

## LOVE / LIKE / LONGING

Odile Cornuz, May 2003

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### Author's note

I'm not trying to justify anything by means of this text. It's made up of interchangeable fragments of phrases and tensions between people. It's a fable without a story. The characters are people who talk without really talking, or rather, without really understanding each other. That should be clear. The people shown here are in a state of rupture. They have lived. They have suffered. No more than anyone else and no less either. They have felt storms rip through their sheltered senses. They have scissored holes in their hopes without meaning to. They have lived. They are young and old at the same time. I want them to maintain some innocence – it helps when in pain, and is sometimes the only refuge from it. A simple thought, a door held open by a stranger, a flower coming into bloom, a zigzagging bumble-bee... so many bits and pieces of innocence gathered on the journey, which somehow reinstate an inhabitable space.

### And still to come:

I want this text to be a complex network. I want it to be timed and orchestrated and choreographed like an extremely precise score. That's what I want, but I'm not yet sure how to go about it. It's as if it were a fruit on the highest branch of a smooth-trunked tree.

Chopped up. Roughly chopped writing. That says it all. I'm not sure exactly how, but it has to give you the impression that everything is there, available, within reach, but without your really knowing how, towards what, and how far to stretch out your hand.

I want what happens on stage to be both feasible and unfeasible offstage. I want the situations to be banal, but with an unrealistic tinge. They are played out in an area which constantly verges on the state between sleeping and waking. Not just played out, better than that – measured out. I want to make this my area of play, of writing. A few millimicroseconds. More than just this atmosphere – the state between sleeping and waking – which may or may not be nocturnal, I want to set down what happens when love disintegrates, to observe the contortions of the body, the body love creates for itself when it lies down alongside lovers and friends, and hollows out their beds the way a tomb is hollowed out.

I would like it to end like dusk falling. Softly, but with a softness which hides the violence just beneath the surface.

The same actors move through the play, but increasingly, they enact the state of acting, assuming roles. It's as if there's a progression from the condition of being in love, which gives a taste of original unity, towards the gradual distancing of minds, by a range of external distractions and other parasitic tendencies.

The play evolves from the most immediate to the most pre-meditated, from the most focused to the most diffuse. The following triad could form a sub-title to the play:

LOVE  
guts

LIKE  
heart

LONGING  
brain

A gut feeling provokes a uniform reaction. It's afterwards that complications arise, that the heart is mobilised, and the brain generates dubious connections.

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.*

## Like

*The two, four, six or eight actors face each other, in pairs. One throws a small coin into a bucket set a metre away from him. The Other gets up and moves the bucket a few centimetres further away to make the game more difficult. The action is repeated.*

ONE

Too easy.

*The action is repeated.*

ONE

Too easy.

*The bucket is moved further away, etc.*

ONE

Way...

*So the Other moves the bucket again, etc.*

ONE

You've never really had a taste for challenge, adventure, have you? This is all so bland, limp... banal. Exhilaration, the tiniest *frisson*, adrenalin, orgasm – ever heard of them?

THE OTHER

Please.

ONE

'Don't start all that again' – but actually, no, no! I refuse! To leave you squatting there, clinging to your bucket. Look at yourself! React, won't you! That's it, I'm not throwing that coin ever again.

THE OTHER

Please.

ONE

No.

THE OTHER

To make me happy.

ONE

No way.

THE OTHER

In memory of –

ONE

But we're here now! The two of us, d'you hear: HERE NOW THE TWO OF US.

THE OTHER

I...

ONE

The two of us.

THE OTHER

My bucket.

ONE

Tin – your bucket equals scrap metal, you equals flesh: living, throbbing, thinking.

THE OTHER

I'll tidy all that away then.

ONE

That's right, everything in its place, and I'll tidy you away and get you out again whenever I feel like it! Burn the lot! No nostalgia, no morbid idolization, no–

*The Other bursts into tears, bucket in hand, coin in the other. He starts to speak, his voice broken with sobs.*

THE OTHER

It was *our* game, don't you understand that, *our* game, ours, ours. Do it for me, do –

ONE

No! I'm not going to replace anyone and you can stop crying for no reason.

THE OTHER

Not for no reason

ONE

Not for anyone.

THE OTHER

It's not something you ever forget.

ONE

You have to make an effort.

THE OTHER

You don't understand.

ONE

I don't want to take this any further.

*He leaves.*

THE OTHER

Never any further. Never. Mum isn't here anymore to say: keep going, it'll get better later, I promise. That's all over, the cocoon, cotton wool, feathers, pillow fights, only ever play-fights, the ones that don't really hurt but where you always end up pretending to cry.

*One comes back in, treading softly, and freezes for a few seconds: he is so absorbed by what he hears that his body starts to mime what the Other is saying.*

I miss that made-up pain. It was more worthwhile, more voluptuous. At the moment, everything grates, it's as if the walls had moved inwards, closed in on me, and I keep dragging myself on

towards the daylight in the distance, clutching at the walls, lacerated at every step but not crying. At the moment I refuse to go on.

*One freezes again.*

It's less painful. And after all, what's to say the light itself isn't a lie? A neon sign at the side of a road. A long long way from the moonlight. The only sound which comforts me is this little coin dropping into the bucket. It hits the bottom. It stops spinning. The universe is *not* infinite.

ONE

Would you like a cup of tea?

THE OTHER

No. Thank you.

ONE

How about a walk, outside, it's a lovely day.

THE OTHER

Don't feel like it.

ONE

I bet you've not stuck your nose outside for days.

THE OTHER

Weeks.

ONE

You ought to make an effort.

THE OTHER

Seeing you –

ONE

It's no trouble, honestly...

THE OTHER

Seeing you is an effort. One that I make. Setting out the bucket for you is a gesture. Hearing you fail to understand me is an insult. This is my place. I want you to get out.

ONE

You ought to open the shutters, let some fresh air in.

THE OTHER

I would rather not have to repeat myself.

ONE

Tell you what, I'll make some soup, buy some bread.

THE OTHER

I would rather not have to kick you out.

ONE

I wish I could help you.

THE OTHER

Get out!

ONE

...

THE OTHER

Get out! Get out! Get out!

ONE

I – a loaf of rye bread then, and some cured meat, that's settled.

*He goes out in a rush.*

THE OTHER

Unbearable to keep grief bottled up. Every time I sense a tear welling up, the person I happen to be with gets all panicky, I see their hands trembling: but what can I do, how can I hold back the tide, the waves of grief, when being rational is like trying to shore up a collapsing dyke... Watch out, the floodgates are opening!

*He grabs his bucket, fills it with water, and throws its contents towards the back of the stage, onto a glass screen which breaks the wave. He does the same with a second and third bucketful, then a fourth. At this point One returns, walks in front of the glass screen and is soaked by the contents of the fourth bucket. A stunned pause, then both start laughing uncontrollably. They splash about in the puddles, pretend to fight each other, then fall down together in a heap, exhausted.*

ONE

I bought the bread.

*He breaks up the bread. They both eat in silence.*

ONE

It's all here, everything we need is already here: look. Behind the picture on the screen, behind the television, no! not the radiator, behind, but not really behind, there, behind in a different way, in your mind's eye – d'you see, now, there: behind the picture. What is there?

THE OTHER

I don't know.

ONE

You can't see anything.

THE OTHER

Behind?

ONE

Yes?

THE OTHER

Behind, no, nothing, nothing behind, just the –

ONE

Radiator. Thank you. What an idea, I ask you, a radiator behind a television.

THE OTHER  
I can't move it.

ONE  
The radiator?

THE OTHER  
Well yeah.

ONE  
Obviously.

THE OTHER  
Yes.

ONE  
The television however...

THE OTHER  
What?

ONE  
Shift it.

THE OTHER  
The television?

ONE  
Yes.

THE OTHER  
You get some funny ideas you! And where would I put it?

ONE  
Outside.

THE OTHER  
What do you mean, outside?

*One throws the television out of the window. It lands on the road with a deafening crash.*

ONE  
On the road: crash, bang, splat! No more telly! No more picture. Blackout. Watch the radiator.

THE OTHER  
You're sick!

ONE  
Waves of heat rise off it, gently, gently, and it heats up, again, gently, gently, no picture, no sound, just the radiator hissing. It hisses, your radiator.

THE OTHER  
You reckon.

ONE



Yeah.

THE OTHER  
So?

ONE  
You ought to...

THE OTHER  
Throw it out the window?

ONE  
Yes! Yes yes yes! You understand then?

THE OTHER  
No.

*One grabs the radiator and throws it out of the window: a deafening crash. He does the same with all of the objects to follow.*

ONE  
So you do understand, brilliant, after all. The radiator: crash, bang, splat! No radiator, no waves of heat and no hissing. No nothing.

THE OTHER  
No more telly, no more radiator.

ONE  
No more telly, no more radiator – no more telly, no more radiator, no more telly, no more radiator.

THE OTHER  
What about the stereo?

ONE  
No more stereo!

THE OTHER  
No more stereo?

ONE  
Crash bang splat! Crash bang splat! All gone. Ha ha! Ha! Ha ha ha! Nothing left. Crash bang splat! No picture, no waves, no sound, zero.

THE OTHER  
Ah.

ONE  
Crash bang splat! Crash bang splat!

THE OTHER  
No more...

ONE

...imitation sunflowers, no lava lamp, no candlestick, no quilt, no pillow, no slippers, no lucky undies, no magazines, no cigarettes, no more photos!

THE OTHER

No more photos?!

ONE

No more keys, no whisky tumblers, no snowstorm, no diary, no fountain pen, no tea-stained mug, no biscuits, no spider plant, no more nothing – nothing nothing nothing nothing nothing!

THE OTHER

Absolutely nothing.

ONE

Crash bang splat!

THE OTHER

Crash –

ONE

Bang splat!

THE OTHER

Bang –

ONE

Splat!

THE OTHER

All gone.

ONE

What then?

THE OTHER

No picture, heating, light, comfort...

ONE

Just us.

THE OTHER

And four walls.

ONE

A window.

THE OTHER

The whole street filled with rubbish, but us, us, us: empty.

ONE

Poor.

THE OTHER

Happy.

ONE

At peace.

THE OTHER

Alone at last.

*Beat.*

THE OTHER

What's that stain on the wall?

*Blackout. The sound of things crashing onto the road, played backwards and speeded-up. When the lights come up again, the stage is strewn with bits of the discarded things.*

THE OTHER

She used to call me marmalade.

ONE

You what?

THE OTHER

Marmalade, every now and then.

ONE

...

THE OTHER

I'd lie right on top of her, give her all my weight. I'd crush the breath out of her until she went: mar-mal-ade. I used to love that. And when she went, mar-mal-ade, I'd let her go, take my weight off her. And I'd bite her shoulder. It tasted sweet.

ONE

That's personal, that.

THE OTHER

Personal. Yes.

ONE

Yes.

THE OTHER

Sorry... Marmalade.

*He gets up, picks up his bucket and starts dancing and singing to himself the refrain from the Mary Poppins song: 'A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, the medicine go down, the medicine go down... A spoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down, in the most delightful way'.*

*Beat. The Other looks sheepish.*

THE OTHER

Can I ask you something...

ONE

What?

THE OTHER

It's tricky, you know...

ONE

How much do you want?

THE OTHER

For the end of the month.

ONE

You ought to do something.

THE OTHER

The lottery –

ONE

Come off it!

THE OTHER

I often do the lottery. I'm going to win soon, I can tell. There's good luck in the air, I can smell it, you know: everything reeks of good luck, at the moment, reeks of it! You'll see. You'll be the first to know.

ONE

What if I hired you?

THE OTHER

Wrapping batteries, you're alright thanks.

ONE

Months since you did anything.

*Beat.*

THE OTHER

So?

ONE

What?

THE OTHER

So what.

ONE

You won't get any money out of me.

THE OTHER

I really do need it.

ONE

So?

THE OTHER

I just want –

ONE

To do what's right I mean make sure you always do what's right like well done son good boy you can wipe your own arse congrats your mum has brought you up well what a nice clean boy and what else can the boy do eh he knows how to read write count and draw houses with mummy and daddy waiting at the door and birds in the sky how sweet well done my boy keep it up that's life you know that's the way to go about it my boy that's wonderful yes and you won a medal for cross-country didn't you top of the school I'm so proud of you my boy what a good boy making his mummy happy well done that's great but but but what's the matter nice boy why is the nice boy sobbing his heart out is something wrong is it the wasted years the tarnished medals? For fuck's sake wake-up!

THE OTHER

I didn't want to –

ONE

You could at least go and buy yourself... some goldfish! For the company...

THE OTHER

I can't seem to be able to –

ONE

Turn the corner, set yourself to rights, pull your socks up: what you need is electric shock treatment, that should do it, a course of ECT.

THE OTHER

I'm ready.

ONE

For what?

THE OTHER

If you'll help me.

ONE

Do what?

THE OTHER

Get out of here. Now.

ONE

Where will you go?

THE OTHER

To your place.

ONE

Erm...

THE OTHER

Oh fine, your place, not a good idea, no, not a good idea at all. I have to get out, yes, but not if it means going to your place, oh no, *tu casa* is not *mi casa*, I must have got mixed up, how could I think such a thing, I really don't know! Not your place, I mean, it's too small, too clean, too... yours.

ONE

I –

THE OTHER

No excuses please, no excuses, no really, tell you what, I'll buy myself some goldfish and stick my fingers in the plughole! ECT! Electric shock treatment! Ha ha ha! Electric shock! Hair standing on end and all! Electric shock! Ha ha!

ONE

I think –

THE OTHER

No, not your place, not your place: my place with my goldfish and my hair sticking up!

ONE

Calm down.

THE OTHER

Goldfish.

ONE

Calm.

THE OTHER

Electric –

ONE

Calm down. Now. I will visit you know, I'll come every day if you want.

THE OTHER

Yes.

ONE

There now...

*They hug each other. Beat. Then The Other starts dancing, as if hypnotised.*

THE OTHER

Time to party, to celebrate, time to party and we're singing and dancing and no-one gives a fuck, and you too marmalade, because what matters in the end is that the world spins like a coin when it hits the bottom of a bucket. Isn't that right, isn't that right?

ONE

I don't know...

THE OTHER

Please...

*They take up the same positions as at the beginning of the scene. The Other holds the bucket, One throws the little coin.*

ONE

Too easy.

THE OTHER

Way...

*They keep on playing the same game as the lights dim. To blackout.*

## Longing

*The stage is divided into compartments like a chest of drawers. We should sense that this world is a size too small for the actors. They appear and disappear, moving at random between one drawer and the next. A recorded soundtrack of crowd noise will be needed.*

ONE

I really like you.

THE OTHER

Show me...

*They dance.*

THE OTHER

Better than that.

*Hearty applause. Caught out becoming intimate, they stop abruptly and face the audience. Cold shower (literally). Recorded laughter.*

ONE

I always weep first.

*Applause*

THE OTHER

I always shout first.

*Applause*

ONE

I do the thumping.

*The invisible crowd boo him.*

THE OTHER

What?

ONE

Anything that moves.

THE OTHER

Anything still moving... I stop where I am. I lose the ability to move my fingers, my hand, my body.

ONE

I shout. Not immediately, but I do shout as well.

*Applause.*

THE OTHER

I just do nothing.

*A voice in the invisible crowd shouts: 'Give us our money back!'*



ONE

I wave my arms around. I must look ridiculous, I want to look ridiculous, I need to be seen. So I gesticulate wildly and break stuff.

*A voice in the invisible crowd shouts: 'Bravo!'*

THE OTHER

I keep myself to myself.

ONE

I can't bear that, can't bear it.

THE OTHER

It's like I'm paralysed.

ONE

But we have to do something, demonstrate, we have to say that you're here, you don't agree, you won't accept that kind of treatment and that you refuse and –

*A roar rises up from the invisible crowd, subsiding gradually until The Other's final words.*

THE OTHER

In the end I've got no strength left. I turn in on myself. I don't know what to do with my body anymore. I'm like a stone trying to listen to its heart beating. That's all I have the strength left to do. I keep myself to myself. I keep very still. I try not to hear what's being shouted. I no longer have the strength to speak. I just stay like that, my arms wrapped around my knees. My knees protect my chest. I no longer exist.

ONE

You listen to your heart.

THE OTHER

I no longer exist for anyone else. Just for myself.

*A voice in the invisible crowd shouts: 'Selfish git.'*

*The Other disappears out of sight.*

ONE

I get that way when I don't know where I am anymore. A lightning flash and there you go: nothing left, white or black space, it's just nowhere. So I wait for something, just like that, without knowing what. And there's me in the emptiness. Just me to infinity. Me who decides where I am, because I'm here. Me me me.

*The other reappears with a bunch of daisies.*

THE OTHER

Nothing to get wanked up about.

ONE

Sorry?

THE OTHER

Nothing to get –

*One snatches the bunch of daisies out of his hands.*

ONE

No need to be vulgar.

THE OTHER

At least I got a reaction.

ONE

What makes you say that?

THE OTHER

No reason.

*They start walking in circles, each following his own circuit. One throws the bunch of daisies in the air, The Other catches it and starts plucking the petals off each flower.*

ONE

You've got nothing to say?

THE OTHER

Nothing.

*They go round in circles.*

ONE

You're really good at saying nothing.

*They keep on walking round in circles, then the Other freezes, takes a deep breath, opens the floodgates and lets out everything he has to say. He speaks as if battling against a storm.*

THE OTHER

Me me me. I heard words painful as a fresh cut in an old wound which has never healed and the blood which poured out, the blood, was my cry. Not an ordinary cry. Not a cry of victory, not a cry of surprise, not a cry of fear. But the cry which surges up because everything is ripped to pieces, skin cut to the quick, slit nerves, chickens running around with their heads cut off, everything is clotted, because everything shuts down. All at once. Nothing. Shapeless, meaningless, formless, rootless, bondless, anchorless. Everything changes tack. Because the established order of things, the one you've established for yourself, little by little, with patience, love, in the ebb and flow of life, in your quiet moments – everything collapses, is hacked and smashed and shattered to pieces by these words

HE IS DEAD

And I wail and I wail and I wail. And tears come too, just floating at first, then coming in waves, which... but more like sobs, the troughs of waves huge as gaping black jaws and then it all has to come out but can't because everything is unleashed and shuts down at the same time –

*He freezes. It's as if what he needs to say is trapped in a block of ice which he has to smash in order to get each word out.*

THE OTHER

But you don't want to hear about that, do you, no.

ONE

...

THE OTHER

You can't bear hearing about that, you don't want to hear what comes out of my mouth, but where else is it going to come out of? I agree, everything is a mess, yes, I've spent hours in the bogs chucking my guts up, because it has to come out somewhere, why not there, because everything's in the wrong place now, rolling around and making me feel sick. In the end it's as if you want it, the nausea, it's as if it's self-inflicted, without you knowing. Because it's right to suffer, it's your right, you've got an excuse, for once, for suffering, you wear it like a badge: I am in mourning. And that excuses everything. No need to concentrate, to work, to smile, to pay attention anymore, just grief oozing out of your body whenever it feels like it. You are outside everything, you are beyond everything and sometimes you hope for a sign, one little sign, like a miracle, perfect and beautiful.

ONE

I wanted to tell you –

THE OTHER

But sometimes, it's funny, at other times you want everything to go silent, to disappear, so there's just you, inert, and the pain: it's your personal gaoler, you get no time off for good behaviour, and there's no hope of remission. And you bury your head in it and say: what if I never come out? There's the same finality as when you crush a fly in your hand. You go: well, that's that. Then there's this crying and moaning and a voice going: why, why, why! And you get up in the morning, but your eyes are crusty, tired, red. And your body has rusted up.

ONE

If only I could –

THE OTHER

And speech is what saves you. Because words keep pouring out of your throat, but talking to yourself doesn't work, you need a sounding board, a presence.

ONE

I didn't know.

THE OTHER

Nothing to get wanked up about.

*Beat.*

ONE

And at the moment?

THE OTHER

I cry less. There's less why. Because it's exhausting.

ONE

And life –

THE OTHER

Goes on, yes, thanks. So I'm told. That's a good one.

*He laughs. One is taken aback, but joins in laughing nonetheless: roars of laughter which suddenly stop.*

THE OTHER

Right.

ONE

Right.

ONE

Goodbye. Goodbye and thank you.

THE OTHER

Yes... thank you. See you soon.

ONE

Maybe.

*A burst of emotional applause from the crowd.*

*They shake hands and One leaves the stage. The Other stands up and approaches the audience.*

THE OTHER

My life's not very interesting.

*He gets ready to launch into a long declaration, looks out into the audience, takes a breath, but at that precise moment, the crowd bursts into applause. He doesn't know what to do. He is mute. Suddenly he takes fright, retreats backwards and disappears. One comes back on stage.*

ONE

I sometimes do a bit of knitting, of an evening.

*Beat.*

ONE

But I don't knit in public, no. That would be a bit fogeyish. It's one of my little secrets. And I also like...

*The Other returns, running, out of breath and beaming. He leaps across the stage and runs rings round One, shouting.*

THE OTHER

Watching people go by, cycling in the rain, ringing doorbells in posh buildings and shouting abuse down the intercom, visiting haunted houses, making lots of noise when you eat, peering through keyholes, jamming lifts, throwing stones in rivers, imitating peacock calls, counting stars

ONE

Not possible –

THE OTHER

Counting stars, being all at sea, scratching your arse, laughing when you ought to cry, sucking in alcohol through your noseholes, forgetting everyone's birthday, permanently celebrating life.. I want, I want...

ONE

I want...

THE OTHER

I want...

ONE

What do you want?

*A voice rises up from the invisible crowd: 'Go on, spit it out!'*

THE OTHER

Something... interesting.

*A few catcalls from the crowd gradually develop into a roar of protest, becoming louder and louder, until it virtually blocks out the speech made by The Other, exhausted.*

THE OTHER

A feeling of difficulty, when life gets caught in the spokes of the big wheel and jams, jams, jams. Until it's ripped to shreds. I hope. I always hope. I'm beyond belief. I don't know how to count the days anymore. I don't know which night joins onto which morning. I latch onto banal things. I would like to be both in and out of life at the same time. I don't really know what to say anymore or how to say it.

*By this time he is lying face-down on the ground. One comes up to him, and rests a foot on his back. Someone in the crowd shouts: 'That's right, you show 'im'*

ONE

You could always start with what you don't dare tell me.

THE OTHER

I can tell you everything.

ONE

That's not true.

THE OTHER

If I want.

ONE

What if I want?

*The invisible crowd choruses: 'Ah ha!'*

THE OTHER

It's too much.

*Someone in the crowd shouts: 'Get your kit off, get your kit off!'*

THE OTHER

It's none of your business.

ONE

I'm your mate. Your friend! What are friends for?

*One has thrown out the question to the crowd. It mutters, caught off guard. So One starts playing guessing games to diffuse the tension. The crowd, well-rehearsed, knows all the answers and answers enthusiastically, in chorus.*

ONE

A friend says to his friend: I haven't eaten today. What does the friend say: HAVE MY BREAD. Now that's what you call a friend! A real one! A friend is walking down the road and bumps into a friend of his who says: I'm thirsty but I've got no money. What does the friend walking down the road say: HAVE MY MONEY. Good! Another proper friend. Another friend puts a bullet through his head but misses and his friend comes to see him in hospital and asks, what can I do to make you feel better. The injured friend replies: PASS ME THE DIAZEPAM.

THE OTHER

It's personal. I want you to respect that: there are things I want to keep to myself.

*One holds out his hand.*

THE OTHER

Stuff your helping hand.

*The crowd roars: 'Boo'*

ONE

Don't say anything else. I'm going.

THE OTHER

No. I...

ONE

You want me to stay and listen to you spouting phrases which mean absolutely nothing: 'in and out of life' ... and calling it genius!

*Mocking laughter erupts from the crowd.*

THE OTHER

Stay.

*One makes as if to go.*

THE OTHER

How do you think?

ONE

What's it to you?

THE OTHER

Do you follow your chains of thought?

ONE

I just move on.

THE OTHER

I need you.

ONE

Of course you do. Goodnight. All the best...

THE OTHER

...Wait! I... I'll tell you everything.

*The invisible crowd is relieved: 'Aah!'*

ONE

Not if your heart isn't in it, no thanks.

THE OTHER

I need to...

ONE

To...

THE OTHER

To do that. To tell you. Everything. Wait.

*Blackout. A cacophony of shouts and compulsive sobbing which makes the audience jump, then the noise evens out, slowly and jerkily, in the way you get your breath back after an emotional shock.*

ONE

I...

THE OTHER

Yes?

ONE

I...

THE OTHER

Yes, yes?

ONE

I've... I've got to go.

THE OTHER

...

ONE

I can't stay.

THE OTHER

I knew it.

ONE

What?

THE OTHER

That.

ONE

That what? What do you know? You don't know...

THE OTHER

That you couldn't...

ONE

That's got nothing to do with it.

THE OTHER

Never mind.

ONE

That's got absolutely nothing to do with...

THE OTHER

Yeah yeah.

ONE

Yes! I... You... Me... I...

THE OTHER

Of course. I understand.

ONE

Stop it! I'm your... I mean – a friend. A friend.

THE OTHER

I know. You... I mean you, Mr [...?], over there, you... know the story about this friend who...

ONE

If I leave now, it doesn't mean that...

THE OTHER

Yeah yeah. Too easy.

ONE

You, I mean Mr [...?], you don't believe me!

THE OTHER

Oh but I do, I do. Hurry up and go then, you're going to be late... Business, Mr [...?]

ONE

Is business. Yes Mr [...?]. I'm off then. I...

THE OTHER

Goodnight.

ONE

I... ring – maybe.

THE OTHER

That's right. You do that. Great.

ONE

Fine.

THE OTHER

Right. Goodnight.

ONE

Good...



*Blackout.*

*Recorded applause is transmitted at the same time as the audience starts clapping. The actors bow. When they go out, the empty stage remains lit up. They come in again, but separately, one after the other, and sit on a bench.*

THE OTHER

Sometimes I confide in strangers.

ONE

Really.

*Silence.*

THE OTHER

Really. I tell them everything. All my most intimate experiences. What I feel most strongly about.

ONE

Really. Good.

*Silence.*

ONE

And does it make you feel better?

THE OTHER

Ah, it... makes me explode, it fills me to bursting with energy, it makes me quiver with happiness when I walk away, lovely and light...

ONE

Really. Great.

*Silence.*

THE OTHER

Are you interested?

ONE

In what?

THE OTHER

My life.

ONE

Erm... well...

THE OTHER

Not really?

ONE

No.

THE OTHER  
Right.

ONE  
Great.

THE OTHER  
So, have a good day then!

ONE  
Right.

*The lights come up in the auditorium. The recorded applause continues while the audience leaves the auditorium, with all lights up.*