

*What follows occurs in the blink
of an eyelid.*

Love

Two young people are bound in heavy chains wrapped around their bodies. They can't touch each other – although they could, just about, if they stretched towards each other with all their strength. Their sex is indifferent. The text is written in the masculine, but should be understood as neuter. Variations in gender will depend on casting. The stage could also be divided into four separate areas with four couples (male-male, male-female, female-male, female-female) performing the text simultaneously.

ONE

Lovers!

THE OTHER

Yes!

ONE

Lovers!

THE OTHER

Yes!

ONE

Lovers!

THE OTHER

Yes! Lovers!

ONE

Yes!

Exhausted, they fall silent. Their heads droop and they doze for a few seconds.

ONE

Lovers!

THE OTHER

Again!

ONE

Lovers!

THE OTHER

Again! Yes, lovers!

ONE

Again!

Their heads are held up by the intensity of the stare connecting them. One of the two looks down. The other's head drops onto his chest.

THE OTHER

Come and get me.

ONE

No. You get your body over here.

THE OTHER

You.

ONE

I mean it, go on, get your body over here, your gobshite too.

THE OTHER

My head's my head, here, on my shoulders – but your eyes, your eyes... support me.

ONE

Come here.

THE OTHER

Come and get me.

ONE

Walk.

THE OTHER

Got no strength. You come.

ONE

I can't.

THE OTHER

Walk.

ONE

Your turn.

THE OTHER

Your fault.

ONE

Your fault.

THE OTHER

I can't take any more of this.

Once again they break off speaking and their heads sink onto their chests.

THE OTHER

I can't do anything.

ONE

Move forward.

THE OTHER

I can't do anything.

ONE

Look at me.

THE OTHER

I can look at you.

ONE

That's good.

THE OTHER

I'm looking at you.

ONE

That's better.

THE OTHER

All I can do is look at you.

ONE

That's true.

THE OTHER

I would like –

ONE

Shush.

THE OTHER

Don't you shush me. I've got the right to speak.

ONE

To look.

THE OTHER

To speak.

ONE

Let it all out then, let it all ooze out the corner of your mouth. The flow never stops, is never fast enough, you choke on it, it builds up inside you. Even as I watch you're bursting with words and your stomach is swelling up.

THE OTHER

I spit. I don't swallow. Never, if it's words.

ONE

What about everything else?

THE OTHER

I don't know how to swallow. I was never taught. Not because no-one wanted to teach me. I just never learned. I don't know how to swallow and I don't want to and I –

ONE

I would like you.

THE OTHER

You want me.

They struggle to free themselves from their chains. Without success.

THE OTHER

It's dark outside.

ONE

Here too.

THE OTHER

Outside.

ONE

It's cold here too; sometimes there are stars reflected on the pavement and you skid about in the sky without thinking twice – except afterwards it sticks and clings to your shoes, all that stuff meant to be shiny that you trample on without thinking twice.

THE OTHER

Crushed.

ONE

Our bodies are, yes. But there's something else.

THE OTHER

Something else.

ONE

That hole we keep avoiding.

THE OTHER

Don't fall in. Don't fall in. Don't fall in.

ONE

That gaping hole in the middle of town. We ask ourselves: where does it end? Scared to lean over. Vertigo and straight to hell – if they really are down there, burning away, all the sinners and those who can't believe.

THE OTHER

Believe.

ONE

Believe. I don't know about that. No light ever comes from the hole and then one day there's nothing there anymore, just the road and the pavement and the garden: everything is smooth, unbelievably smooth – and that's when doubt creeps in, when the festering idea takes root, when a voice starts undermining your every step: underneath, everything must be hollowed out, everything has been hollowed out, but where?

THE OTHER

Where?

ONE

That's what I'm asking you – no, not you, I'm asking THAT. I shout: where?! To anyone at all, anyone who might have an answer, here, now, in this dark room. I'm on my knees in front of you but what's going on underneath? That loose soil has been turned over: who for?

THE OTHER

That's not for you to say, that.

ONE

You'll follow me underground, in any case.

THE OTHER

Not like that. First... first.... let's bury ourselves in the sand.

ONE

I promise.

THE OTHER

Promise with more conviction. We'll go to the beach.

ONE

We'll go to the beach.

THE OTHER

We'll write our names in the sand at low tide and every stroke of our initials will be five foot long.

ONE

Five foot.

THE OTHER

One after the other we'll bury ourselves.

ONE

I promise.

THE OTHER

I've not finished yet. After that, we'll dig ourselves out of the sand and wash off our bodies in the salty sea. Then we'll lick the salt off each other's skin, one after the other. We'll wait for the tide to wash away our names.

ONE

And then?

They look at each other without saying a word. Beat.

ONE

You've got nothing to say?

THE OTHER

Nothing.

They look at each other again. Time passes.

ONE

You've got nothing to say?

THE OTHER

I don't know. I don't know what to say, I mean, how and to whom, why. It's too easy just to say any old thing. Too easy. Look. I'm really good at saying nothing.

ONE

True enough. But your voice, your voice, your voice soothes me.

THE OTHER

I don't want to soothe you.

ONE

I know. Your voice makes me sweat, too.

THE OTHER

That's better. Truer.

ONE

When you call me by my first name –

THE OTHER

I never call you by your first name.

ONE

I know.

THE OTHER

I say: nutcracker. Little *Nußknacker*, my nutcracker, my little *Nußknacker*.

ONE

I prefer the possessive.

THE OTHER

I know.

ONE

I forget that I'm my own person when you say: my little *Nußknacker*. I'm someone else, and yours, yours, I'm all yours.

THE OTHER

You belong to me.

ONE

You belong to me. *Petal*.

THE OTHER

Petal and *Nußknacker*. Great.

ONE

Lovely.

THE OTHER

We're great.

ONE

We could be better – but we're great.

THE OTHER

The two of us. *Petal* and *Nußknacker*.

ONE

You've made your point. The two of us.

THE OTHER

The two of us.

ONE

Will you stop repeating everything I say!

THE OTHER

I'll stop then.

ONE

Use your own words. Mine are private property.

THE OTHER

I'll be quiet. Just a second.

One falls asleep.

THE OTHER

When you're asleep you fake it. *And* when you smile. Your eyelids are wonky – your teeth too white. You aren't you. I don't know you. I'll never know you. There's nothing else to explore, to excavate. The only space I'm aware of is the distance between us. The rest of you is a shadow puppet. Your eyes are shut, your head droops spinelessly, and your body is limp, slack. But I can't reach you, I can't bite into your sleep, can't bite into your sleep and taste it in my mouth. You're faking it. I would like to free you, but what from? What makes your limbs so heavy, drags you down? Where does all this weight come from? Is it me, looking at you...? Is that what weighs you down? What if I closed my eyes? I'm closing my eyes... I can still see you. Printed on my cornea. I can still see you, from the inside – but am I weighing you down? Can you sense that my attention, my desires, my hopes, my bad experiences are all still bearing down on you? I would like to free you. I would like. But what are you dreaming about? You never move a muscle. You're faking it, you're just trying to pull from my mouth confessions of tenderness. You'll get nothing else out of me, nothing! I'll just keep watching and that should be enough, should make you sag: everything is too big for you. I'm too big for you, I'm four heads higher and two torsos wider than you. You're an insect, I could swallow you whole at any moment – I'm just too kind, don't you forget that. Our space is marked out on the ground – the only space which is real. I want you.

He pulls at his chains. So hard and so effectively that his hand comes free. He is amazed, and after a while reaches his hand forward until he almost touches One's genitals. One moves imperceptibly, prompting The Other to take his hand away – then after a time he makes a similar attempt to touch his face. One lifts his head, groans – the freed hand returns to its previous chained position. One opens his eyes. The Other has got over his stuttering attack.

ONE

No dreams! No dreams, I can't bear it!

THE OTHER

Try again. Close your eyes.

ONE

A dream machine.

THE OTHER

I'll invent one.

ONE

It's already been done. I've seen it – an aquarium full of brains sucking in children's wishes.

THE OTHER

I'll invent it again.

ONE

You were watching me.

THE OTHER

I was admiring you.

ONE

You were sussing me out.

THE OTHER

I didn't have anything else to do.

ONE

Not sleepy?

THE OTHER

As usual.

ONE

And you'll keep on watching over me?

THE OTHER

As usual.

ONE

And every morning I'll feel dead and brought back to life by your eyes.

THE OTHER

We won't see daylight fill this space.

ONE

As usual.

THE OTHER

Instead...

ONE

Yes? An idea – you've had an idea...?

THE OTHER

I – how do you think? By hallucinating?

ONE

I follow my chains of thought.

THE OTHER

Do you chase images?

ONE

No. No!

THE OTHER

That's all you are for me. An image. I can't – touch you.

ONE

I'm hungry.

Some food appears at the end of a string. One catches the hook in his mouth, not without some difficulty, and eats his fill, munching noisily. Beat.

THE OTHER

At the corner of your mouth.

ONE

There?

THE OTHER

The other side.

ONE

There? That it?

THE OTHER

It's gone now.

ONE

You're not hungry?

THE OTHER

Thirsty.

ONE

He's thirsty!

Water pours down on The Other, who opens his mouth skywards and laps.

ONE

Better?

THE OTHER

Easy. I mean, it's easy to make yourself feel better like that.

ONE

I feel better.

THE OTHER

Too easy.

ONE

Never happy.

THE OTHER
Too easy

Blackout. The actors change places, rattling their chains, dragging them heavily along the ground. The light comes up shortly before they've managed to change places and they freeze, faking chained-up poses, caught in flagrante delicto – in the act of being free.

ONE
Lovers!

THE OTHER
Lovers!

ONE
Again!

THE OTHER
Yes, again!

ONE
Lovers!

Blackout.

Odile Cornuz
Translated by Olivia Mac Cannon