the filming of our intimate times

together. We have finished all the later scenes when our love matured and we became accustomed to each other's company. The exterior location work and all the studio scenes were shot during the summer. Now we are filming the internal location scenes, including the days when we first met. I am never going to make my body look like it is driven by an uncontrollable attraction towards her now. How I wish that we could have filmed it chronologically. How can she imagine that her behaviour will not produce feelings of anger and frustration? How can I greet her at the door now with a loving kiss? It will kill me to sit with her at the table, talking of my overwhelming attraction towards her.

*I won't dance, why should I?
I won't dance, how could I?
I won't dance, mer-ci beau-coup,
I know that mu-sic leads the way to ro-mance,
And if I hold you in my arms, I wont dance.*

I start to clap very loudly and then get worried that everyone is looking at me. I am looking at the pianist. He nods his head in recognition of my appreciation of his playing and begins again.

*S'won - de r - ful, s'mar - vel - lous,
you should care for me,
S'aw - ful nice, pa - ra - dise,
s'what I love to see.*

I get up from the table to buy another drink. Once at the bar, I decide to stay there. I can see some of the technicians moving around the hall, talking about where they will run wires or position this or that. When most of the guests are fast asleep we will be filming here, pretending that the place is in full swing and pretending that Sophie and I are in love. I take a gulp from my glass of wine and look at a couple that are

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sitting quietly holding hands at a table near by. They are looking at each other's hands as if they are making a study of them.

The man has the back of his right hand against the table and the woman has her left hand over the top of his...

His thumb is moving gently up and down, stroking the back of her hand...

His fingers are moving under her hand, caressing her palm...

Her fingers dance slowly over his palm as delicately as a spider spinning its web...

My eyes are fixed upon them as they slowly intertwine their fingers in, out and around each other...

Their hands twist this way and that, continuously, until there is not one part of each hand that has not received some affectionate contact...

The hairs on my neck tingle, just as their hands must be tingling with the charge that lies between them...

He supports her fingers with his right hand and slowly travels his left middle finger over the back of her hand...

He is stroking the soft terrain created by the lines of her veins...

Three, four, maybe five minutes pass by without the action ceasing or their passion for contact waning. This sensuous loving receives every bit of their shared attention and the energy that passes between them is almost palpable...

He twists his fingers over her hand and caresses her skin with his thumb...

She turns her hand and plays with his fingers...

The contact is so gentle that she appears to be playing in the air that surrounds his fingers rather than with the fingers themselves...

The movement of her fingers continues over his upturned palm and over the hairs of his lower arm, barely, if ever, touching them...

The little sensitised hands dance together, tenderly twisting and darting about...

The fingers touch as they brush past each other on their orbit...

This accidental touch occurs so fleetingly that contact could only be measured in mille seconds...

Gradually, their gestures slow down and soon any form of movement becomes imperceptible. The vitality of their actions remains as intense as before and the fingers could almost be conversing with each other as they hover above the table...

You've made my life so glam-our-ous,
You can't blame me for feel-ing am-or-ous,
S'won - der - ful, s'mar - vel - lous,
that you should care for me.

I can hear the text that I must deliver this evening going through my head. I begin to say it to myself as I watch them. I do not take my eyes off their hands for one moment. I am filled with admiration for them. I take in their pleasure like an infusion and breathe in the strength and the support that they are giving each other. It makes me sad to think that I may never love like this. I have become completely still, mesmerised by their caresses and seduced by their empathy.

He places his middle finger under her fingers and delicately lifts them to his lips, placing a gentle kiss upon them...

Their eyes meet and they smile at each other...

I put my glass down and walk away from them. I want to make a love like theirs. I want to know what their fingers and hands feel. I want to know what it might do to the rest of me. I wonder if I can mimic their gestures, assume their romance and feel their love while I hold Sophie's hand. My need to try this out is greater than the anger that I feel towards her. I bless the couple for their delightful performance. I would never have got these feelings without them. I know that I will never sense what these lovers experience, but I know that this sequence of actions will make something marvellous out of tonight's scenes. I walk out of the hotel and secretly blow them a kiss of thanks. I have to take a walk in the evening air.

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This was the extent of my preparations for the evening's performance. I remember walking about for a long while, breathing in the beautiful gestures bequeathed to me by the two lovers. When I eventually returned to the hotel I was late for the pre-shoot meeting. All the other actors and film crew had already gathered together. They were talking about Sophie's arrival at the hotel. Without waiting to pick up the thread of the conversation I launched straight in with the suggestion that I take Sophie's hand and kiss it. This was met with silence and some uncomfortable shuffling. I felt that everyone was looking at me in a slightly bemused way. A faltering discussion followed, in which the director expressed a number of doubts and made a few further suggestions. It was obvious that nobody had a clear idea about how we should perform at the door. Sophie only had one idea, but she continually returned to it. She wanted to run in and throw her arms around me in a girlish kind of way. I was eager to progress to the discussion about our activity at the table, so I agreed with Sophie. I even attempted to sweeten her mood by saying that her idea would relate to the dynamics of our relationship much better than the other suggestions.

When we had agreed on this as the strategy the discussion began to focus on where we would stand and where the camera and lighting positions would be. Most of the technicians left us after this to begin the set up. I immediately launched the discussion in the direction of our scene at the table. I could feel my hands tingling. I introduced the idea about the two of us holding hands by taking Sophie's hand and giving a demonstration of how the action might proceed. Her eyebrows furrowed and her hand was like a piece of clay. The atmosphere was very tense and the discussion did not develop. It was time for make up. I continued to dream of the couple as my face received a youthful glow and as soon as I was in costume my hands started to dance rhythmically. It took hours to set up and shoot the entrance scene. We did thirteen takes.

When it was time to do the table scene, the director presented us with

a new set of ideas. Sophie crossed her arms and started to puff loudly. When he had finished his enthusiastic description of the clever camera angles she simply said that she would not do it. She then explained to us how she saw the scene. Both she and the director were in serious conflict with each other and both had a view of the scene that was very different to mine. The two of them started such a battle over it that there was no room for me to join in. It was as if I had expressed no interest in how it should proceed at all. I sat and watched them in bemused silence, still wrapped in the great calm engendered by the romantic couple playing with their hands. The director insisted that we carry out the scene in the way that he had envisioned it, claiming that he had made his views perfectly clear from the beginning. Sophie was livid. She said that a camera swirling around us while we sat at the table would ruin the film. She threatened to walk off the set. I tried to reason with her and took her hand once again. I have no idea where my reasonableness came from, but it was not useful in this instance. Sophie turned on me. She said that she was completely unimpressed with my contribution and with my carefree attitude. She claimed that she did not understand what all the weird stuff about holding hands was about and that she was fed up with having to initiate all the moves. She insisted that without her everything would have fallen apart months ago. She even stated that she alone had engineered how to portray the loving relationship that was supposed to exist between us and that she had done this without any encouragement or support from me. I stared at her. I was dumbfounded. Then, for some reason, I smiled at her. I may even have given a little laugh. In any event, she slapped me across the cheek and walked out of the hotel.

Eventually we shot the scene at the table. It was much shorter than planned and more basic than anyone had envisaged. We delivered our words to each other as if we were in an office meeting and the director seemed not to have any energy left to be critical about it. When the film was being edited we were asked to return to the studio to re-record our words at the table. Sophie and I did this with great tenderness

Preparation

in our voices and eyes that never looked at each other. We were told that in the final cut our dialogue would be played over a still image of us sitting at the table in the hotel. When I went to the preview, I was surprised that we did not look as if we hated each other. The film was finally released a few months later and it did not appear to suffer on account of the judicious editing that resulted in the frozen image of us on the screen. Some critics even commented positively on the tableau, claiming that time had stood still for the lovers who were wrapped up inside their own universe.

The image of Sophie and I at the table is on the screen for over a minute. This is long enough to get to know the scene rather well. On the first viewing I noticed something that pleased me greatly. I got myself a photograph of this frozen scene and studied it carefully. The bar where I sat drinking that night before the shoot is clearly visible behind the table where Sophie and I were sitting. We are slightly to the left of the image and the barman is just to the right of us. A waitress is standing at the bar immediately to the right of the barman. I recognised this couple and because she appeared to be putting something into the barman's hand, I wanted to take a closer look at them. I had this section of the photograph enlarged. Their performance, even as a static image, has an amazing gracefulness about it. Their eyes are fixed upon their hands. As far as I can make out, the middle finger of his left hand extends upwards into the palm of her right hand and her middle finger dips down into the palm of his hand. Their mouths are open and their faces are smiling.

Availability

I was already swimming in a different atmosphere, so I was not surprised when the sound of his voice disintegrated into a disturbed mumble. I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference, but the truth was, I did not want to hear any more until I had time to assimilate what he had to say. I had gathered the reason for the telephone call almost immediately and I could not think about what it would mean for me. I felt warm, bemused and detached. I could hear the blood coursing through my temples, but I could not hear anything else. Then a part of me just left my body behind and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still sitting in the same place, because I was holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to the shock by escaping. I could see myself from a considerable height sitting quietly at the table, surrounded by the debris of my world. Then, in no time at all, I was back on my seat. I sat very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their energy as they took in water through their roots and delivered it up through the stem. I was surprised that the sound they made reminded me of a power station.

I knew that I had not defied the laws of gravity, but experiencing myself up by the ceiling bothered me. I was uncertain about the veracity of these events and my world became vague and confused. It is possible that I had left my wits up there somewhere, suspended in air. Not having done this kind of thing before, and not being inclined to believe others when they tell of such stories, I was reluctant to trust

my memory. I certainly experienced a dislocation in the essential synchronicity of my time and space perceptions, but I have no idea how I could see myself from the ceiling. I stayed with my stillness for a while and tried to consider what possible alternative explanations there might be for these extraordinary minutes or seconds in my life. Nothing that I came up with could account for them. Wherever my wits were at this point, they were not coming back to me in a hurry.

My first attempt at an explanation was that I had fainted, but this did not equate with the lucidity that I felt while flying around. The impression I had was that I carried out this action deliberately and that I was fully sentient of everything around me when it was happening. I considered the possibility that my memory told me that the event took much longer than it actually did. On the basis of this thought, I tried to argue that I had become delirious, leaped into the air and believed myself to be off the ground long enough to think myself on the ceiling. This did not ring true either, for I know that I made my move off the floor slowly and sedately. It may not have been for more than a few seconds, but I could definitely see the kitchen in such a way and from such a position that it could only be achieved by hovering near the ceiling. I had, after all, watched myself sitting at the table.

It took me a while to calm down after this event, not least because I was to be treated to further unexpected experiences in my post-flying world. My life became incredibly consequential and rather bewildering. Despite my continuing scepticism and lack of understanding, I eventually decided to come to terms with floating up to the ceiling without knowing anything specific about it. I now enjoy the idea of it and talk about it to my friends as a thrilling experience. Letting go of one's self to this extent is fairly unusual.

At the time, I was too embarrassed to begin asking anyone questions about what I may have done in the kitchen, so I tried to identify what the possible causes might be for this experience. On the basis that it was the phone call that had triggered my flight, there was only one possible explanation, but I could not imagine how the subject of the

call, or the events that preceded it, could have affected me in such a way. They were dramatic, without a doubt, but they were also rather ordinary. Given the way that I am and the age in which I live, the feelings should not have produced anything as dynamic as leaving my body. I did experience a very high level of stimulation and this, coupled with my overcharged reactions, could certainly have contributed to the possibility of this excursion. It is true that the events themselves were made more extraordinary by a surprising coincidence, but I still found a recognisable explanation difficult to come by.

The most likely impetus for this extraordinary act of flying was my considerable attraction to a beautiful woman. The moment I saw her, I was magnetised to her. How this vivacious actress had such a powerful affect upon me I do not know, but my attraction to her increased with every stumbling step that I took on my ridiculous advance along the road that ended in the phone call. I saw her for the first time in a television play and I regarded her with some interest. She then appeared in a television series that I watched avidly. Everyone commented on how beautiful she looked. After this, some two years ago, I saw her performing in a play. From the moment that she stepped onto the stage, I was smitten. I could not take my eyes off her. I followed her every move and delighted in the sensuality of her movements. Every nerve in my body reacted to her. They reacted to her bright voice and open face with the dazzling eyes. They reacted to her graceful neck and swan-like shoulders. They reacted to her perfectly shaped, slender body and they reacted to everything about her performance.

In the play, she is sent to the Middle East, disguised as a resident, to learn certain information. At the end of the play, her political employers, being overwhelmed by the gossip and intrigue that they have set in motion, decide that she knows too much. They do not want her to return home so they poison her. These events upset me and I wanted to save her. The words, "I am dying Egypt, dying", were on my lips as she entered her final moments. At the end of the play my passion for her had grown far beyond the common attraction that a

beautiful actress may expect to summon from her audience. I had lost myself totally in her. I was not prepared for these reactions

After the performance I felt shocked and even guilty about my yearnings for her and I tried, just a little, to shrug them off. I awoke early the following morning knowing that I had been dreaming about her. It was not long before the desire to see her again in the play became irresistible. I went a second time and a third time. On this last visit I went backstage to meet the actors. As she was leaving, I managed to follow her out of the building. I delighted in her extraordinary grace and charming lightness of step. She stopped outside to sign autographs and I stopped in the doorway to look at her, astonished by her beauty. To me she was as lovely as a flower, as any picture that moves the heart.

I had no idea what was happening to me and I should have known better. I know that I am an impossible romantic, but I am not entirely green about matters of the heart. I have tasted most of the things that were available to my generation and practically everything that is said about sexual exploits on film locations is true. I have been a successful actor for nearly twenty years and an unsuccessful one for nearly that long. I have a fairly well-developed emotional apparatus and I am generally not obsessive about people, although I am oversensitive about myself. At this stage in my life I do not feel nervous about expressing my attraction to someone and I was under no illusions that this young woman might find me attractive. I have a reasonable aptitude for self-discipline and I have survived this far without involving myself in scandals, although I will admit to a few noisy episodes of recrimination. I have no idea why I could not regard my feelings for her as a harmless infatuation that would eventually go away, or why I felt that I should not be thinking about her at all. Everything about her felt serious and purposeful to me.

Shortly after the play had closed a Sunday magazine ran a four-page interview with her. The occasion that prompted this was the release of a

film that she was appearing in. Glamorous and knowingly provocative full-page photographs of her were presented with the text. I looked at them and froze. I said to myself that she was beautiful and then I told her, or rather I told the pictures of her, that she was beautiful. Before long I was talking to her on a regular basis. The images hypnotised me and I convinced myself that her generous smile was directed at me. I also played with her eyes. No matter how I viewed them, her clear and lovely eyes would stare into mine. It is a simple trick. I even said "thank you" to the pictures. I knew that this was ridiculous behaviour and I feel silly telling you about it, but her overwhelming sweetness captivated me.

I went to see her film at the first possible opportunity and went again for a second visit. The film, being serious and rather well done, had a calming effect upon me. She was not the main focus of attention and she had no need for a knight in shining armour to rescue her this time. Of course, I fantasised about saving her anyway. After this I went to Spain to do some film work. While I was away, I missed a few episodes of her second TV series and I was relieved to find that I did not feel any great remorse about this, although this did not stop me getting copies of them on video.

Shortly after my return, I went to an opening party for the first production of *Plain Tales*. I agreed to meet up with George, my agent, and, after the performance, we enjoyed a few drinks at the bar before going backstage to the reception. I walked in and there she was. I was both elated and dumbfounded. She was so completely charming and worthy of desire, so full of brilliance and beauty that I was immediately dazzled and full of worship for her. I became agitated and my feelings were so contradictory and painful that I did not think myself capable of containing them. I tried to compose my features to prevent others, and particularly George, from becoming suspicious about the way I was behaving. I felt an urgent need to put my mind at ease, to prepare myself to meet her, knowing what kind of ordeal it would turn out

to be if I did it badly. I could not get past my turmoil and my gentle resolutions to behave sensibly were no match for the wild passion that she evoked in me.

I held onto George, entertained him desperately with funny stories and encouraged him to keep drinking with me. I always kept half an eye on my beautiful friend and after a little more alcohol and laughter, I gathered up the courage to go and talk to her. After our introductions, I told her that I loved the play and the TV series that she was in, that her performance in the film was riveting and that her interview in the Sunday magazine was wonderful. I asked her if I had missed anything that she had done that I should see. She declined to answer the question and mentioned a few things that she had seen me perform in. She then asked George if he knew some agent or other and they talked agents while I stared.

While looking at her, I attempted to put my empty glass down on the table next to me. I misjudged the distance and the glass dropped to the floor. I started berating the table for moving around and told it that it could not be invited to nice parties if it could not remain still. Everyone seemed to be entertained by this so I kept going. I then told the waiter, who came to clear up, that he should audition the tables before he hired them or he could not guarantee that they would behave properly. I followed this with a routine in which I auditioned the tables for a part in a hotel dining-room scene and had everyone in stitches. It was not long before I was playing the waiter who was trying to cope with these errant tables that moved around the dining-room. I was glad when the real waiter approached with a tray of glasses, for I managed to use him as a ready-made cue to finish my antics. I helped myself to a glass of wine, lifted it up to the audience, thanked them for their attention and gave a bow. There was some applause and a group of people gathered around me, as one does after a performance. It was with some remorse that I realised that I had made myself the centre of attention and that it was not going to be easy getting back into a conversation with my beautiful friend. George gave my actress his

card and then said goodbye to her. I gave her a wave. I did not know what else to do.

I watched her TV series on video a few times and I thought about her often, but very little happened. I told myself to stop thinking of her. It must have been four or five months later when I saw her again. I had arrived at a party with an old friend. We had been drinking. When my beautiful friend arrived unexpectedly, the very sight of her lifted my spirits, though at the time they hardly needed lifting any further. A male friend, probably her partner, accompanied her, so I practised the art of not thinking about him at all. She looked as vivacious as ever and I swear that whenever she walks into a room the atmosphere changes completely. It is not just my reaction, it can't be. I am sure that everyone realigns their thoughts and sensibilities when they see her. I could sense it and I could also sense that there was something going on between her and her boyfriend that wasn't quite settled. We had gathered in the garden when her male friend left abruptly and marched into the house. She followed him. The hostess went to join them and then returned saying that he was going home and my beautiful friend was furious with him. He left and she came back into the garden. If she was in a furious mood she did not make it appear obvious.

Everyone tried to ignore the situation and remain exceedingly cheerful. I felt disabled by my sensitivity towards her. She coped with the situation extremely well, projecting an air of decorum and intelligence, with just the right amount of flirtatiousness to make desire for contact with her almost inevitable. It pleased me no end to see her wonderful smile in response to some crack that I made and I felt that she came close to me on purpose. During the conversation she touched my arm and I had a compelling urge to tell her that I loved her. I managed to resist doing this, but I did not resist enjoying the desire that I felt for her beautiful body. At one point, I leaned so close to her that my stability abandoned me and I had to grab hold of my friend to stop myself falling to the ground. In an attempt to cover up

my drunkenness, I started to act the drunk and repeated the action of falling against her a second time. I did it with as much humour as I could muster. Before I could do it a third time, she gave me a hearty slap on the shoulder and pushed me away. She was laughing. I am sure that she realised what was going on. It was probably apparent to everyone at the party what was going on. I was truly crazy for her and thoroughly extravagant with my craziness.

A month or so later I heard that my lovely actress was going to pull out of the next TV series and that she had been offered a major role in a Broadway hit that was to open in the West End. I had read about the play and the reviews were good. It concerns two people who succeed in keeping their devotion to each other alive, despite a set of conditions that make it almost impossible. I was excited for her and, of course, I immediately saw myself playing the partnering role. I did not do this with any seriousness, because I am completely the wrong kind of character for this type of role. My film persona is altogether too extrovert and boisterous and my stage persona is non-existent. But this did not stop me fantasising about it.

When George phoned a few days later to say that he was sending me the script I was extremely agitated. He said that the producers were interested to know what I thought about it. Nothing more. I asked him why they should ask for my opinion and he told me to read it and offer my opinion. I became a bit hysterical and asked George if this was a euphemism for something that I should know about. He questioned my attitude and my behaviour, which left me feeling a little shocked. I then made an attempt to throw him, and also myself, off the scent of my true feelings by presenting him with a string of contradictory reactions that must have been entirely incomprehensible. George reacted to this by practising one of his rare silences on me. I was so confused by this strange development, this incredible stroke of destiny, coming at me as if it had arrived in a dream, that uncertainty about myself was all that I had left. I asked him to send the script by courier. For a few

hours after this I was light-headed and I noticed that I was doing one thing while thinking that I was doing another.

George phoned again a few days later to tell me that they were indeed considering me as the partner to my beautiful friend. He said that they would not be doing auditions because they had already established a shortlist of actors that they were interested in. Currently, there were conflicting opinions about who should do it and they wanted to know if I would accept the role if it was offered to me. Well, I said "yes". It was impossible for me to refuse this opportunity to be with my actress, but the idea that I would be given this role still struck me as unreal. It was too far from the probable. At the same time, in my usual contradictory manner, I fantasised that my beautiful friend had requested that I be offered the role. I tried to talk to George about it, but he knew nothing about who favoured whom.

During the days following I cannot remember doing anything except reading the script. It is a serious story that continually interweaves the various stages of the two lives as they deal with the conflicts that beset their love for each other. The characters are rigorous about their formal relationship and they are confident about their shared devotion. He is a charming, quiet, well-organised character. She is deeply focused and has a belief in herself that can stand up to anything. These are the keys to their survival. The play starts with a kiss, moves backwards and forwards towards the kiss and then forwards and backwards again to the same kiss at the end. The realisation that kissing played such a formative part in the play added further to my incomprehension. I found it strange that the kiss was so crucial to the play's structure, when kissing is never a thing that works well on the stage. It is too difficult a thing to succeed at, night after night. Repetition weakens it. Even in real life it belongs, in its best moments, at the beginning of a relationship. In the movies repetition is an issue for the editing suite. With the right camera angles and judicious cutting a success can be made of it, but in the theatre everyone tries to avoid it. No one is entertained by watching lovers kiss in public, in any shape or form. It

just doesn't work as a live event. It is too closed and exclusive. I then began to fear that this part would wear out my desire to kiss her. I asked myself if I could I imagine kissing her three times every night of the week and six times on Saturdays. I could, of course, think of nothing better and yet something in me also said that I couldn't. I was unsure about being able to convert my fantasy into a stage reality, when I had such real desire for her.

I never react to this kind of 'on/off' situation very well and this little set of surprises prompted me to start doing my breathing exercises again. I went to see my doctor who said that I was probably suffering from nervous exhaustion and suggested that I take a holiday. I told myself that I was a professional actor with years of experience behind me, and that this is what I was best at. No matter how hard I tried, it was obvious to me that the prospects of playing this part made me lose all sense of proportion. It was at this point in my history that George rang to tell me that they had decided to give me the part.

I was already swimming in a different atmosphere, so I was not surprised when the sound of his voice disintegrated into a disturbed mumble. I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference, but the truth was, I did not want to hear any more until I had time to assimilate what he had to say. I had gathered the reason for the telephone call almost immediately and I could not think about what it would mean for me. I felt warm, bemused and detached. I could hear the blood coursing through my temples, but I could not hear anything else. Then a part of me just left my body behind and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still sitting in the same place, because I was holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to the shock by escaping. I could see myself from a considerable height sitting quietly at the table, surrounded by the debris of my world. Then, in no time at all, I was back on my seat. I sat very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their

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I sat fairly still for the remainder of the day. I wanted no more excitement and surprises. I went to bed exhausted and fell asleep. The following morning I began by taking things very slowly. The script of the play was lying on the kitchen table and I picked it up, hugged

it and gave it a kiss. I then began to amble around the house looking for something without knowing what exactly. I started going through the many hundreds of books in my shelves, which is a way that I have of feeling safe. It is a ritualised and obsessive act, something that I do automatically, so that the hours can go by unheeded and unchallenged. I was waiting to confirm to myself that my feet were back on the ground. When I felt restored enough, I gave George a ring to confirm yesterday's telephone conversation. He verified what I had understood and said that either I had been struck dumb or that I was completely drunk. I certainly don't remember talking to him. I laughed nervously and then said that someone was knocking at the door. I put the phone down, claiming that I had to answer it. His confirmation that I was going to play the part gave me a renewed sense of surprise. I had difficulty in keeping my face straight for I was covered in smiles. As before, however, my mirth was quickly accompanied by disquiet. I was uneasy about what to do next and I wanted my wits back so that I could decide something.

I returned to my books, looking for information that might inspire me, but nothing happened. I went out for a walk and thought about every kiss that had ever been performed. I could only think about kissing. I had lunch and thought about kissing. I had tea and thought about kissing some more. When the notion struck me that I should begin to think about the formal, confident character that is the subject of the play, I felt myself to be so far away from everything that I became uncertain about my ability to return. I knew that if I was so completely out of touch with myself, so lacking in perception, then I could not even have ideas about how to begin. I also knew that there was a significant difference between acting in love and being in love and that the kind of intentionality that I had developed was entirely inappropriate to the role that I had to play. I needed some playful detachment in my life to detract me from the heavy, clogged-up conditions that I had made for myself. I could not think about this man in the play any more than I

could think about her partner at the party. With the exception of my beautiful friend, everything was foreign material to me. I knew that I had to change my intentionality towards her, but I wasn't sure that I was prepared to do this. I enjoyed being the man filled with desire for her too much to exchange it for a man who is expected to adopt a professional responsibility towards her. I just wanted to kiss her.

The following day I promised myself that I would talk to her. I wanted us to meet before the formal rehearsals began. I felt that I should phone her before she phoned me, but I was not ready to do it yet. I felt emptied out, as if a fire had burned its way through me. I had to wait for some new shoots to appear before I could do anything. For another day, I continued to plod around the house looking in various bookshelves. I did find some old books on acting techniques, which I had kept since my student days and felt an eagerness to devour them, despite the fact that I had never regarded them with any interest before, even as a student. They were as useless as ever and I ceased my search. I phoned my beautiful friend and left a message to say that I was going on holiday. I said that I hoped that we could meet up upon my return. I then phoned George to tell him the same news. He was a little surprised and more than a little irritated at the number of changes that we had to make in my diary. I felt a great relief at the decision to go away.

I went to stay with friends where it was hot. I ate and drank a little, talked and slept rather more and walked and swam a lot. The beach really agreed with me. I had studied drama with these friends, so we could talk. I did not involve them in my fantasy, as it was still too difficult for me to talk about it. After a week my world began to get lighter. One evening we talked of our years as students. We remembered a particular teacher we had worked with. He ran a series of workshops in which we practised getting into character and improvisation techniques. He taught us ways to remain focused when mistakes, or the unexpected, occurred. He was amazingly good at

stimulating us to read and feed off each other. I enjoyed the sessions enormously, mostly because I had a talent for empathy and sensing what was going on.

At the beginning of each session we did 'warm up' exercises which he referred to as 'tuning our availability'. We practised being receptive, or 'available' in his terms, to the performance context. We listened to each other in a very particular way and we all felt that we were working as a single body. It was exciting and we all felt buoyant and charged up during the classes. At the end of each session we did grounding exercises. He called this 'closing down our availability'. He said that it was not a good idea to go about feeling like this all of the time. He said that it was not a good idea to go about being available all of the time. I repeated it to myself more than once. When I felt the impact of these words, I felt so moved that all I could do was walk myself along the beach for hours on end. I had to allow the notion to sink in. Remembering 'availability' made me aware of how I had lived my life so far. With great clarity, I knew what I had been up to all these years. I had relished my facility for 'availability' so much that I did not want to close it down and cease the stimulation of my sensory functions ever. All day, every day, work or play, I operated off the top of my head, dancing to every tune that was played and improvising with everything. Apart from periods of essential recuperation, I had operated this system non-stop, for years on end. I was always 'available' for something. I realised now that it was this, coupled with my excited infatuation for my beautiful friend, which created the potential for my flight to the ceiling.

The more I considered this possibility, the more relieved I was that my passion for this woman could be considered separately to my overcharged state. The notion of defining and limiting 'availability' itself was still a concept rather than a reality, but I tried to make a pact with myself to take more control over things that concerned my sensibility. The thought of squandering myself willy-nilly at every

opportunity now began to appal me. Over the next few days some new realities wove themselves into place and some modest realignments began to occur in the way I proceeded with things. I could feel my wits returning. I even sensed that I might inherit a new set of wits that were somewhat different to the ones that I had used previously.

I phoned my beautiful friend the moment I arrived home. It was delightful hearing her voice. She said that she was about to go off to a funeral, but we agreed to meet in three day's time. She wanted to drive out to the country for lunch and asked if I would mind being her passenger. Anything that she suggested would have delighted me. We agreed that she would pick me up at eleven-thirty. I kept my new resolution alive and paced myself carefully during the following days. On the morning of our lunch date my availability factor was well over a hundred per cent, but I was expecting this. It was a hot summer day. She arrived early, shortly after eleven o'clock. When I opened the door I wanted to throw myself at her, but I held myself back. Each time that I saw her she was more beautiful than I could ever have imagined. I asked if she would like some coffee before we started out and to my delight she said yes. I wanted her here with me more than anything. We sat down in the garden. I was drinking in every moment.

I asked whether the funeral had been a difficult time for her and she claimed that it was the nicest gathering she had attended for a long time. The one thing that she did find strange was the number of people who talked about the deceased person resting after an active life. She said that some of the mourners even suggested that the dead could not rest until all their worldly affairs were sorted out. She did not understand how this could be true. She liked the idea that the dead were finally free and delighted to be in a place that provided them with the opportunity to fly around wherever they wished. I was amazed by the comment and I adored watching her as she talked. She then said that she was concerned about making a will, as she had no one to leave anything to. I wanted to hold her, to hug her tight for a

fortnight. It impressed me a great deal that she was here talking about death and the people she loved, when all that I could think about was kissing her. I loved her for this.

She talked for a while and then suddenly she stopped and stood up. She apologised for talking too much, claiming that she always did this when she was nervous. When I showed surprise at her being nervous she replied that the prospect of kissing someone for the first time makes everybody nervous. I told her that I was more nervous than I had ever been in my life. Her face gave a lovely expression in recognition of my words and we began to make our way out for lunch.

She stopped when she reached the hall, and, with her back against the wall said, "Come on then, kiss me."

I moved towards her.

She lifted her hand up and I locked my hand into hers. She squeezed it in such a way that it was more like a kiss than any kiss that I can remember. I felt a surge of desire and, pushing her hand against the wall, I kissed her quickly and gently on the mouth. She lifted her other hand and I placed my free hand into it. She then pushed against this hand and pulled on the other one. She was turning me round. I gave in to her movement and found myself in her position, with my back against the wall. She delivered me a little kiss like the one I had given her. I repeated her turning action and then she did the same again to me. We smiled at each other, squeezed our hands together and parted. We were both elated and somewhat relieved at having kissed each other so nicely. She said that she knew that I would be good at it. I was speechless and probably grinning.

Being in the car with her was like being transported to a magical land. We talked about our kiss by congratulating ourselves for finding a model for it so quickly. Neither of us mentioned anything about why we did it at this time. We then adopted a professional manner with each other. We talked of the affinity that our kiss had with a dance and we appreciated the sequence of moves. It had strong formal qualities that are always useful when persistent repetition is required. We

loved the way it was completely different to the qualities that the two characters displayed in the rest of the play. It was free, spontaneous and full of celebration. She claimed to have no problems about kissing onstage, but it did depend upon whom it was that she had to kiss. I thought again about whether she had suggested me for the role. She said that kissing on stage was not as difficult as dying on stage and I agreed, despite my recent dilemmas. She did not enjoy doing her death performance because everyone focused too much attention on her. She said that it was a cold, lonely task and that she felt that she was truly punished every night.

I started to list all the examples of kissing onstage that I could think of and she enjoyed this with much laughter. I did not tell her that I had remembered and researched these as a way of helping myself survive my weightless days. She then entertained me with her reminiscences about kissing performances. Between us we had an endless supply. We hated it when a kiss occurred at the end of a scene and the lights dimmed just as the kiss started. Almost as bad were the kisses that received an impossibly long build-up of dialogue only to be finished with the briefest of resolutions. We remembered when kisses only happened offstage and we laughed ourselves silly thinking about lovers rushing onto the stage, holding hands, with inane grins covering their faces. We both agreed that it was delightful when lovers covered their heart with their hands to express their love for each other. The kiss that is delivered by blowing it off the palm of the hand was, to our minds, altogether too brief an act to warrant any notions of success. The ones that attempted to portray passion and reality and failed on both counts were the worst. Tender fleeting kisses before a departure did not count. We felt great affection for the type where the passionate partner, who can't stand the prevarication any longer, delivers her 'full-on' kiss to the stiff, shy lover who responds by standing still in a state of shock.

I could have stayed with this all day. I loved it that we were doing everything with so much humour and entertainment. I then mentioned

my preoccupation about kissing her onstage. I could feel the shift in her attention. As an excuse for my obsession on this subject, I invented an improbable story about performing a love scene in my youth that was completely catastrophic. She enjoyed the ridiculous inadequacy that I portrayed so much that I thought she was going to burst. I thought that it was not unlike my bumbling meetings with her in real life. I talked of the books that I had found on acting technique and the sections dealing with the kiss. I exaggerated their tone and made them sound so ridiculous that the material could easily have been a script for a comedy routine.

When she laughed, I could feel her delicious presence washing over me. Her proximity to me made me feel permeated by her. We were travelling together in a world of our own.

"You are beautiful," I told her and she said, "Thank you."

"I was completely ecstatic when I heard that I would perform with you."

She smiled at these words in a rather particular and delightfully self-conscious way.

"When George phoned to tell me that I had been given this role in the play, I was in such a state of euphoria, I completely lost my wits."

"Oh don't exaggerate."

"It's true," I told her. "I could not hear what he was saying for the noise of my own excitement."

"And you lost your wits?"

"I was already swimming in a different atmosphere, so I was not surprised when the sound of his voice disintegrated into a disturbed mumble. I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference, but the truth was, I did not want to hear any more until I had time to assimilate what he had to say. I had gathered the reason for the telephone call almost immediately and I could not think about what it would mean for me. I felt warm, bemused and detached. I could hear the blood coursing through my temples, but I could not hear anything else. Then a part of me just left my body

behind and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still sitting in the same place, because I was holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to the shock by escaping. I could see myself from a considerable height sitting quietly at the table, surrounded by the debris of my world. Then, in no time at all, I was back on my seat. I sat very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their energy as they took in water through their roots and delivered it up through the stem. I was surprised that the sound they made reminded me of a power station."

PART THREE

Invitation

"... Is it better if I stand like this?"

"Hmm... I need to move the light... Turn to me slightly more... that's it..." CLICK... "Lean away from the chair just a little." CLICK... "Go back to the chair if it is more comfortable..." CLICK... "Move the chair back. You are still obscuring the mirror too much..." CLICK... "That is fine, just a few more..." CLICK... "Lift your head to look at me and then drop your eyes to look at the painting..." CLICK... "Turn your body more towards me..." CLICK... CLICK... "Good, that's enough for the moment. I am going to paint while the light is good. Are you comfortable standing for a while longer?"

"Yes."

"Excellent. So let's concentrate on the quality of your presence and forget about arranging your position and the objects. Painting tends to gather up whatever is going on and now we need to focus on the quality of your gaze."

"I should like you to paint this portrait in such a way that it speaks of love."

"That's a tall order. I have never painted a portrait that speaks of anything up to now. When I indicated that something of what we do or talk about can in some manner get gathered up into a painting, I did not mean for it to sound specific. Painting has to do with feelings. Its relationship with intension is tentative. The whole is rather delicately balanced."

"Yes, of course... I understand... but some painters achieve this... I will tell you about a painting. It is very important to me... I associate it with a woman called Gina... The photograph in the picture frame

here is of Gina... From the moment I met her I have been in love with her. The painting that I am referring to is *The Music Lesson* by Vermeer. I was with Gina the first time that I saw it. It is at Buckingham Palace. Do you know it?"

"Yes. Please don't tell me that this is why you insisted upon having the mirror here... Is this why you want to reflect her in the mirror?"

"Yes, but it is not what you think."

"What is it then? I cannot consider, even for a moment, any attempt to paint like Vermeer."

"I am not asking you to do such a thing. Let me tell you about the painting and the day that I spent with Gina... We stood gazing at Vermeer's little self-contained world for a considerable time. It knows about love's pleasures and also its sorrows. I love the space that separates the tutor from his pupil. It is so highly charged and yet it is extremely calm. There is electricity between the two of them. I want something of this in my portrait. I want an association with the painting... to have some of the delicate attraction and formal distance that Vermeer sets between his characters... I want to appear to be looking at someone, someone who is close to me and yet separate. Does this make any sense?"

"It sounds complicated... You want my painting to suggest that this charged relationship exists between you and this photograph of Gina, or painting as you presume it to be...? Vermeer's dynamic relationship is between a real couple. I have no idea how he does it, how he manages to indicate that intimacies exist between, them but Vermeer can do a great number of things. I know what you are asking when you say that you want this, for Vermeer's ability to make people communicate with each other is sheer delight. He can even suggest that his lovers are just about to reveal their feelings for each other for the first time, but this kind of talent is far beyond my capabilities. I have no idea how to create these feelings between you and this painting of Gina. Why is it so important to you?"

"In my imagination the distance between the man and the woman

in the painting is huge and yet the tutor is standing close enough to touch her. He is resting his arm on the side of the virginals that she is playing. He is staring at her, entranced by her. I love this real and imagined distance between them. It seems to me that I have spent my life in this position; being so very close and yet so far removed. Is it really too much to ask? Surely you can seduce viewers into believing that I am deeply attracted to the person in this painting."

"Well, it is more complex than that. You are looking at her. She appears to be looking at the mirror which reflects her gaze, creating the illusion that she is looking out of the painting to the viewer."

"In Vermeer's painting, the woman is standing with her back to us. Her face is in the mirror that hangs above her on the wall. She is not gazing. The gesture that we see in the mirror is a furtive glance directed at her tutor. I love that move, seeing the reality of her preoccupations indirectly. It is this glance that invites me into the painting. I can spend hours moving backwards and forwards between the man and the woman and across the advances and retreats that make up their relationship."

"The gaze that you direct at the painting will have to be very special if this kind of dynamic contact is going to be effective in this painting. Perhaps this will be one of your great performances."

"Don't worry. I know how to look at Gina ... Will she be looking out of the painting from her reflection in the mirror?"

"For the moment I am concentrating on you. The position of your head is better when you look directly at me and then only your eyes should move to look at the painting. This will give it the quality of a glance."

"I am happy for it to appear that I am studying her. After Gina and I had been staring at the painting in the gallery for a while she moved away, leaving me to gaze at the Vermeer by myself. Hanging next to the painting on the wall of the Gallery is a real mirror and from my position I could see Gina reflected in it. I stared at her without her knowing that I was doing this. She always looked so beautiful.

I repeatedly switched my gaze between the mirror and the painting, taking a glimpse of her in the mirror looking at another painting and then looking back at the Vermeer. The woman in the painting is glancing at the man in the mirror in the same way that I was glancing at Gina in the mirror. The man in the painting is gazing directly at the woman and Gina is gazing at a painting on the other side of the gallery mirror. This strange collection of cross-references was rather magical. In some ways Gina and I shared a similar intimacy and distance as the couple in the painting. I was experiencing the same pleasures and sorrows as the tutor... being so close and yet so far"

"Would you lift your head again, it has dropped. Are you getting tired?"

"No, I'm fine. On the day of our visit to the Gallery, Gina was withdrawn from me. I had cajoled her on the telephone into coming into town to be with me and she was not pleased about my insistence. When we met that morning she told me that she could not possibly dedicate all her free days to being with me. I thought about her constantly and wanted to be with her everyday. Her remark made me feel that I was little more than a diversion for her. She loved it when I invited her out to join me in town, but on this occasion I had pressed her a little too hard and she felt that I was trying to own her. I was always pursuing her and generally she dealt with this in a charming manner. If we experienced stormy times it was due more to my behaviour than it was to hers. One minute I was up in heaven and the next I was down in the street. On this day I was trying everything to charm her, but she remained in a mood of withdrawal. I could never bear upsetting her, even for a second, and now our precious time together was strained. I knew that I could not press the relationship too hard or I would lose her. I had to be patient and give her time to allow the gap between us to heal. For the moment I was relieved just to be able to see her in the mirror."

"Has this tableau of the imagination stayed with you all these years?"

"Yes. It is the last time that she and I were together. After our gallery visit, I walked with her to the station and I saw her onto the train. That the discord still existed between us when we parted was very painful. On the following day I learned that she and I were never going to be together again. I imagined that the news would kill me. In the days that followed I wanted to die. Everything I had or did reminded me of her. The memory of her filled me with an ache that I had not known before. Her beauty caused my senses to soar, but it also scoured my heart, etching lines into it that I have never managed to polish smooth again. I was completely lost and full of fear when she was gone. My imagination was fixated with her the whole time. I could see her and hear her everywhere and I swam in this vivid world of memory each day until it filled me with misery. I had no idea how to live and nothing interested me enough to cause me to shift my focus away from her. Had I not demanded that she come into town everything would have been different. Eventually, exhausted by grief, I resigned myself to living my life without her, but I have never forgiven myself for what happened. I carried on, but I was changed by all of this. Since then I have never once entertained the ambition of crossing the divide that separates me from another, it is the space that separates the couple in Vermeer's painting. This divide is very important for me. In some way it defines who I am and what I regard as my opportunities"

"Oh! But this is a sad tale. Are these memories the stuff of your portrait?"

"No, but I wanted to tell you. I want the painting to know that the distance between lovers is rarely crossed, that it is only a fleeting occurrence that life treats us to. I don't even mind if there is sadness to it. We never get enough time or opportunity for love. I want that strange, intangible, big yet little space that exists between two people to be the homage of the painting. It is something precious for me."

"Did you love Gina more than you loved other women?"

"Oh yes, but then I don't know. I never had the opportunity to test my love for Gina. My love for her was cut short when I most wanted

her and this was the most difficult thing. It also occurred when I most needed someone like her in my life. I never met anyone before or since who had her sensuality and this was like a gift. She was the woman who inspired me most to feel completely myself when I was in love."

"It still concerns me that you want something as good as a Vermeer. This will never happen, no matter who paints it. You can't even create a scene that looks anything like the scheme of a Vermeer painting. Don't ask me why. Those paintings come out of a time and a place that I cannot enter. They are about everything that he is about and his invitation is tied completely to who and what he is. You can't fake this kind of thing. I have to make an invitation that reflects my own intentions."

"I am sure that you do. I am not expecting a Vermeer, I promise. You must paint the way you know how. I would like to know why he is so good at depicting the presence of love though. Can you tell me about that? I would like the painting to gather up some thoughts of this kind."

"Oh, I can't think about things like that. I cannot possibly lecture and paint at the same time."

"Then tell me instead what you mean by your 'invitation'. You said something about it reflecting your intentions."

"Did I? I can't think. You are an actor. Surely, when you perform you have some ideas about what you are inviting the audience to, don't you?"

"Of course. You have to think about the effect that you want to achieve, but my engagement with this is very abstract. It also tends to be very complicated. I am not sure that it constitutes an invitation. Perhaps it does."

"Tell me about it anyway. I will listen and think of it as your invitation."

"It's very difficult talking about these things... I like the idea of an invitation, but I can't think of a good example to kick off with..."

Invitation

it's a wonderful word to use about why a piece of art exists in the first place... it doesn't assume that one is going to say something important... I always have such convoluted ideas behind what I am doing... I am never happy unless I have a thoroughly unusual take on something... it's a kind of affliction. I am used to it, but I am sure that others find it distinctly odd."

"We could take a break for a few minutes. I need some water. You should stretch your limbs. Just move out of your position and walk around for a bit, or do whatever you do to relax your body."

"If I invite you very nicely, will you join me for supper this evening?"

"It's a day for invitations, isn't it? Let's see how the afternoon progresses. Would you like a drink?"

"Thank you."

"When you are ready, try to walk back directly into your position... Do it slowly and try to freeze in a natural position... head up, look at me... now drop your eyes... So, invite me into your thoughts about acting."

"I'll invite you to my invitation when I remember what the invitation is. Actually, I am worried that I have never offered a proper invitation before. I upset Gina with a particularly unfortunate invitation... it wasn't an invitation at all, was it...? It was a demand... I never gave the same quality of attention to my relationships that I gave to my work... It is a regrettable thing. It is as if I regarded work as complex and people as simple, rather than the other way round. Work always demands more time than people... when I think about what I am doing for the audience I do it to the point of being obsessed with it. I think about it non-stop at every possible level... When I am working on a character, I generally start with the details. I work on short sentences and small gestures... I imagine that these elements hold a secret... a secret about the character that I am dealing with... For some reason, details initiate profound thoughts in me in a way that 'big ideas' never can... I wonder if Vermeer started with the details... no, I don't think

so... he had something else in mind... I try to perform in a completely relaxed way, but this is an ambition that is never fully realised. It is something that I move towards. It inspires me. I try to ensure that the way I inhabit a space and the gestures that I make are exactly right. I want my performance to appear as an effortless enterprise. I like to think that I am so relaxed that the audience suspects that I am slightly naïve and even uncertain about what I am doing. If they feel a little edgy about my lack of drama then I am pleased. Does this sound perverse? Maybe the whole thing is an illusion, a useless piece of unrecognised artifice. Nevertheless, it is what I do. I pare everything down to its essential components and then I attempt to display this efficiency of means as a feast. I try to lull the audience into thinking that my performance is detached, so that I can connect with it in an unexpected and dramatic fashion. I want to do both things. I want to appear detached and I want to leave the audience in no doubt that I am totally in charge of my character. I have no idea why it is so important to me to employ this double tactic. This appearance of not caring, as a means of saying that I care deeply is the way young lovers behave, isn't it? It is hardly an appropriate way to seek an audience's admiration. Actually, I think that I imagine that knowledge lies in here somewhere, but I do not know what else to say about it. Would you recognise this as an invitation?"

"Yes. It's not so difficult to understand. You would have got on well with Vermeer. I doubt that I would have done so. My thinking operates in the reverse direction. I like everything to play around feelings."

"Maybe that's what he did. I also have to feel my way through these things. I don't have a set of rules, only an inclination about something, like a rather loose strategy. It is a way of acting that one can never be sure of and once it is under way it has to progress with tactics rather than strategies. A fixed strategy is like a deliberate ordering principle... it always wants to be made visible. I want to rely on what the thing looks like, nothing else. I like it best when everything proceeds with a quality that feels like an absence of acting. I like to think that the

audience are watching me carry out an everyday action, like washing the dishes, knowing that the deepest drama is unfolding before their eyes. I love that tension. I have no inclination for giving an activity a theatrical function. I even obscure or deny the potential that does exist for the dramatic occasion in order that my position is clear."

"My goodness, it is not a simple invitation, is it?"

"It sounds so wilful when I am talking about it. There must be a simpler way of talking about it. Let's say that I am in a scene where I am supposed to get angry. Instead of actually being angry I decide to stay calm and by doing this I create the impression of being indifferent. This stand-off between the opposites initiates a kind of void, a vacuum that offers a different kind of potential. I am keeping the audience back, keeping them waiting for my anger. I then attempt to fill this void by using gestures of a completely different nature to those associated with anger. This is where the detail comes in. I have to find a hand movement or a head turn that is directly pertinent to both the character and to the dramatic occasion. Everything has to be carried out within the realm of gesture and all dramatic, or in this case angry movements, have to be avoided. It might be the way that I place a cup to dry, or the way that I turn on the tap that carries the meaning. The action should not equate directly with the emotion and it should be a product of the moment. In this way I have abandoned acting and the improvised gesture bears the whole weight of dramatic development."

"Making a calm gesture when an aggressive one is expected is a difficult move to follow. You are right, it sounds paradoxical and a little perverse."

"This is not about style or being clever... I am not arguing this for its own sake... these kind of moves are a means of placing myself in a space where I have some form of independence... they are a way of avoiding the domination of conceptual continuity... you know, where one thing follows another... I have to avoid continually repeating what I already know at all costs... it is such a deadening place to be... it is unsustainable. My tricks help me to see things afresh, as if for the

first time. They help me feel free and open to possibilities... If I didn't feel this freedom I would not be inclined to play... dancing what the moment looks like keeps my wits alive... there is nothing better than exercising one's wits."

"But you are not really indifferent to cause and effect, as you suggest."

"No, I am not indifferent to it, I'm trying to ride it in the way that surfers ride a wave. Imagine that I am at a critical point, say when an angry response needs to be portrayed. First I delay the action and then I commence it using a trigger that is completely independent... something that is outside the usual apparatus of decision-making processes... For example, I might make a decision to start an action mechanically rather than conceptually... The unlikely timing is a surprise, but then a display of anger is often like this. The effect on the audience is like tasting something sharp... It can re-orientate taste buds. Often people remember these moments of pure description as being every bit as important as the governing drama... I am treating the audience to a kind of illusion, an illusion that has something to do with artifice... I suppose that is what my invitation is... I am definitely attempting to control reality rather than imitating it. What is it Wilde said? 'Nature imitates art.' "

"Things don't always turn out the way you imagine them though, do they?"

"No, it goes in every direction but straight. One needs a huge amount of self-assurance and conviction to build a whole performance around this kind of approach and you don't always feel ready for it. I am not even sure that all of this is true... it is all so many words... nothing actually happens in the way that I have been telling it... they are fictions... what I have said is what happens at the back of the mind... But if asked, it is what I imagine my invitation to be... it is surprising how many fictions one employs to keep one's life going, or one's invitations alive... I like to believe that looking in the opposite direction to the way that everyone else proceeds takes guts, but

actually it doesn't, you just have to be a little more hungry than most others... I like to imagine that by doing this I am being brave, but this is a fiction also... one simply has to be a little crazy to add uncertainty and contradiction to an already complicated set of conditions."

"It's a risky business and you shouldn't be so critical about it... for me it is fine if someone elects to inhabit a brave world and then defines the conditions that constitute that bravery. We live with too much emphasis on being critical and there is too much pressure on everyone to perform in a similar way... Being different is the most attractive thing about people... When you get close to someone it is always their uniqueness that is surprising... their difference and their separation from you are always greater than you could have imagined... even when you know someone well, the independent position is always a thing to be considered... I know that I seek distance rather than closeness... I enjoy being in my own world... being evasive and withdrawn is a luxury."

"I am that way... except when I am in love... then it seems, I yearn for proximity... When I projected my love on Gina she wanted more than anything to remain independent from me. There were others before Gina where it happened in the same way. I too have been the object of projected love, but in this position one never feels the reality of the lovers situation... it has always gone one way or the other with me."

"Perhaps projected love is always this way. A life of continuous love for someone is different. I suspect that for most of us being close to someone is something we can't live with for any length of time."

"There is always a barrier of some kind, but even so, getting close to someone is such an attractive proposition. Desire must lie in hear somewhere, wanting to be so close that you get inside another body."

"Yes, you are right. I like what you say about the intangible space between two people in love. Vermeer probably felt the reality of this space and enjoyed its potential."

"The space that exists between you and I in this studio is also attractive... it is a rare occasion that allows strangers to speak in this way... the artist and the model are always suspected of sharing intimacies... most of them probably enjoyed a more intimate set of conditions than we do... tell me, do women choose their sitters on the basis of attraction or is it just men who do this?"

"Do you think that attraction ceases to exist because we have been brought together on a professional basis?"

"No of course not... but being professional is not the most exciting prerequisite for the kind of invitation that we have been speaking about is it?"

"Well, how interesting. You do like to control reality. When the Garrick gave me the Milne prize the President asked me who I would like to paint and I said that I would like to paint you. He said that he would invite you to have your portrait done and here you are. I invited you as my model as much as any artist has invited a model."

"Oh! How nice. I feel quite embarrassed... Thank you... I suppose I just wanted to say that I have been looking at you and thinking about you while you have been painting me."

"I have been doing the same. At this point in time, we both want to know what the other one is like. We already share intimacies on account of this."

"I like it. I would like to keep it going for as long as possible. I don't want to disturb it. We should nurture it so that the painting will gather it up. The portrait should know that we are very conscious of the gazing that we have engaged in."

"The situation will change. You can't keep it frozen in its early potential. I have a painting to make and I will feel differently about it as time goes by."

"So the desire never lasts. I suppose the truth is that you have clear responsibilities in this situation. Mine, if I have any, are invisible. You are the active one. I am passive. Out of this you will produce something finite. I am just the subject."

"I don't agree. You also have responsibilities. In any event, it will be you who has anxieties when your portrait is hung, not me. Your investment in these hours is as important as mine. This is one of many pictures for me, but there is only one portrait of you."

"You like to look at things clearly, don't you?"

"Not really. I spend most of my time avoiding things or looking at them askance. Tone and light are my main players and they are in a state of continual flux... to the point that being clear is rarely an option."

"Well, your words are clear."

"Thank you, but my desire is to make a record of things optically. The context in which I work determines that nothing can be trusted... I live in a world of half-concealed contradictions and enigmatic gestures."

"But you are brave enough to deal with it."

"For a painter, every brush stroke is a risky business. At any point you can fail abysmally and you need to know how to recover quickly. The surface of a canvas never stays the same. Sometimes, painters surprise themselves delightfully, but they can also produce startling intrusions and horrid deformities that have to be battled with. The art of portraiture has its own problems. It demands some form of naturalism, but the attempt of achieving it is so full of hazards that one has to be prepared for failure. Thoughts about being in control are just not possible... I know what you mean by artifice, but there is a lot of control in a game like that. Painting in the way that I engage it, cannot put up with so much planning... everything happens much faster... each time my brush touches the canvas I am engaged in a gesture of description... nothing that I do relies on thoughts about cause and effect and all my decision-making is made mechanically. Your tactics for acting were not unlike my tactics for painting."

"Surely, each brush stroke concerns cause and effect."

"Not on the basis of thinking about it. Later, when I look at the work from a distance, I study it and then I think about conceptual continuity... I desire continuity... I do not want to be free of it... there

is not a lot that hold things together for a painter like me."

"I can't imagine what my portrait may have gathered up out of all this."

"It's coming along just fine... there are a few surprises in it already... you invited it nicely... but I think that is enough for one day... the light is failing... Do you want to see what I have done?"

"Yes, of course, I can't wait."

"I will turn it round to face the studio and we can sit and have a drink while we look at it... Did you invite me nicely to go out for supper?"

"I did."

"Good. I accept. Here, you can open the bottle... Can I ask you something about Gina?"

"Please do."

"I hope it is not too personal... Did she leave you? I mean, did she leave you because you had an overbearing need to have her with you?"

"Oh no, she didn't do that."

"Then why could you not be together?"

"Oh! For some reason I presumed that you knew... actors often think that everyone knows everything about them... Gina never survived the train journey... It crashed... I'm sorry, I can't stop the tears. Give me a second... She died in the carriage... the distance between us is of a different order altogether... sometimes I imagine that she comes to visit... I would invite her to stay if I knew how."

"Oh my... I am so sorry... I did not mean... "

"Don't worry, my tears are automatic. They are part of me. They no longer make me sad. They are tears of love. I am still touched by the loss... Come on, let us toast the portrait. I will be with her in the painting. I would like to celebrate that... I like the idea of having my portrait painted now. I hated it at first. There is something brave about it."

"But I have upset you."

Invitation

"No. You just know a little more about me, that's all."

"Are you sure? I was going to ask you something else, but... "

"Go on. Really, I am fine."

"Would you mind if I invited my neighbour, Julia, to join us for a drink. She is especially keen to meet you and I am sure you will like her."

"Of course, I like company. We can ask her what she thinks of the portrait."

"... Julia, it's Francis. Would you like to come over...? Now... Don't worry, just come... Oh more than you imagine... yes... good, I'll see you soon... She asked if you were as romantic in real life as you are in the movies."

"And you said 'more than you imagine'."

"No, I said 'yes'. That was a reply to a different question and I am not telling you what that was."

For some reason the very name Julia triggered something off in me. I fell straight into the feeling that I was about to have a romantic liaison. It was a kind of premonition. By the time Julia arrived I was completely overexcited. She was a similar build to a Julia I had known in my youth and there was something about her manner that confirmed my premonition. I suppose that she reminded me of the first Julia, but in truth my attitude was in place before memory or thoughts about comparisons could have occurred. I reacted to this woman in a similar manner to the way that I reacted to my young Julia and this must have been automatic. She was already familiar to me. It is strange how attraction always follows certain lines and stays within similar aesthetic conditions. I have no way of telling how I could have expected these conditions before she even came in through the door. The three of us looked at the portrait, drank wine and chatted together happily. When it was time to go for supper I invited Julia to join us, which she did.

The following morning I could not stop thinking about Julia, the

first Julia. She had been present in my dreams. I sat down at my desk and started to write a story about her. This book began on that day. The second Julia rang me just before lunch. She invited me to a production of *Dido and Aeneas*. Two days later we held hands in the cinema watching Cocteau's *Orphée*.

Arriving

“Take it easy.”

This comes from the parrot on the other side of the room.

I am sitting in the corner of a bar, feeling old. I am too old to be here by myself. I have a nagging feeling that I should have remembered something, but I have given up on trying to remember what it is. These days I tend to stare at the walls trying to think of something that eludes me. The only thing that comes to me are old memories. I am waiting for Adelia to arrive. I try drawing in my notebook to pass the time. Drawing is not the right word for what covers my pages - doodles would be more accurate. They remind me of plans of an old city. It is where I want to be, somewhere old and hot, with little alley ways and beautiful courtyards. I am feeling too tired to make much of them today.

I have not seen or spoken to Adelia for a while. She rang last week to make this arrangement to meet. We have been together and apart for most of our lives. We are accustomed to each other. We are going to the theatre to see a new production that our grandson has devised. I wanted to meet at the theatre, but Adelia insisted that we meet here. A night out for Adelia means doing as many things as possible. I always admired her appetite for the social occasion. These days I feel exhausted by the thought of too much activity. I am nervous because Adelia is late. She has always been late for appointments. She knows that this adds to my anxiety, but she has never felt that knowing this should change her behaviour in the slightest respect. When timing concerns a visit to the theatre I am especially edgy. I was twenty minutes early. By the time that Adelia arrives, she is twenty minutes late.

She swirls into the bar under a huge hat and coat. She looks younger. She walks over to me, opens her coat and says 'look'. She twists around, lifts her foot, turns it from side to side and asks me what I think of them. I say that they look very nice and insist that we leave immediately. I tell her that she will have to wait until the interval to get a drink. Adelia bends down and places a kiss on my forehead.

"It is lovely to see you," she says.

For her, the party is everything and everything is part of the party, unless she happens to be with someone as grumpy as me. I have not always been this way. Tonight my nervousness is adding an extraordinary burden on my propensity to be irritable. I am out of step with myself. I seem to have lost the underlying rhythm of things and my mind is wandering.

I stand up, button up my coat, put on my hat, pick up my walking stick and make for the door. Adelia follows behind. Outside, it is bitterly cold and snowing heavily. The distance that we have to travel is not far enough to warrant a taxi and yet it is far enough to make walking in the snow a hazardous excursion. We both step along the slippery pavement with extreme care and by necessity very slowly. Adelia is even slower than I am. This increases my irritability. She cannot resist looking at her new boots as they sink into the snow and I cannot resist making remarks about her hurrying along. I know that my words will not achieve anything. The more I turn around and coax her along, the more time she takes to admire her boots. This is her way of dealing with my nervousness. I have always been nervous before the start of a performance. A lifetime as an actor has not calmed this condition for me. I am particularly nervous about my grandson's first production.

As soon as I walk through the doors of the theatre and see the crowds in the foyer I realise that we are not late for the performance. While sitting for a considerable time in the auditorium waiting for the play to begin I realise that the play is exceptionally late in starting. The auditorium is very different from the place that I had imagined.

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It is a simple black box. Even the stage lacks any formal definition to indicate that it is a place of performance. On either side of the stage there are two large white screens. To the left of the stage there is a tall black box with what looks like a swing hanging inside it. To the right of this box, on the wall, is a long thin poster. It is the same shape as the box. The image on the photograph shows a dark stairway leading up to an open door, through which daylight enters in a dramatic fashion. It is lifesize and it looks like stage scenery, but this is an illusion. It is simply a flat image with *trompe l'oeil* qualities. Above the poster there appears to be a balcony. It extends along the length of the back wall. The balustrade and the wall behind it are painted white. Everything else is black.

When the auditorium lights go out the stage remains shrouded in a fairly dim light. The sound of a woman's footsteps fills the auditorium - a continual **CLICK, CLICK, CLICK, CLICK** of shoes as they connect with a hard surface. Lights hit the stage and two men rise up out of the centre of the stage through a large opening that has appeared in the floor. They are dressed in the kind of 'all in one' leather outfits that motorcyclists wear. The first one has a limp. He is carrying rolls of paper, a brush and a tub, that he holds by the handle. The second one has a patch over his eye and is carrying a ladder. The motorcyclist with the ladder places it against the wall, next to the long thin photograph and climbs up. The limping assistant places one of the pieces of paper on the floor. He then places a second piece of paper on top of it and brushes it with glue. The sound of the woman's footsteps can still be heard. Mr. Limp hands the paper to Mr. Patch, who is on the ladder. The paper has an image on it. He pastes the paper on top of the long thin photograph. The image shows a woman standing in the very same doorway that featured in the original photograph. It is pasted over the uninhabited doorway so precisely that the whole image looks like a single photograph. The woman is wearing a black dress and is walking away from us through the doorway. She looks real and her presence enhances the illusion that the stairs are an actual construction,

not just a flat image.

The motorcyclists stand still and look at their work.

One of them asks, *"Is the visitor expected?"*

The other replies, *"I have heard nothing."*

They leave the sticky paste-up sheet on the floor and return below stage carrying the tools of their trade. The sound of the woman's footsteps ceases and everything is very quiet. The woman who is depicted in the photograph enters from behind the right-hand screen. She is wearing a black dress identical to the one that the woman in the photograph is wearing. A man, in a dark overcoat and wide-brimmed hat pulled down over his eyes, enters from behind the screen on the left. The woman walks towards the man. He looks about him, but he does not acknowledge the woman.

I recognise this woman, but I am surprised by my recognition. It is entirely unlikely that this is actually the woman who I think it is. I stare at her fixedly and look for the possible characteristics that might differentiate the present woman and the woman from my past. I decide that my ability to identify properly has diminished and cannot be trusted. I spot my grandson, Alex, immediately, even though he is hidden behind the hat and coat. I also recognise the hat and the coat. They are identical to the ones that I deposited in the theatre cloakroom. I turn to Adelia to ask her to verify this, but she is not sitting next to me, someone else is. I wonder what social activity has inspired her attention and her absence from me.

My grandson says, *"How can it be so hot here? I can almost hear the sound of my blood boiling."* He does not address this question to anyone in particular.

The woman directs her remarks to Alex. *"It is so quiet here, one can even hear the sound of footsteps in the street."*

Alex does not reply to her and he does not look out from behind his hat. The woman walks off to the right of the stage, behind the screen that she entered by. Alex takes off his coat, throws it on the floor and enters the tall black box with a swing inside it. He sits on the swing and

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starts to swing. The back of the black box is made of fabric. It billows out as the swing sails through it.

The motorcyclist with the eye patch arrives again through the hole in the stage, carrying a ladder. The limping one arrives with a large roll of paper. The one-eyed assistant places the ladder on top of the photograph on the wall and climbs up. The limping assistant hands him the roll of paper. It is a new photograph, long and thin like the first one. He staples the second poster to the wall next to the first one. The first photograph shows the woman in a doorway at the top of some basement stairs. The second photograph shows a large stone staircase that rises up out of a courtyard. The light is very dramatic and it also has a *trompe l'oeil* quality. The motorcyclists return below stage.

Two women appear on the right of the white balcony, high up on the rear wall. They are moving very slowly and evenly to the centre of the stage as if they are standing on a very slow travelator. They are dressed in canteen outfits. Alex gets off the swing. They watch him as he walks over to the new picture of the staircase. He doesn't look at it. The canteen assistants talk to each other.

"It's so tryin', him tryin' to remember, when he don't."

"He will remember that tryin' to remember is not rememberin', or he can try."

"Will he do it by tryin' or by rememberin'?"

"When he remembers to try, he'll remember rememberin'."

The motorcyclists come up through the stage again with their ladder. They appear to have exchanged their eye patch and limp. The one with the patch climbs the ladder and peels off the image of the woman that was added to the first photograph. He drops it on the floor. They both return below stage. Alex returns to the swing in the box. The women on the balcony continue to talk.

"Does he remember that rememberin' has to be tried?"

"He is tryin'."

"He is tryin' to remember what others remember."

"It's his remembering that she's tryin' to have him remember."

"There's tryin' and tryin'."

"He should remember to try by tryin' less."

The woman in the black dress returns from behind the right-hand screen. She picks up the coat, searches the pockets and hangs it on a hook on the side of the box. She really does look like my beautiful friend. I can't take my eyes of her.

She asks Alex, *"Will you please stop swinging for a moment and tell me if you remember seeing the two motorbikes."*

Alex without stopping to address her directly replies, *"Yes, I remember the two motorbikes. It is far too hot to be wearing an overcoat."*

With that, he gets off the swing and exits behind the left hand screen.

The woman turns to the two women on the balcony and asks, *"Do you think that he has recognized me?"*

"I doubt that he remembers," one of them replies. *"Why do you want him to follow you?"*

This question is delivered just before their travelator takes them off the left-hand side of the stage. The woman in black does not reply to the canteen lady's question. She stands looking in Alex's direction.

The two, leather-clad assistants arrive from below with another paste-up sheet, more posters and glue. The one with the limp applies the paste and the one with the patch climbs the ladder and pastes up the posters. They add new images of the woman on the photographs of the basement stairs and the courtyard stairs. As before, they fit perfectly into the frames of the doorways that are located at the top of both stairways. In each photograph the woman is walking away through the doors, but her head is turned back towards the audience. The motorcyclists stand still and look at their work.

One of them says, *"He looks very tired."*

The other replies, *"It is not certain."*

They return below stage leaving the redundant poster and their paste-up sheets littering the floor.

The woman exits behind the right-hand screen. The sound of her

footsteps is heard again. Suddenly a film appears on the right-hand screen. The woman in her black dress is in the centre of the screen. She is walking quickly along narrow streets in bright sunlight. The camera is following her. Her rhythm is constant and her movements are graceful as she walks on and on through the long, winding streets. Then an image appears on the left-hand screen. It is a black and white still image of a city street at night. It is winter and the street is covered in snow. I know it well, for it is the street that Adelia and I walked along on our way to the theatre. A similar picture follows the first. In this one Adelia and I can be seen in the picture. We are walking awkwardly, covered in snow. It looks bitterly cold. I look around the auditorium to see if I can see Adelia. I need to get her reaction to this, but she is not to be seen. Several more images of our argumentative trek along the hazardously icy pavement are shown on the screen. Suddenly, both screens go blank. I hardly know what is happening.

The two leather-clad assistants arrive from below. Both seem to be limping and the one without the patch is squinting. The sound of the woman's shoes, clicking on hard paving and echoing through the streets, continues to fill the auditorium. With the help of a ladder and a staple gun, the motorcyclist fixes a third, long thin photograph to the wall, next to the previous two. This image is of a very grand staircase. It rises up to an impressive pair of glazed doors, through which light is dramatically streaming in. One of the doors is ajar. When their work is complete, the leather-clad bill posters return below stage.

Alex enters from behind the left-hand screen, carrying a large bag. He places it on the floor and begins to search through its contents.

He is mumbling to himself. *"Now what am I looking for? It is far too hot to go on walking."*

When the woman enters from the right of the stage, the sound of her footsteps ceases.

She walks over to Alex and addresses him. *"You will get acclimatised to the heat. Have you noticed how quiet and empty it is here?"*

Alex does not reply. She takes off his hat and hangs it on the side of

the black box with the swing in it.

Alex is playing someone who recognises nothing, not even the woman. The young woman reminds me of an old friend who could not possibly be playing this role on the stage. I want to get close to her and talk to her. Alex looks towards the woman and walks along in her direction, passing the new images that have been added to the basement and courtyard stairways. He is searching around. He stands in front of the image showing the unpopulated grand staircase and looks out into the auditorium. The two canteen assistants appear again on the right of the white balcony. They are moving evenly and almost imperceptibly towards the centre of the stage. They look down at Alex as they travel along and talk to each other.

"She appears for him to look at her."

"He don't look at her."

"She appears and he don't look."

"He looked at her lookin' at him."

"He appeared to look at her."

"Apparently his looks are not looks."

"How does that appear to her?"

"He appears not to look, but he looks."

The billboard assistants arrive from below with the ladder. The one with the patch places the ladder in front of both posters, climbs it and peels off the images of the woman on each of them. The doors at the top of the basement and courtyard staircases are now empty again. He drops the images on the floor. They look at their work in a satisfied way and return below.

The female chorus continues from the balcony.

"When she appears, does he look at her?"

"Does he look for her to appear?"

"Apparently he is not lookin' at her."

"Look, he appears to me to be lookin' for her."

"Does he look like he's lookin' for her to appear?"

"If you look, they are both lookin' for each other."

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Alex looks at the discarded paste-up sheets and posters that litter the floor. He walks carefully back to the black box and sits on the swing. The woman returns and watches him swinging, pushing through the curtain at the back of the box.

She asks him, *"Can you just stop swinging for a moment and tell me if you remember hearing a loud bang?"*

He gets off the swing.

"Yes, I do remember a loud bang. I must change my clothes on account of this heat."

He exits behind the left-hand screen.

The woman looks up to the two women on the balcony.

"Do you think that I can help him?"

One of them replies, *"He doesn't appear to be looking for help. Why do you want him to follow you?"*

The woman in the black dress replies, *"I want to help him."*

"Why?" asks the second canteen assistant, but they have moved off the stage before they can get an answer. The woman does not reply to them and she stands looking in Alex's direction.

The two billboard assistants enter again with their ladder, paper and glue. They begin to paste new images of the woman onto the basement, courtyard and grand staircases. This time the woman can be seen standing with her back against each of the doorframes. Her head is turned to the audience and she is holding out her hand as an invitation for someone to come to her. The motorcyclists look at their work.

One of them says, *"I hope we will finish before sunset."*

The other one says, *"They all take their own time."*

They both return below stage.

As the woman exits behind the right-hand screen, the sound of her footsteps can be heard and the film of her walking appears on the screen. The camera is following the woman as she walks along narrow streets in bright sunlight. She walks beautifully and evenly. It is definitely my beautiful friend who appears in the film even if it

is a look-a-like who inhabits the stage. Suddenly, the left-hand screen lights up with a dramatic black-and-white image of Adelia and I. We are covered in snowflakes. We are standing on the pavement outside the theatre. There are more images of us and each shot shows our treacherous journey along the street. Some show Adelia stopping to stare at her boots and some show me turning round to check her progress through the snow. Both screens go blank at the same time.

The play is a bewildering sequence of events. I can't imagine what I will say to my grandson when we meet afterwards. I hate being included in another person's performance. Being highlighted in public when I have not prepared for it is a nightmare for me. It is as bad as having a surprise birthday party. I have the dreaded thought that horrid speeches about my life are going to follow the performance. Gratefully, I remember that my birthday is in the summer.

The auditorium is still filled with the sound of the woman's footsteps resounding against the hard façades of the street. The assistants rise up into the centre of the stage with a ladder and a staple gun and fix a fourth photograph to the wall. This shows a small circular staircase leading up to a balcony. The billboard assistants return below stage.

Alex and the woman enter from the left and the right as usual. The sound of footsteps ceases. Alex starts to search through his bag.

He addresses the woman directly, *"In this temperature my body refuses to walk any further. Do you always work in this heat?"*

"I did not expect to. Is the silence here what you expected?" she asks, but he does not reply to her. The woman leaves the stage. Alex sits on the swing and then stands up again. He takes off his jacket, searches through each of the pockets and throws it on the floor. He reminds me of myself when I was his age. He has the same sharp angular way of looking around the stage. It is slightly comical and he is playing it for effect. He follows in the direction of the woman, looking at the images of her on the various doorways at the top of the stairways. Some members of the audience give the odd laugh at the surprised gestures that he makes. The women on the balcony have again arrived on the

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right-hand side of the balcony. They glide along as before, watching Alex and talking about him.

"He don't get it."

"He never got what he got by seein' to it."

"What does he see?"

"Will he get to see her?"

"Is gettin' her what he gets?"

"Will he see to it?"

"Will he see?"

"Gettin' what you get by seein' what you see and gettin' it, is gettin' it."

The billboard assistants enter and peel off the images of the woman on the basement, courtyard and grand staircases. They drop them on the floor. The one with the limp slips over on the paper. His one-eyed colleague helps him to his feet and they return below. The nattering chorus continues from the balcony.

"He can't see what he gets."

"Does he see her?"

"He's got to see her and get on."

"It will get to him if he don't get it."

"Why don't he see that he's got to see it?"

"Can he see that he's been got?"

"He must get on."

"He'll see what he gets."

Alex walks back carefully as he steps with difficulty over the sticky, discarded posters that now litter the floor. The woman follows him, picks up his jacket and checks each of the pockets before placing it on the side of the box. Alex searches his trouser pockets.

The woman tells him, *"You do not need a ticket. Your name is on the door. Do you remember hearing people shouting?"*

He sits on the swing. *"Yes, I remember people shouting, but I do not know how long I am expected to walk in these hot streets."*

He gets off the swing and exits behind the left-hand screen.

The woman in black looks up to the two women on the balcony and

asks them, *"Do you think he will follow me?"*

One of them replies, *"He still doesn't get it. Why do you want to help him?"*

"We are attached to each other," she tells them.

As they are about to glide off the stage, the second woman asks her, *"How did you know that he would be here at this time?"*

The woman does not reply to the now absent chorus and she stands looking in Alex's direction.

The two leather-clad experts in the art of pasting enter with paper and glue. They begin to paste new images of the woman onto the staircase posters. This time she is shown walking quickly away from the camera. The poster assistants look at their work.

One of them asks, *"Is it a case of poor imagination?"*

The other one replies, *"It is probably a case of too much imagination."* They return below stage.

As the woman exits behind the right-hand screen, the sound of her footsteps can be heard and the film of her walking appears on the screen. The camera is again following her as she walks along narrow streets in bright sunlight. I love watching her, but I am beginning to lose my concentration. For a while now my head has been nodding and the need to sleep is beginning to gain on me. Suddenly, the black-and-white images of Adelia and I walking along in the freezing snow appear again on the left-hand screen. My name, J A C K, appears on the screen over a picture of me stepping into a deep pile of snow at the edge of the pavement. There is a picture of Adelia, almost lost beneath her hat, her coat and her scarf. I have no idea where she has gone to sit. I do not know whether she knew that we were being photographed for this production. I am annoyed at her for leaving me. I can't stay awake. I give in to my nodding and fall asleep.

I dream of the drama that I have been watching. I can hear the sound of the woman's footsteps, her little heels resonating against the buildings. I dream of the billboard assistants with their ladder, pasting and discarding posters everywhere until there is nowhere

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on the stage to walk without getting entangled in the sticky paper that covers it. I dream of the canteen assistants as they talk and travel along the balcony. I can hear the woman in black talking to them. I am taken aback when she tells them that she arranged everything from the beginning. I dream of Alex, trying his best to walk through the sticky paper. I dream of Adelia and I, as we attempt to walk through the snow. Everything on the ground gets deeper and deeper.

Suddenly, it is I who enters on the left of the stage rather than my grandson. I am now in step with myself and I swing my hips to emphasise my sense of rhythm. I look about the stage.

The woman in black enters from behind the screen. It is Gina.

"I gave you my heart," I tell her and she replies,

"I've come to get you."

"I can no longer hear the sound of my blood boiling."

"Good, I was counting on you."

She takes my hand and leads me through the mass of paper covering the floor. We stop and look at all the new posters of the doorways. The canteen ladies chatter away happily.

"I feel that she feels that he counts."

"He now counts on her feelin' it."

"I felt that he could be counted on."

"He don't feel that he counts."

"Is that what counts?"

"It is if he's feelin' discounted."

"If he's counted in, then she should count it out for him."

Gina is beautiful, exactly as I remember her.

She asks me, *"Do you remember seeing the taxi approaching as you were crossing the road?"*

I say, *"Yes, I remember seeing the taxi."* I stroke my legs and ask her, *"Have I been walking in this heat since then?"*

She nods her head. *"The motorcyclists arranged for it to veer in your direction."*

"Were you standing in the street when it happened?" I ask.

She replies, "Yes, I was there."

I try to speak again, but she places her hand over my mouth.

"We should get through the city before the night is upon us," she tells me. She turns and begins to walk past all the images of her in the doorways on the various stairways. The sound of her footsteps fills the auditorium. It is the sound of quick steps, of small light heels resonating through the hot, narrow streets. I can hear the canteen ladies talking about us.

"He will not count if he is not countin'."

"Can you feel him countin'?"

"She is countin' on him countin' it."

"He could count on her if he feels that he can't count."

"That countin' feeling is what counts here."

"You can count on it."

"I feel that he is countin'."

I follow my beautiful friend Gina, ecstatic that I am with her again and deeply grateful that she has come to get me at last. I can hear my name being called.

"Jack, Jack, come on Jack."

Gina turns her head to see if I am following her and then she is out of focus.

"Jack, you must wake up." I can hear the sound of a man's footsteps accompanying the sound of Gina's footsteps.

"Really Jack, you are far too old to be sitting here by yourself. How on earth did you get here in the snow?"

I realise that I went to sleep during the play, but I am anxious to stay with Gina. I call out, *"Wait for me, I am counting."*

I open one eye. There is a woman in front of me. It is not Gina and it is not Adelia. I am still in the bar. I close my eyes again. I felt more awake in the other place.

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I keep my eyes closed. "I knew that Gina would come to get me," I say. I want to call out to Gina, to tell her that I am following in her footsteps, but I can't see her.

"Jack. Come on Jack."

I open my eyes again. I can see the nurse. She is crouching before me, still patting me.

"Are you waking up? We must get back."

"I have just arrived."

"You have been here for hours and you have been sleeping."

I keep my eyes closed and try to re-enter my dream. I am desperate not to lose Gina again.

With my eyes still closed I speak to the nurse. "It is a good thing that you did not come any sooner. You would have prevented my dream."

She holds my hand. "Home is the place for dreaming, not public bars."

"I have always preferred dreaming in public," I tell her. Despite my efforts, I am awake now.

A woman on the table next to me addresses the nurse,

"He was havin' a good ol' snooze there."

The woman next to her says, "Only old'uns and young'uns sleep like that."

My nurse laughs. "We must get you back home. Adelia is waiting for you."

"Are we going to the theatre?" I ask.

"No. Adelia has brought a recording of your grandson's performance. You are going to watch a DVD. Did you forget?"

"No," I tell her, "I was waiting for her, but I have to go back to the theatre first."

A male nurse and my female nurse help me into a wheelchair. She puts a blanket over my legs.

"I am not being covered in a blanket in this heat," I tell her.

"Don't be silly. It is freezing outside. You will catch your death

without it.”

The male nurse pushes me in the wheelchair.

“Take it easy,” shouts the parrot as we leave the bar. Outside it is bitterly cold but it has stopped snowing. My nurse tucks my scarf in. It is not far to the home, just across the road. I fall asleep again before I get to the other side. This time nobody can wake me.

CREDITS

PURSUIT

Reference for Apollo and Daphne: *Bullfinch's Mythology, The Age of Fable*.

Reference for the singing lesson: *The Singers Manual of English Diction* by Madeleine Marshall, Schirmer Books 1953.

HOME

The performance was originally called *Back, the Ninth Method*. It was first performed at The Acme Gallery, London in 1981. It was devised while I was working with The Theatre of Mistakes and the structure was based upon forms that were developed by the company. Thanks to George Lawson for dancing Beethoven.

RETURNING

The children's stories are by Cordelia Blair-Stickland. The conversations are notations of exchanges that Cordelia shared while playing with her friends Maddy, Isobel and Jenny when they were five years old.

PREPARATION

"*It might as well be spring.*" Richard Rogers and Oscar Hammerstein II.

"*I wish I were in love again,*" Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart.

"*Bewitched, bothered and bewildered.*" Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart.

"*I won't dance.*" Jerome Kern, Dorothy Fields and Jimmy McHugh.

"*S'wonderful.*" George and Ira Gershwin.

AVAILABILITY

Guillermo Rozenthuler at a singing workshop that I attended used the term 'availability'.

INVITATION

Inspired by the book *Vermeer* by Lawrence Gowing, Giles de la Mare Publishers Ltd, 1997.

ARRIVING

The play in this section is based upon my own publication *The Book of the Play* which was published in 2002 by gf2 Gallery, London.

In *Dreaming in Public* we are treated to accounts of romantic events in the life of an actor. His life is not extraordinary, but the playful narrative devices that the author uses to tell his tale make this a book of many surprises.

The thread that ties these stories together makes a striking web of associations and continuities. Structurally, the stories are like acts in a play and at times the narrative sequence has qualities that are similar to the libretto of an opera.

A distinctive aspect of this novel is the way that theatrical performance is described and the relationship this has with the usual modes of literary description. In this book the reader is led to discover a place that lies somewhere between the written page and the auditorium.



Peter Stickland lives in London. He is a Course Director at Chelsea College of Art and Design. His explorations of the possibilities for narrative are usually explored as architectural interventions that are exhibited in a visual art context. His performances and installations have been shown in Europe and the USA.

Fiction

Front cover painting,
Fallen Angel by Louise Blair.

Futures Publications