

JULIET



A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

by

Gundogdu GENCER



J U L I E T

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A P L A Y I N T W O A C T S
b y
G ü n G E N C E R

Can not be performed without the written permission of the playwright

Any requests for permission to stage the play must be directed to the playwright

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THE SCENE IS THE KITCHEN AND THE DINING ROOM OF A REMOTE BEACH HOUSE / A HALF-WAY HOUSE FOR PSYCHIATRIC PATIENTS. THE APRON OR JUST THE DOWNSTAGE AREA WILL SERVE AS THE BEACH / DESERT. THE SCENE CHANGES MUST BE WITH A MINIMUM OF FUSS AND PHYSICAL CHANGE AND MAINLY THROUGH A HEAVY RELIANCE ON LIGHTING CHANGES.

CHARACTERS:

GEORGE / JOHN

JOYCE / PAULA

TIM /NICK

LENA / THE LITTLE GIRL

LIZ

ACT ONE

(GEORGE AND JOYCE ARE IN THE KITCHEN, PREPARING CHRISTMAS DINNER, USING BIG, CHOPPING KNIVES. THEY ARE BOTH OVERWEIGHT. SO IS THEIR DAUGHTER, LIZ. TIM AND LENA, BY CONTRAST, ARE SLIM, ALMOST ANAEMIC.)

GEORGE: Is it tough?

JOYCE: The steak?

GEORGE: Yeah. The steak.

JOYCE: Scotch fillet.

JOYCE: Not eye fillet.

GEORGE: No. Too expensive.

JOYCE: Not by much.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Which butcher?

GEORGE: The one in town.

JOYCE: He's bad news.

GEORGE: I know.

JOYCE: Why not Gary's, then?

GEORGE: You and your bloody Gary. **(PAUSE)** He asked about you.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: It's out of the way.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Gary's shop.

JOYCE: Only a bit.

GEORGE: It'd rot in this heat. The meat.

JOYCE: He is better.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Chinese, is it?

GEORGE: I don't know.

JOYCE: Nice?

GEORGE: I don't know.

JOYCE: Maybe Vietnamese.

GEORGE: Wouldn't bet on it.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Could be Chinese.

JOYCE: Nice?

GEORGE: Can't tell them apart.

JOYCE: No.

GEORGE: One of the girls did.

JOYCE: Girls?

GEORGE: In the office.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Give me the recipe.

JOYCE: Oh. Vietnamese?

GEORGE: Who?

JOYCE: The girl.

GEORGE: I don't know.

JOYCE: Ginger.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Where's the ginger?

GEORGE: How should I know?

JOYCE: I don't know.

GEORGE: You don't know?

JOYCE: You don't know?

GEORGE: They're all slanted.

JOYCE: (FINDS THE GINGER): Here it is. It was here, under my nose.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Must be nice.

GEORGE: All skinny. Can't tell.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: The chinks.

JOYCE: The food.

GEORGE: Slanted and skinny.

JOYCE: Not all. I know this...

GEORGE: Yeah, they don't eat.

JOYCE: 'Course they do.

GEORGE: Can't trust them.

JOYCE: No?

GEORGE: 'Cause they don't eat.

JOYCE: They don't?

GEORGE: Can't trust anyone skinny.

JOYCE: Yeah...

GEORGE: And slanted.

JOYCE: Well...

GEORGE: Especially skinny.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: No appetite.

JOYCE: For Christmas dinner?

GEORGE: No. I do. They don't.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Have no appetite.

JOYCE: I haven't known any.

GEORGE: No appetite. No good.

JOYCE: I wish I didn't.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Have an appetite.

GEORGE: You're healthy.

JOYCE: Yeah, right. I'm healthy.

GEORGE: Fat and healthy.

JOYCE: Fat isn't.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Healthy.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: I'm not fat.

GEORGE: And I'm Greta Garbo.

JOYCE: You're what?

GEORGE: You are fat.

JOYCE: Cuddly. Plump...ish.

GEORGE: Yeah, yeah.

JOYCE: Some men like that.

GEORGE: I don't.

JOYCE: Some men do.

GEORGE: I bet they do. Meaty.

JOYCE: I don't either.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: I said I don't. I always did.

GEORGE: Like fat women?

JOYCE: Fat men. Like you.

GEORGE: Big bone structure.

JOYCE: And a big gizzard.

GEORGE: Took after me Dad.

JOYCE: I don't remember him. Do you?

GEORGE: No. He must have been like me. Peasant ancestors.

JOYCE: Peasants aren't fat.

GEORGE: They weren't.

JOYCE: They weren't peasants anyway.

GEORGE: Weren't they?

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Liz hasn't got that.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Big bones.

GEORGE: She's fat. **(PAUSE)** What do you mean?

JOYCE: She's cute and cuddly.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

JOYCE: Like mummy. **(CHOPS FOOD.)**

GEORGE: She won't find a husband. No man will have her for a wife.

JOYCE: She doesn't want one.

GEORGE: Bull!

JOYCE: No, husband. She doesn't. She says she won't be owned.

GEORGE: Of course she does.

JOYCE: How do you know?

GEORGE: Every lazy woman does.

JOYCE: I'm not lazy.

GEORGE: No.

JOYCE: She works.

GEORGE: Bloody social work.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: They all wanted my money.

JOYCE: Who?

GEORGE: All her boyfriends.

JOYCE: See?

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: She did have boyfriends.

GEORGE: I know. **(CHOPS FOOD.)**

JOYCE: But no husband. Thanks to you.

GEORGE: Right.

JOYCE: Oh, well...

GEORGE: Well, they can't have it.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: My money.

JOYCE: Don't I know it?

GEORGE: Your money, too. You know the will.

JOYCE: Thanks Georgie.

GEORGE: You worked hard, too.

JOYCE: To build a life.

GEORGE: For my Joycie.

JOYCE: Together.

GEORGE: From scratch.

JOYCE: Blood and tears.

GEORGE: Worked our arse off.

JOYCE: Not nice.

GEORGE: We did.

JOYCE: Arse. Not nice.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Let's go to Europe.

GEORGE: Europe?

JOYCE: To Venice, Paris, Vienna.

GEORGE: Not Venice.

JOYCE: Gondolas...

GEORGE: Open sewers. Stinks.

JOYCE: You haven't been there.

GEORGE: I haven't? I know, though.

JOYCE: Yeah?

GEORGE: Yeah. No sanitation.

JOYCE: Paris, then.

GEORGE: What for?

JOYCE: Cafés, the Eiffel tower...

GEORGE: They serve frogs.

JOYCE: In the Eiffel tower? No.

GEORGE: In Paris. Paris, France.

JOYCE: Have you?

GEORGE: I can't remember. **(PAUSE)** And snails.

JOYCE: No!

GEORGE: No proper food.

JOYCE: I haven't tried snails.

GEORGE: Gary doesn't sell them.

JOYCE: Maybe, Gary...

GEORGE: Nothing like a good steak.

JOYCE: Don't they have any?

GEORGE: Too expensive.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: The Louvre...

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Where they keep Mona Lisa.

GEORGE: All old stuff.

JOYCE: Classics. You like antiques.

GEORGE: Can't buy them.

JOYCE: You can't?

GEORGE: No, too expensive.

JOYCE: I guess so. Still...

GEORGE: You can't.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: I like it here.

JOYCE: Yeah, quiet.

GEORGE: Away from it all.

JOYCE: It is quiet. The desert.

GEORGE: Yeah, peaceful.

JOYCE: I can hear the surf, though. At night.

GEORGE: Nobody there.

JOYCE: Nobody around.

GEORGE: Yeah. Soothing.

JOYCE: No one to talk to.

GEORGE: No one to listen to.

JOYCE: The desert.

GEORGE: It was a good buy.

JOYCE: For beach frontage.

GEORGE: I like the desert.

JOYCE: Not really.

GEORGE: I do.

JOYCE: It's not a desert. really.

GEORGE: Nobody around.

JOYCE: We've got enough food.

GEORGE: Should be enough for three days.

JOYCE: We've got our family.

GEORGE: Two hundred kilometres.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: To the nearest soul.

JOYCE: Only four hours' driving.

GEORGE: In the four-wheel.

JOYCE: That was a good buy.

GEORGE: Yeah.

JOYCE: None other would do.

GEORGE: Why?

JOYCE: In the desert. The four-wheel.

GEORGE: That's why.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Why we bought it. Besides, it was a good buy.

JOYCE: Yeah.

GEORGE: Four bloody hours.

JOYCE: It's a breeze.

GEORGE: Across the desert.

JOYCE: A hot breeze.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: No good for Europe, though.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: The four-wheel.

GEORGE: Why not?

JOYCE: We'd have to hire a car.

GEORGE: Can't take the Jag.

JOYCE: A Citroën should do.

GEORGE: They're all mad in Europe.

JOYCE: Mad?

GEORGE: (PAUSE) The drivers. The bloody drivers.

JOYCE: How would you know?

GEORGE: I was sixteen... Or was it six?... My father... No.

JOYCE: You don't remember.

GEORGE: I have nothing to remember.

JOYCE: Ancient history.

GEORGE: It never changes.

JOYCE: Ancient history?

GEORGE: Europe.

JOYCE: Where's the duck?

GEORGE: No one does.

JOYCE: I'd better put it in the oven.

GEORGE: Look at me.

JOYCE: The duck!

GEORGE: It's not a duck.

JOYCE: Of course it is.

GEORGE: A drake.

JOYCE: It looks like a duck to me.

GEORGE: Drake's tastier.

JOYCE: Where is it?

GEORGE: It's the male, see? Drake's the male. That's why it's tastier.

JOYCE: Where'd you put it?

GEORGE: Should be there. Somewhere.

(JOYCE FINDS THE DRAKE)

JOYCE: Three hours should do.

GEORGE: I wouldn't know.

JOYCE: What's the time?

GEORGE: Where's your watch?

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: Your watch.

JOYCE: Oh, the Paddock?

GEORGE: Bloody Patek Phillipe.

JOYCE: I don't know.

GEORGE: Cost me a fortune.

JOYCE: I know Georgie. Sorry. Weren't you sweet?

GEORGE: You wanted it.

JOYCE: It must be about three. **(SHE LOOKS AT GEORGE'S WATCH.)**

GEORGE: I shouldn't bother.

JOYCE: It should be ready by six.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: The pepper grinder.

GEORGE: What's wrong with ground pepper?

JOYCE: It's not the same thing.

GEORGE: Who can tell?

JOYCE: You didn't forget the peppercorns?

GEORGE: Spent a bloody hour to find them.

JOYCE: Not green ones again?

GEORGE: No. **(HE FINDS THE PEPPERCORNS.)** Here. Why don't you buy ground pepper like normal people? **(PAUSE)** I mean, ordinary people. They grind it for you. Much easier to use. You'll never learn. Never do yourself what you can get others do for you.

JOYCE: It tastes better. The aroma...

GEORGE: The next thing, you'll be baking your own bread.

JOYCE: I wish I could. Liz had a recipe. You know what I'm like. I'd mess it up.

GEORGE: What's wrong with Tip-Top bread? They bake it and slice it for you. Nice and white. Where's Liz anyway?

(LENA ENTERS, CARRYING SUITCASES THAT ARE OBVIOUSLY TOO BIG AND HEAVY FOR HER.)

LENA: Anybody home? **(SHE SEES GEORGE AND JOYCE.)** Oh, you must be...

JOYCE: (INTERRUPTS HER. BUSINESS-LIKE AND OUT OF CHARACTER)
Not yet darling. You're far too early. Liz hasn't had her entrance yet. Shivers!

LENA: Oh... Sorry. **(EXITS.)**

(SILENCE. GEORGE AND JOYCE RE-COMPOSE THEMSELVES.)

GEORGE: ...nice and white. Where's Liz anyway?

JOYCE: She must have fallen asleep. The kid always does that to her. She goes and reads him things for his afternoon nap, and before you know it, she's sound asleep.

GEORGE: I like the kid. He takes after me.

JOYCE: I do, too. No, he doesn't. He's sweet. I like biting his arms and legs. His toes. Mmmmm... He reminds me...

GEORGE: I like him anyway. He's got a future. The other day, he was trying to flog off a little rock to a kid in the street. He washed it, put it in a box, found some gift wrapping. A ribbon and everything. Flogging it for ninety nine cents. Only six and already... The kid's got a future.

JOYCE: Yeah.

GEORGE: You know why the Yanks are so successful? You wouldn't have a clue. They are realistic. That's why. They know what makes the world go round. They know there's a sucker born every minute. If you can't find them, you're a sucker yourself. So the race is on. It is a bloody race, you know. You know the July tariff increases... Luxury goods, my foot. That's the trouble with these governments. Those bloody public servants. Because they can't afford to buy good crystal, slap, luxury goods. They have no taste. No... refinement. That's what culture is all about. People in Europe would go without a meal to buy good crystal. The merchandise I import is no Taiwan or Hong Kong junk. No sir, it's genuine Bohemian crystal.

JOYCE: Where's the ham?

GEORGE: Real stuff.

JOYCE: The ham.

GEORGE: D'you want me to carve it?

JOYCE: No. It dries up. You'll do it later.

GEORGE: Where's the electric knife?

JOYCE: Can't you find anything? I'll get it out later. I wish Liz woke the kid up. I don't want him tugging at our skirts all night. If he sleeps too long now, he'll stay up until God knows when.

GEORGE: I like the kids. Even the little kid. She's started calling me Da-da now. Did you hear that? She goes da-da da-da. She's sweet.

JOYCE: That's the first thing all kids say.

GEORGE: As if you'd know.

JOYCE: I was bloody working, wasn't I? To help you out. Remember? You couldn't even afford a secretary then. Remember?

GEORGE: Yeah, yeah, but a kid needs a mother's love.

JOYCE: You don't say.

GEORGE: That's her problem, you know.

JOYCE: Whose? Pass me the mayonnaise.

GEORGE: Liz's. Mother's love. I don't mind the little kid at all. She is so plump. And sweet.

JOYCE: You don't mind anything, do you? Why don't you mind anything? Because you don't care. You can't remember anything. You would, if you cared. You never do. You never have. **(PAUSE)** Pass me the mayonnaise.

GEORGE: What the hell for?

JOYCE: Potato salad. **(PAUSE)** Shallots?

GEORGE: In the fridge.

JOYCE: I'll boil them now.

GEORGE: Shallots?

JOYCE: Potatoes.

GEORGE: Where shall I put the meat?

JOYCE: I don't know what you're making, do I? How long does it take?

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Your Chinese dish.

GEORGE: How should I know?

JOYCE: You've got the recipe.

GEORGE: I don't know where I've put it.

JOYCE: I think it's hardly appropriate.

GEORGE: I don't remember where I've put it.

JOYCE: Chinese for Christmas!

GEORGE: The green bag!

JOYCE: Chinese aren't Christians.

GEORGE: I took it into the bedroom. I think.

JOYCE: Oh well, why not?

GEORGE: I took everything into the bedroom.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: My green bag.

JOYCE: What green bag?

GEORGE: The one I bought last week. Cost me a bundle, too. real leather, my foot. It's animal skin after all. They charge like a bull.

JOYCE: Perhaps it's cow-hide.

GEORGE: It's a disgrace. Bloody animal skin, after all.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Are you sure you put it in the green bag?

GEORGE: I think so. I'll go and have a look.

JOYCE: See if Liz is still asleep.

GEORGE: When are they coming?

JOYCE: I don't know. Soon, I guess.

GEORGE: I'd better go and find the recipe.

(GEORGE GOES OUT. JOYCE WASHES AND CHOPS THE SHALLOTS, BOILS THE POTATOES AND NIBBLES ON THINGS AS SHE DOES.)

JOYCE: I don't know why I put up with him. He can be so exasperating. I don't know. We've gone through so much together. I guess that must be it. And the things we have. I can buy anything. Well, almost. We did struggle, though. I'll give it to George. He is tenacious. And hard-working. Well, he used to be. He doesn't have to, anymore. We could retire tomorrow and live comfortably. Why should I throw all that away? We could go to Europe. Not London, though. Everyone goes to London. I guess it's all right for the theatres. One could go to Europe and spend a few weeks in

London, just to see the plays. But Paris, Vienna... that's where it's at. George couldn't be bothered. He's all right, Georgie. He's mine. He's got his family, though. Somewhere in Europe. God knows where they are. They may all even be dead now. Perhaps I will go. George doesn't mind. Frenchmen... Why not? George can have his crystals. I will go. Where did he put the goose? I don't know if I should stuff it.

LIZ: (ENTERS) Hi, Mum!

JOYCE: Hi! The goose... Do you know where your father put it?

LIZ: In the fridge, I think. What's there to eat, I'm starving.

JOYCE: There are some cream buns.

LIZ: Mum, I'm on a diet.

JOYCE: It's not real cream.

LIZ: That's all right, then. **(OPENS THE FRIDGE)** D'you want the goose in the oven?

JOYCE: No, I'll roast the duck first. Then I can re-heat it. It won't dry. The goose would. I'll stuff the goose while the duck's cooking. **(SHE PUTS THE DRAKE IN THE OVEN AND TAKING THE GANDER FROM THE FRIDGE, STARTS STUFFING IT. LIZ, IN THE MEANTIME, IS STUFFING HERSELF.)** Is the kid still asleep?

LIZ: No, he's watching television. I mean, video.

JOYCE: I bet your father's there with him, watching it, if it's a violent movie.

LIZ: Leave the boys alone, Mum. We'll watch the other one tomorrow.

JOYCE: You're chirpy today. Is it Tim?

LIZ: Yeah. He shouldn't be long.

JOYCE: You haven't known him for long, have you?

LIZ: Does it matter? I had known Len even shorter.

JOYCE: I suppose. Poor Len. He was...

LIZ: TIM's lovely.

JOYCE: But only a couple of weeks... Now, don't get me wrong. I think it was a good idea to invite him over for Christmas. I can get to know him.

LIZ: Mum!

JOYCE: Socially.

LIZ: He is sexy.

JOYCE: Does he know about the kids and...

LIZ: Yes, he does and no, he doesn't mind.

JOYCE: He should get along well with Dad.

LIZ: You're kidding. He's not like that.

JOYCE: Like what?

LIZ: Like Dad. He's... sensitive, gentle.

JOYCE: What does he do?

LIZ: I told you, Mum.

JOYCE: I meant for a living.

LIZ: Oh, odd jobs. Apparently he even worked as Santa Claus at some stage. Just to keep alive. And he is alive. You should see him when he finishes a painting. He is on top of the world. Oh, you'll love him, Mum. **(PAUSE)** You will like him very much.

JOYCE: Do you love him?

LIZ: Don't be silly, Mum.

JOYCE: Well?

LIZ: I've only known him for a couple of weeks.

JOYCE: Did Dad say he's interested?

LIZ: You know what Dad's like.

JOYCE: If he can make a buck. That's fair.

LIZ: He'd sell anything.

JOYCE: Almost.

LIZ: Anything. He would. If he can't devour it himself, he makes money out of other people who want to.

JOYCE: Has Tim sold any yet?

LIZ: No. But he is good. Some galleries are interested.

JOYCE: Which ones?

LIZ: Not many. Not big ones. In fact... one.

JOYCE: Which one?

LIZ: What do you know about galleries, Mum?

JOYCE: As much as you know about men. Which one?

LIZ: He's not after Dad's money.

JOYCE: Which gallery?

LIZ: A friend of his... He is opening one, next month.

JOYCE: See what I mean?

LIZ: No, Mum.

JOYCE: You don't?

LIZ: You know what I mean.

JOYCE: All right, let's give it a chance.

LIZ: He'll make it. He's good.

GEORGE: Let's hope George thinks so, too. Don't let them talk politics.

LIZ: No. I'd better check the kids.

(AS LIZ STARTS TO GO OUT, GEORGE ENTERS.)

JOYCE: (TO GEORGE) Did you find it?

LIZ: Hi, Dad!

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Your green bag.

LIZ: Hi, Dad.

GEORGE: What about the green bag?

(LIZ EXITS, UPSET. GEORGE LOOKS PUZZLED.)

GEORGE: What's with her?

JOYCE: What do you expect? Where's the recipe?

GEORGE: In the green bag. I told you. What's with Liz?

JOYCE: And where is the green bag?

GEORGE: How should I know? What's wrong with Liz?

JOYCE: For God's sake, George. You'll never understand, will you?

GEORGE: Understand what?

JOYCE: You've never really tried to find out what goes on in other people's minds, what they feel, their sensitivities...

GEORGE: I respect people's privacy.

JOYCE: When it suits you. She got upset because you ignored her. She's all excited about Tim and you don't give a damn.

GEORGE: Don't start that again.

JOYCE: Start what?

GEORGE: You always start things. Leave me alone. Where's the gander?

JOYCE: Stuffed. You are alone. You are alone now, Georgie baby. Bobby was your only friend.

GEORGE: Which Bobby? Oh, Bobby. See what I mean? You're trying to start all that again.

JOYCE: Robert Sinclair and Company. Poor Bobby.

GEORGE: Poor Bobby.

JOYCE: You ruined him.

GEORGE: It was a matter of life and death. **(PAUSE)** If I remember correctly.

JOYCE: You remember?

GEORGE: Wasn't it?

JOYCE: You ruined him. He'll only last six months after the bankruptcy, remember?

GEORGE: That was a long time ago. It was. Tell me it was, Joycie. How's the drake going?

JOYCE: It wasn't that long ago.

GEORGE: (RATHER MONOTONOUSLY) The company has to win this contract. It is a matter of life and death. We either get this contract or we get eaten alive. We can't allow anyone to stand in the way. What's good for the company...

JOYCE: It's all right, George. Forget it. It's just that...

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: It wasn't very nice.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: What you did to Bobby.

GEORGE: Nice! Christ, woman, you think you can be nice and survive out there? Nice! I can't afford to be nice. Did it ever occur to you that

you can be nice because I am not? I earn it for you. It's a man-eat-man world out there. Nice, my foot!

JOYCE: Dog.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Dog eat dog.

GEORGE: Yeah, see my point?

JOYCE: Pass me the mayonnaise, will you?

GEORGE: Say it nicely.

JOYCE: Go to hell.

(BOTH KEEP BUSY PREPARING FOOD FOR A WHILE)

JOYCE: Tim should be arriving soon.

GEORGE: Isn't Len coming?

JOYCE: Don't be silly George, that was last Christmas.

GEORGE: Oh.

JOYCE: He was here last Christmas.

GEORGE: You mean we are doing the last one.

JOYCE: Of course not. Now listen. This is the one with Tim.

GEORGE: Has Liz married Tim now?

JOYCE: Christ, George, you are hopeless. Liz marries eighteen months later. She marries Jack, not Tim. We go to their wedding,

remember? We invite Liz and her husband, that is Jack, for Christmas dinner two years after this one.

GEORGE: Who's Tim, then?

JOYCE: I've told you George. Liz's new boyfriend, the painter. The father of Liz's third child, to be born next year. Pass me the oregano.

GEORGE: Oh, here. **(PAUSE)** Tim?

JOYCE: Yes, and a very nice young man, Liz tells me.

GEORGE: Right. So this is the one with Tim.

JOYCE: What?

GEORGE: This is the... well... Christmas with Tim.

JOYCE: And Lena.

GEORGE: Lena?

JOYCE: Right. Christ, you're slow.

GEORGE: Doesn't it taste better with thyme?

JOYCE: Thyme makes it tough. Oregano doesn't.

GEORGE: I didn't like Len much. He was old.

JOYCE: Tim is young.

GEORGE: Well...

JOYCE: I did have good conversations with Len before...

GEORGE: Huh!

JOYCE: What's that supposed to mean?

GEORGE: Talk. That's all you do.

JOYCE: You know it's not, George.

GEORGE: I guess...

JOYCE: Never mind. He was good.

GEORGE: Don't you ever get sick of doing nothing?

JOYCE: Go jump in the lake.

GEORGE: Action. That's what you don't have. **(PAUSE)** Lake? **(PAUSE)**
When are they coming? What's his name?

JOYCE: (EXASPERATED) Tim.

GEORGE: Right. Tim. So this is it, eh? Christmas. My family. All gathered. Christmas dinner. This is what it's all about. Family, good food, nice things... Christmas here is not like in Europe, though. All this heat. You can't have Christmas in the middle of summer. In Europe, in winter... The snow... All nice and white. Where's Liz anyway?

(LENA ENTERS, CARRYING SUITCASES THAT ARE OBVIOUSLY TOO BIG AND HEAVY FOR HER.)

LENA: Anybody home? **(SHE SEES GEORGE AND JOYCE.)** Oh, you must be...

JOYCE: Liz's mother.

GEORGE: I'm George.

TIM: (ENTERS) Hello. Sorry I'm late. I'm Tim. Oh, and this is Lena.

GEORGE: Hello Lena. A friend of...

LIZ: (ENTERS) Tim.

TIM: Hi. **(LIZ KISSES TIM. TIM TO GEORGE)** Yes?

GEORGE: Tim's.

TIM: What?

GEORGE: (TAKES THE SUITCASES OFF LENA. TO LENA) Sit down.

LIZ: Who's she?

GEORGE: Lena.

LENA: Yes?

JOYCE: Pleased to meet you Tim.

LIZ: Who is she?

JOYCE: It's me dear. What's wrong with you?

GEORGE: Stop nagging and check the drake, Lena must be hungry.

JOYCE: Liz.

LIZ: Tim.

GEORGE: Joyce.

TIM: Who?

LIZ: Her.

LENA: I'm fine.

(A MIAOW)

TIM: (GIGGLES) This is a farce.

LIZ: Who is she?

LENA: She's Parsley, my cat.

LIZ: (TO LENA) Who are you?

LENA: I'm Lena. You must be Liz.

TIM: She was hiking.

JOYCE: In the middle of the desert?

TIM: No, I picked her up just before the turn-off.

GEORGE: Where are you heading?

LENA: Mmmm... Smells yummy. Is it the Christmas roast?

JOYCE: (AS SHE TAKES TIM AWAY, TO LENA) Will you join us?

GEORGE: You will join us, of course. Unless you want to be on your way.

LENA: No, I don't.

GEORGE: What kind of car does he drive?

LENA: It was a very comfy trip. Thank you Tim.

GEORGE: (LOOKS OUT OF THE WINDOW.) That old bomb. Lucky you've made it.

LENA: Can I take Parsley out for some fresh air?

JOYCE: Sure.

LENA: There aren't any dogs around here, I hope.

GEORGE: No. Only dingoes and vultures. No, no dogs. I'll take you to the backyard. It's all fenced. The cat can't run away.

LENA: Parsley. She never runs away.

LIZ: I'll take her. **(TO LENA)** Come on.

(LENA AND LIZ EXIT.)

JOYCE: I'm sorry. We just didn't expect her.

GEORGE: Lena.

JOYCE: Yes. No, we didn't.

TIM: **(GETS UP)** I hope it's all right. I'm sure she'd understand if it isn't.

GEORGE: No, of course it's all right. How could she leave anyway? Walk?
(HE LAUGHS.)

JOYCE: Sit down Tim, make yourself comfortable.

TIM: **(SITS DOWN)** Thanks. Liz told me all about you.

GEORGE: Oh.

JOYCE: She didn't tell me a lot about you. **(PAUSE)** Would you like a drink?

TIM: Yes. Thanks. I'm parched.

JOYCE: Hot, isn't it? George!

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: Drinkies.

(GEORGE GOES TO FETCH A DRINK.)

TIM: At least the old bomb didn't break down.

GEORGE: It could be dangerous, you know. In the desert.

TIM: I know. **(HE TAKES THE DRINK.)** Thanks. **(HE DRINKS.)**

GEORGE: Well...

TIM: Tim.

GEORGE: Well, Tim, have you known Liz for long?

TIM: Well, it's only been...

JOYCE: Another one, Tim?

TIM: No, thanks.

JOYCE: I hope you like stuffed goose.

GEORGE: Gander.

TIM: Sounds great. Actually I used to have a recipe for stuffing. See if I
can remember.

GEORGE: Where are the girls?

TIM: It is peculiar, don't you think, apparently Parsley never runs away.

JOYCE: It must be Lena's attraction.

GEORGE: Well... What do you do, Tim?

TIM: I paint.

GEORGE: What, as in paintings?

TIM: (LAUGHS) Yes, you could say I'm in painting. **(LAUGHS)** As in oil...

JOYCE: Artist, George.

TIM: I wouldn't call myself that.

JOYCE: A modest artist. Liz tells me you're good.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: Joyce!

JOYCE: What? Oh, she told me he is, you are a good painter.

TIM: I think she likes me. You can hardly expect her to be objective.

JOYCE: I think she likes your work, too.

TIM: She's never seen any of it.

JOYCE: Have you been doing it for long?

TIM: (EMBARRASSED) Well, we...

JOYCE: Painting.

TIM: Oh... yes. Well, three, four years now.

GEORGE: You have to die to become a famous artist, don't you?

TIM: I want to try other ways first.

(TIM LAUGHS AT HIS OWN JOKE. JOYCE JOINS IN OUT OF COURTESY, GEORGE DOESN'T.)

GEORGE: Like what?

TIM: Like... I want to improve myself, my art. Be good in what I do. Be a good painter.

GEORGE: How would you know that?

TIM: What do you mean?

JOYCE: Leave the boy alone, George.

TIM: No, its all right. Really. **(TO GEORGE)** I just don't understand what you mean.

GEORGE: How can you tell if you are a good painter?

JOYCE: People can tell. Like with... Leonardo.

GEORGE: He is dead, isn't he?

(THE SOUND OF THE WIND IS HEARD. IT KEEPS BUILDING UP.)

TIM: There are some who aren't dead.

JOYCE: Don't mind him, Tim.

TIM: No, it's all right. George has a point. A lot of people say the same thing. It is one of those myths, you know. I guess part of it is that once an artist is dead, his oeuvre is complete, there is no more to come. Or he is so old that everyone gives up hope that he'll produce anything worthwhile any more. Once people know that the supply is limited, if you like.

JOYCE: The storm's on its way.

TIM: Not the cyclone.

JOYCE: No, the cyclone's going past about a hundred kilometres away. I'll check the radio.

(JOYCE TURNS ON THE RADIO.)

THE RADIO: *The cyclone is going past about a hundred kilometres away from the coast. Although some high winds are anticipated, it is not expected at this stage that the cyclone will hit the coast.*

GEORGE: (HE HAS ONLY CAUGHT THE LAST BIT. HE PANICS.) The cyclone will hit the coast.

JOYCE: No, George, it said it is *not* expected that it will.

(GEORGE LOOKS AT TIM FOR CONFIRMATION. TIM NODS.)

TIM: High winds, though.

JOYCE: Enough to uproot fifty-foot trees.

GEORGE: And poles.

TIM: I guess it would. Do you get them along the coast often?

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: Another drink, Tim?

TIM: No, thanks.

GEORGE: Well, how do you know?

TIM: You said it. You must have seen it happen before.

GEORGE: What?

JOYCE: The trees, George. **(TO TIM)** Do you paint trees?

TIM: No, I think their natural colour is better.

(TIM LAUGHS AT HIS OWN JOKE. JOYCE JOINS IN, GEORGE DOESN'T.)

GEORGE: What do you paint?

TIM: Paintings. **(HE ATTEMPTS TO LAUGH AGAIN, BUT WITH NO ENCOURAGEMENT FROM JOYCE, GIVES UP.)** But, seriously, it is not the subject matter that counts, but what the painting is.

GEORGE: Come again.

TIM: You see, I can paint anything. It doesn't matter. What matters is what I see. I try to capture what I see, my impression of it.

JOYCE: It's called impressionism, George.

TIM: I paint it as it is with me, inside of me...

GEORGE: You digest it.

TIM: In a way, yes. I'd like to get to the essence of things. They don't have an essence in themselves, we give them that. It's like naming things.

JOYCE: Naming?

TIM: Yes. Things exist whether you have a name for them or not. Then you give them a name, give them essence. The same with painting. If I can capture that essence...

GEORGE: You capture things in your paintings.

TIM: Not things. You can't capture things. It's like owning things. Or people. You just can't do that.

GEORGE: (UNCOMPREHENDING) I can't own things?

TIM: When you do, they stop being what they were to start with. They become part of you, your extension. What you end up owning is something quite different because you change it purely by owning it.

GEORGE: I do own a big company.

TIM: And it would be quite a different company if you didn't own it, right?

GEORGE: Of course.

TIM: And the people in it. Do you own them, too? This house, the four-wheel drive... Do you own your family?

GEORGE: It's like family. We're all like a big family in the company.

TIM: You own the family.

GEORGE: Yes. Well... It's a bit different with Joycie. I don't know who owns who.

TIM: Exactly. Once you own something... **(LOOKS AT JOYCE)** Or someone... It starts owning you. It runs your life. Like the master and the slave. A master can never be free if he owns slaves.

JOYCE: (SHE IS A BIT LOST AND TRIES TO RECOVER.) Which painters do you like? Impressionists, I guess. I was planning to go to the Louvre. Still life or portraits?

TIM: (MAKING AN EFFORT TO BE POLITE.) It doesn't really matter. If the artist has managed to capture...

GEORGE: How do you know if you've captured something?

TIM: What happens if you try to capture a beautiful bird? In spring. Chirping and flitting. You capture it. It's not the same bird any more. It's in your hands. You can hear its heart beat in fear. It's a frightened bird now. It's not the same.

(GEORGE WANDERS OFF INTO THE KITCHEN.)

JOYCE: It's great talking to you, Tim. I really like conversations like this with artistic people. One can learn so much. The frightened bird... I never would have... That was so well put. It made me understand... things. You are very clever.

TIM: Well...

JOYCE: No, really... I like you a lot. Liz has good taste. In men, I mean. In other things she is a bit... well, unsophisticated. Have you got any of your paintings with you?

TIM: I have a few drawings.

JOYCE: I'd love to see them.

(TIM GETS UP TO GO.)

JOYCE: Not now dear. Later. I'll come around tonight. You can show me then. I'm sure you don't want to sleep in the room where the kids are. They cry all night. Liz hardly gets any sleep.

TIM: Liz?

JOYCE: I'm sure she won't mind. I'll give you one of the spare rooms. Lena... Was that her name? **(TIM NODS.)** She can sleep in the other spare room. You can tell me all about your drawings tonight.

TIM: I'm glad you like art. It's not very often that an artist finds someone who is genuinely interested.

JOYCE: Of course I am. That'll be lovely. I like talking to artistic people. I like picking on their brains, so to speak.

GEORGE: (COMES BACK FROM THE KITCHEN.) So who decides you are a good painter? Can you tell?

TIM: I can't, with my own paintings. But you can. The public can.

GEORGE: You are saying, if I like your paintings, you are a good painter. I know nothing about paintings.

TIM: That doesn't matter. If I've succeeded in conveying to you the essence...

JOYCE: I like landscapes myself.

GEORGE: Look, if I like something, I'll buy it. Art is big business these days. Good investment, too, if you're smart. You're saying it's a good painting if people like it. If they like it, they'll buy it. So if you sell, you must be good. How many paintings have you sold so far?

TIM: Well, if you put it like that...

GEORGE: What sort of price range? Look, I believe in people putting their money where their mouth is. The rest is bullshit.

TIM: I haven't really exhibited...

GEORGE: D'you think they'll sell?

TIM: To be honest, I wouldn't want to sell them.

GEORGE: You want people to like them, but not sell them?

TIM: I'd love to make a living as a painter...

JOYCE: I'm sure you will.

GEORGE: He won't if he won't sell them. Let me have a look at them and see...

(LENA COMES IN, OUT OF BREATH.)

LENA: Poor Parsley was so frightened. I think the storm's coming. The wind is so strong. The cyclone must have changed direction.

JOYCE: Let me check. **(SHE TURNS ON THE RADIO.)**

THE RADIO: *The cyclone has changed direction. It is now approaching the coast very fast. Fortunately, the part of the coast Cyclone Marjorie is heading for is totally uninhabited and no lives or property are in danger.*

GEORGE: **(TURNS OFF THE RADIO.)** Uninhabited!

LENA: I'll give Parsley some warm milk. She likes that. May I?

JOYCE: Go for your life. In the fridge.

GEORGE: I'll show you, love.

(GEORGE TAKES LENA INTO THE KITCHEN. JOYCE TURNS ON THE RADIO AGAIN. THERE'S A LOT OF STATIC, BUT SHE MANAGES TO GET A STATION, ALTHOUGH QUITE FAINTLY. CHRISTMAS CAROLS ARE PLAYING. JOYCE AND TIM KEEP TALKING.)

LENA: I'll warm some up.

GEORGE: I like slim women. You have a great body.

LENA: You're all right for your age. And you're straight. I like that.

GEORGE: Would you...

LENA: Oh Tim, how would you like to have a bit of a rest? All that driving...
You must be tired. Shall I run the bath for you?

TIM: Yes. Thanks.

(LENA GOES OUT CARRYING THE BOWL OF MILK.)

TIM: I'd better go and settle in.

JOYCE: Make yourself comfortable. It's the third room on your left.

(THE WIND HAS BECOME QUITE FIERCE NOW. CYCLONE MARJORIE IS APPROACHING. TIM GOES TO THE WINDOW AND LOOKS OUT, CHECKING THE WEATHER.)

JOYCE: (TURNS THE RADIO OFF.) Check the duck, George.

GEORGE: She's nice. Sort of, like a child, but not really a child.

JOYCE: You're too old for that sort of thing, George. Don't make an ass of yourself.

TIM: If you'll excuse me. **(GOES OUT.)**

GEORGE: You thinks so, do you? You know, there's more than one way to skin a cat.

JOYCE: Only / can put up with you, Georgie baby. **(PAUSE)** Go on, go for your life. She's in the small room. **(PAUSE)** Go on.

(GEORGE STARTS CARVING THE HAM. JOYCE GOES BACK TO THE RADIO AND TURNS IT ON AGAIN.)

LIZ: (ENTERS) I don't know about this Lena character.

(JOYCE TURNS OFF THE RADIO.)

LIZ: She acts as if she owns the place. She's running the bath for Tim now. She was stark naked feeding her bloody cat. She didn't even wince when I saw her. She told me she'd love to give Tim a good wash, rub his back.

GEORGE: Your Tim... He's a bit of a no-hoper, eh?

JOYCE: How would you know?

LIZ: He's all right. It's that Lena girl I can't stomach. She offered to rub my back, too. Bloody cheek!

GEORGE: He says he won't sell his paintings.

LIZ: Give him time. He just needs to find his feet. You will help[him, won't you Dad?

GEORGE: I'll see what I can do.

LIZ: He is so gentle, so sensitive.

JOYCE: Not like a bull in a china shop. Or was it crystal?

GEORGE: The only crystals I have are the ones I sell, thank you. And they are all intact pre-delivery, don't you worry.

JOYCE: I wish you were, too.

GEORGE: Where'd you meet him?

LIZ: Tim? Oh, just a coincidence.

GEORGE: He's not one of your loonies then, where you work?

JOYCE: That's not nice, calling them loonies.

LIZ: They're all people, individuals, like the rest of us.

GEORGE: Not like me, they're not. I've got my marbles.

LIZ: No, what I mean is, Dad, they all have problems like the rest of us. It's just that they can't cope. The whole idea is to give them a bit of room to be themselves, listen to them.

GEORGE: Can't you find a proper job? I'll talk to Frank, he's got...

LIZ: I like my job.

GEORGE: That's not a good sign, my girl. You'll end up a loony yourself.

JOYCE: Shut up, George. **(TO LIZ)** Go on, love. It sounds interesting.

LIZ: We have these psycho-drama sessions you see...

GEORGE: Oh, yeah...

LIZ: It's giving people a situation and assigning them roles. And when they play these roles a lot of the suppressed feelings, anxieties come out, so we sit down and talk about them afterwards.

GEORGE: They ought to be locked up.

JOYCE: Does it help them? Do they actually get better?

LIZ: It's a slow process Mum, but it does, eventually. See, someone gets worked up a bit, usually because of some traumatic event in the

past... We don't know what... Often they're not conscious of it themselves. It's usually too painful to remember.

GEORGE: You're spending my taxes playing games.

JOYCE: Don't they realise it's a game?

LIZ: Initially they do. But they get into it in no time. Sometimes we do, too.
We just get carried away.

GEORGE: Let me talk to Frank...

LIZ: Dad!

JOYCE: You play some of the parts, too.

LIZ: Yes, we do.

JOYCE: Fascinating.

LIZ: Mornings are the worst, usually, after a bad night. Nightmares and all that. We have relaxation classes in the morning. If we can calm them down by lunchtime, we have the psych-drama in the afternoon.

GEORGE: Do they talk any sense?

LIZ: In their own way. They have a different kind of logic, you know.

GEORGE: I bet they babble.

LIZ: It does sound like babble at first until you get to know them, get to know their problem. There is this man, for instance, this young man, who keeps talking about Juliet.

GEORGE: He doesn't think he is Romeo, does he? I thought a lot of them were Napoleons.

LIZ: No, but it became clear after a while that Juliet was the key to it all. One morning, John told me... It was John's shift... This man with the Juliet fixation had burst in. John was trying to recover from a heavy night. You know, with only the three of us, it's not easy. John and Paula are both ex-patients, but they're both lovely. Having gone through the whole thing themselves, they can really identify with the residents. See, we don't even call them patients.

GEORGE: Big bloody deal.

LIZ: Anyway, there was John...

(LIZ STARTS RE-ARRANGING THE STAGE AND DIRECTS GEORGE TO TAKE HIS PADDING OFF, SO THAT HE LOOKS SLIMMER. SHE PUTS A WIG ON HIM, TRANSFORMING HIM INTO JOHN.)

LIZ: I was in the kitchen with Paula, doing the dishes...

(LIZ TAKES HER OWN PADDING OFF, TAKES JOYCE INTO THE KITCHEN, TAKES HER PADDING OFF. SHE PUTS A WIG ON JOYCE, TRANSFORMING HER INTO PAULA. THE LIGHTS CHANGE TO THOSE OF THE HALF-WAY HOUSE, LEAVING A DARK SPOT UPSTAGE. TIM WALKS INTO THE SPOT QUITE CASUALLY, PUTTING A WIG ON. HE, AS NICK, CROUCHES IN THE DARK SPOT WITH HIS BACK TO THE AUDIENCE.)

LIZ: All of us had thought it was going to be a fairly quiet day. I think it was Christmas. Yes, yes it was. We'd organised a lovely Christmas dinner... Paula and I had finished doing the dishes. Paula was carving the ham, I was drying up.

NICK: (EMERGES FROM THE DARK SPOT.) My whole life's struggle has been... Hasbeen... Ha-sbeen... Sbeen... Sbeansbeansbeans... **(SINGING THE JINGLE)** Beanz Meanz Heinz... Beanz Meanz Heinz... The objective transposition of the subjective savoury of the integration of tertiary colours with primary, or rather primeval forms... The cranial representation of spherical negative space has been my ultimate aim... M-ultimat-aim... Mu-t'aime... Ma táime... Aim... Aim... Maim... Maim!... Ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta-ta!... The severance of... The severity of angular forms in conspicuous contrast with abdominal and other comparable cavities has formed the basis of the strife... Strife... Strife... Trife... Trife... Trifle striving of homo sapiens to achieve the terminal identification with the greater good... Good... Good... Good God Baal... As Baalbek features such an abortive concavity as to exemplify the desperation of the efforts of the Baalbekians to identify with the good residents of the neighbouring Gethsemane Irrefutably... Refute... Refute... Fute... Fute... Futile... Futile... Futile-ity of the piccolo to address the issues raised by the tuba has rendered Brueghel irrelevant. On the other hand, having two hands, a left-handed effort by Bosch would have been too close, too close... The cutting edge posing an unacceptable level of threat to the discursive sensibilities of predominantly bourgeois art critics of bloody Marys... Critics... Critiques... Teeks... Teeks... Ticks, ticks, ticks... Tic-toc, tic-toc, tic-toc... The intemperate passing of time, time, thyme or of water has been a pissing influence on the otherwise sensible, or more correctly, sensitive animus of what was to come. And it's come, it's come, it's come... Scum!... The astonishing ability of the fertility of the low lands to sprout great masters in line with the exploitative, explorative expansionist sea-farers has never bothered the fish, the

cod, who was making allowances and planning, indeed programming, codified with the promise of one in a thousand survivors... Vivors... Vye... Vivre... Viva... Viva... Vi-va... Vie... Vie en rose... La vie en rose feeds on manure. Not chicken manure. Good, decomposed, fibrous, slow-release manure produced as a direct beneficial end result of industrialisation following inevitably from the mud on the footsteps of constipated visionaries such as St. Paul. S-Paul... Spaul... And the other S.T.s, naturally not to be confused with S.R.s, which of course stands for various isotopes of strontium. The colour spectrum intrinsically conceived in strontium leaves no room for subjectivity in the context of structuralist methodology. This is a lamentable state of affairs for elements, lements, la-ments, laments... Lamentations of people wrapped in pink shrouds. In sunset colours at the crematoria gates.. The clashing phosphorescent green is the penultimate penalty saved by the often-ignored but extremely keen observer that is the goal-keeper. Keeper of goals, other people's goals, so they can't have them. It's my goal... It's my goal not to be penetrated, defiled, filed, filed away as scores of victorious, vociferous breast-beating. Long arms, spiders' arms, long, long arms for goal-keepers... Tentacles... Octopuses... Octopi... To-pi... Ta-pi... Ta-bi... To buy, to buy, to buy... Buy, buy, buy... My Santa Claus costume... Buy, buy, buy... Santa... Bye... Bye-bye Santa... It's mine. It's my Santa costume... It's mine...

PAULA: Come on Nick, time for our relaxation.

NICK: I am relaxed.

JOHN: Your Santa costume has been mended.

NICK: Oh, my God. Providence. Pray, pray...

PAULA: You can wear it any time you want now.

NICK: Thank you, thank you. Gratings. I am grateful. I am your slave, your greeting slave. Grating Doctor.

JOHN: Come now, Nick, I'm no doctor, you know that, don't you?

NICK: A nuthouse. I want a nuthouse with doctors who know about Jung and Freud, who are young and friendly, who don't take any notice of what I say.

LIZ: It's been explained to you, Nick. This is better for you. We don't regard you as a nutcase. You know that.

NICK: How do you even know that my name is Nick?

JOHN: You told us, didn't you? Don't you remember? We trust you. Names don't matter here, anyway. It's the person that counts.

NICK: But I am a nutcase. What do I have to do to convince you?

PAULA: You are among friends here. We all have our problems. And we're all trying to sort them out. Help each other sort them out. We are your friends, Nick.

NICK: You call me Nick. You call me friend. But you don't even know who I am, do you? You don't care who I am. I am dead. I died with her.

PAULA: I am sorry.

LIZ: Do you mean Juliet, Nick?

(NICK SHUSHES LIZ FORCEFULLY. PAULA MAKES AN ATTEMPT, BUT SHE TOO IS SHUSHED BY NICK. JOHN DOESN'T EVEN BOTHER. SILENCE.)

NICK: You want me like them, like them. They want me like you.

JOHN: What do you mean, Nick?

LIZ: What do you mean? Who are they? Whom do you think I want you to be like?

NICK: Like the rest of you. You normal people. Normal and fat. Like people who don't think. Like people who don't see that everything is connected to everything else.

PAULA: Not everyone has the same intellectual capacity as you, Nick. You are clever. That's why I like you.

NICK: No, no, no, no! That's the point. You want to drag me down. Concrete boots or Wellington boots, boils down to the same thing. They drag you down. Mud of compost and blood. That's why I'm barefoot. I need snow-shoes not to sink, not to be dragged down. Get me snow-shoes. **(TO JOHN)** Please Doctor, can I have some money to buy snow-shoes. Please.

JOHN: You won't sink here. trust me.

NICK: Trust you! You look like him. You are like him. Not as fat, but you are him. You are him. Ducks and drakes, snakes and ladders, girls and women and kids. Fat women. The mountain of flesh. Meat. On top of everything else, I have claustrophobia. **(TO JOHN)** Listen to me mate, I have no one left I can trust.

JOHN: You know I am your friend. Your brother. We are all brothers and sisters.

NICK: They shoot the one who falls behind. Brother, father, Padrè, tell me what happens to the one who goes ahead, who's ahead of the rest? Now listen. A very logical proposition from a madman. Take the one who falls behind. How can you shoot hi? Answer. That wasn't meant to be a rhetorical question.

JOHN: What do you mean?

NICK: How do you shoot him, if he's behind you?

JOHN: Facing him, I guess.

NICK: Right in one. The one who falls forward?

JOHN: I don't know?

NICK: You can't keep up with him?

JOHN: Why can't I?

NICK: You haven't the will, the stamina., the legs, not enough gray in your overturned bowl. You can't. You may regard this as the ultimate injustice, but you can't. You can't keep up.

PAULA: I'd try. Lots do.

NICK: Try their best. What if their best is not good enough? They fall behind. Ants, cockroaches, rats... I must have my head shaved, I've got lice. A shaven head suits the role better. A madman must have a shaven head. Please shave my head. I'm not asking you to give me anything, Doctor. I'm asking you to take something away from me. It's an offer you can't refuse.

JOHN: Go on.

NICK: I mean it.

JOHN: I mean, go on with what you were saying. They fall behind...

NICK: No, you fall forward. So you get a shot in the back. **(MIMES GETTING SHOT IN THE BACK QUITE REALISTICALLY, BUT WITH NO SOUND.)**

PAULA: (PRODUCES A PILL.) Take this please, Nick.

(NICK TRIES TO RUN AWAY, BUT JOHN AND PAULA GRAB HIM. LIZ< RATHER EFFICIENTLY, TRIES TO MAKE NICK TAKE THE PILL. NICK RESISTS.)

LIZ: Look, it's no big deal. **(SHE GIVES PILLS TO JOHN AND PAULA, AND TAKES ONE HERSELF. WE ASSUME THEY TAKE THE PILLS< AS THEY MIME SWALLOWING.)** We're all taking them.

NICK: You're faking it.

(NICK TRIES TO RUN AWAY. JOHN AND PAULA OVERPOWER HIM AND LIZ MAKES HIM SWALLOW THE PILL.)

LIZ: You'll feel better.

NICK: Please, please, a madhouse...

PAULA: It's very good, this pill. You'll see.

JOHN: D'you really think they'd give you no medication in a mental hospital?

NICK: They won't, if I'm classified hopeless.

PAULA: But you're not, Nick.

JOHN: Trust me.

NICK: A nuthouse please, I beg you.

JOHN: Would you like to have your Santa costume now, Nick?

NICK: I don't deserve it. I'm not worthy, I am... I couldn't stop you. I couldn't stop them. **(PAUSE)** Whose turn is it to do the dishes today?

PAULA: Don't worry Nick, it's all taken care of.

NICK: I want to wash the dishes. Please. They can't. They are sloppy, greasy bastards. Their hands...

LIZ: They're your friends Nick, they care for you.

NICK: I want the dishes clean.

JOHN: All right, you can have the Santa costume whenever you like.

NICK: I have nowhere to keep it. Away from the scum. Clean. Clean. Can I have a lock on my wardrobe please?

LIZ: You know the rules, Nick.

JOHN: No locks here, no secrets. Everything is open.

PAULA: Sharing...

NICK: Share and share alike? But those bastards have nothing to share with me. If I share everything with them and they don't, because they can't, because they haven't... Because shares... Future markets... Share the future... Market the future... Futures for sale... Buy, buy, buy, buy... Sell! Sell! Buy and sell! Futures for sale!

Sale of the future! Sale! **(PAUSE)** Put me in a nuthouse. I deserve it.

LIZ: You are not a danger to yourself or to others. You know the rules, Nick.

NICK: I am a danger to myself. Those bastards are a danger to my self. They are hungry. They want... They want... They even want my Santa costume.

PAULA: I'll safekeep it for you.

NICK: I am dangerous. I am an insurgent. I try to undermine your rules. If you let me keep staying here, your house will lose all order. I'm a rebel. I won't share my Santa costume.

JOHN: That's all right. We all understand that. Everyone in the house accepts how important it is for you.

NICK: But the rules...

JOHN: The rules can go to buggery. What's more important is that you stay here and get better. Why do you want to go into a nut... mental hospital, anyway?

NICK: Because I am mental. I think I am Santa Claus. Or should I be Napoleon? Is that a better qualification for the nuthouse?

PAULA: **(HUGS NICK IN AN EXTROVERTLY LOVING WAY.)** It's all right. We love you. We know you are a loving person deep down, too.

NICK: How the hell can you know that? I am dry. All the way. My insides are dry. No love here, mate. No juice left. Dry.

JOHN: I know the feeling, Nick, we all do. Believe me, it is better for you here. You'll get over things. Time is the best healer.

NICK: I don't want to forget.

JOHN: We all do.

LIZ: Come on now, lunch time.

NICK: I won't have any. Leave me alone.

PAULA: Just soup, if you like. **(SHE SERVES SOUP.)**

NICK: Wooden spoon.

LIZ: Wooden spoon.

(LIZ GIVES NICK A WOODEN SPOON. NICK STARTS EATING HIS SOUP.)

NICK: No knives.

LIZ: All right.

NICK: Just soup.

LIZ: Just soup, Nick. Come on now. After lunch, we'll have our little game.

NICK: I don't like your bloody games. Can I have my Santa costume now?

LIZ: Just finish your soup.

NICK: (FINISHES HIS SOUP.) Now?

(JOHN FETCHES NICK'S SANTA CLAUS COSTUME. WITH PAULA'S HELP, NICK PUTS IT ON AS THE SOUNDS OF A DEPARTMENT STORE IN CHRISTMAS BUILD UP. JOHN, PAULA AND LIZ PUT UP METALLIC TINSEL DECORATIONS AND PUT ON FUNNY HATS BECOMING THE SHOPPERS IN THE STORE. SOUNDS OF A SALE ARE HEARD FROM DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS. NICK, AS SANTA, STRUTS AROUND THE PLACE.)

-Hurry, hurry, hurry!

-Only for the next two hours, every customer who purchases one of our special...

(PIPED MUSIC STARTS BUILDING UP ON TOP OF THE SHOPPING SOUNDS.)

-The shepherds at these tidings

Rejoiced much in mind

And left their flocks a-feeding

In tempest, storm and wind,

And west to Bethlehem straight-away

The blessed babe to find

Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,

Oh tidings of comfort and joy.

-Boys and girls, if you want your pickies taken with Santa...

-This is the last day. Don't miss out. Santa will be waiting...

-Three extra copies of your very own pictures with Santa for only nine...

NICK: Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas. Ho, ho, ho!

-For that last minute present for your loved ones

-Hurry, hurry, hurry...

-You would normally pay at least twice as much for this extra special. Now for only seventeen ninety five...

-Boys and girls, Santa, for the last day...

NICK: Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas.

-It's the last day today. Only five more shopping hours to go.

-Hurry, hurry, hurry...

-Your Christmas stocking...

-Don't be the one to miss out. It's Santa's last day today...

-God rest ye, merry gentlemen

Let nothing you dismay,

For Jesus Christ, our saviour,

Was born upon this day;

To save us all from Satan's power,

When we were gone astray

Oh tidings of comfort and joy, comfort and joy,

Oh tidings of joy.

(JOHN, PAULA AND LIZ HAVE NOW SET UP A PLATFORM ON WHICH SANTA CAN SIT. BRIGHT COLOURS AND A GLITTERING BACKGROUND. JOHN, PAULA AND LIZ BECOME THE SHOPPING CROWD AGAIN. A LITTLE GIRL COMES AND SITS ON SANTA'S KNEE. SHE DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE SHY AT ALL.)

NICK: Ho, ho, ho, Merry Christmas. You are a lovely little girl, aren't you?

Do you want your picture taken with Santa? Ho, ho, ho!

THE LITTLE GIRL: No, thank you.

NICK: You can look at it when you get old.

THE LITTLE GIRL: I will not grow old, thank you.

NICK: Ho, ho, ho, everybody does.

THE LITTLE GIRL: I only wanted...

NICK: Let me guess. A big doll. One that talks. Where's your Mum?

THE LITTLE GIRL: You can't guess. I don't want a big doll. And I am alone.

NICK: What's your name?

THE LITTLE GIRL: I like you.

NICK: That's a lovely thing to say. How old are you?

THE LITTLE GIRL: I don't know.

NICK: You are a playful little girl. Where's your Mum?

THE LITTLE GIRL: All the mothers are buying things.

NICK: I wonder what she's going to get you for Christmas. Little pressies for her little princess.

THE LITTLE GIRL: I don't want any presents, thank you.

NICK: Of course you do. A lovely little girl like you...

THE LITTLE GIRL: Is it true that your real name is not Santa?

NICK: What do you mean? Ho, ho, ho.

THE LITTLE GIRL: I don't mean that you are an employee of the store playing Santa for Christmas. I like that. I play games, too.

NICK: Well, I...

THE LITTLE GIRL: No. What I mean is that your name is really Nicholas, and they made you a saint after you died. Saint Nicholas?

NICK: I... I guess so.

THE LITTLE GIRL: May I call you Nick?

NICK: If you like.

THE LITTLE GIRL: I like you, Nick.

NICK: Thank you. How do you like my beard?

THE LITTLE GIRL: That is fake. I like you. I've been watching you all morning. You are a good person.

NICK: Thank you.

THE LITTLE GIRL: My pleasure.

NICK: Are you sure you don't want anything?

THE LITTLE GIRL: I just wanted to give you a kiss.

(THE LITTLE GIRL KISSES NICK ON THE CHEEK WITH GREAT AFFECTION.)

THE LITTLE GIRL: You can remember this when you grow old and grow a real beard. Don't forget to remember.

(THE LITTLE GIRL EXITS, SKIPPING. THE CHRISTMAS AND SHOPPING SOUNDS INCREASE AGAIN AND "OH TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY"

IS HEARD. NICK STARES AT THE POINT WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL HAD GONE OUT. THE LITTLE GIRL COMES BACK IN.)

THE LITTLE GIRL: I like you Nick.

NICK: Thank you.

THE LITTLE GIRL: My pleasure.

NICK: Are you sure you don't want any presents?

THE LITTLE GIRL: I just wanted to give you a kiss.

(THE LITTLE GIRL KISSES NICK ON THE CHEEK WITH GREAT AFFECTION AND EXITS SKIPPING. "OH TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY" IS ABRUPTLY CUT. NICK STARES AT THE POINT WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL HAD GONE OUT. THE CHRISTMAS AND SHOPPING SOUNDS INCREASE AND CONTINUE FOR A WHILE. THE LITTLE GIRL COMES BACK IN. "OH TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY" STARTS AGAIN. THE LITTLE GIRL KISSES NICK ON THE CHEEK WITH GREAT AFFECTION.)

THE LITTLE GIRL: Don't forget to remember.

(THE LITTLE GIRL EXITS, SKIPPING. NICK STARES AT THE POINT WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL HAD GONE OUT. THE SOUNDS AND "OH TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY" GET LOUDER. THE LITTLE GIRL DOES NOT COME BACK. THE LIGHTS START FADING VERY SLOWLY SO THAT AT THE END OF THE SCENE THERE IS STILL JUST ENOUGH LIGHTING FOR THE FINAL PICTURE TO BE SEEN. JOHN, PAULA AND LIZ SLOWLY TAKE OFF THEIR FUNNY HATS, SIT AT THE TABLE AND START EATING QUIETLY WITH SHINY, SPARKLING CUTLERY. NICK, SEEING THAT THE LITTLE GIRL IS NOT COMING BACK, GETS OFF THE

PLATFORM, TAKES HIS BEARD AND SANTA COSTUME OFF QUICKLY. HE IS BAREFOOT AND IN HIS UNDERWEAR. AFTER A LITTLE PAUSE, HE RUNS OUT WHERE THE LITTLE GIRL HAD GONE OUT. THE LITTLE GIRL COMES IN FROM THE OTHER END OF THE STAGE, SKIPPING. NICK COMES BACK A SHORT WHILE LATER, LOOKING DRAINED, DEJECTED AND OUT OF BREATH. HE FACES THE TABLE WITH HIS BACK TO THE LITTLE GIRL AND DOESN'T SEE HER.)

NICK: Juliet!

(THE SOUNDS INCREASE TO A VERY HIGH PITCH AS THE STAGE GETS COMPLETELY DARK. AT THAT POINT ALL THE SOUNDS ARE ABRUPTLY CUT.)

ACT TWO

(EVERYONE IS AS THEY WERE AT THE END OF THE FIRST ACT, EXCEPT THAT THE LITTLE GIRL IS NOT THERE. THE PLATFORM AND ALL THE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS ARE GONE.)

JOHN: Come on Nick, have some more soup.

NICK: She's gone.

(NICK PUTS HIS CLOTHES ON AND JOINS THE OTHERS AT THE TABLE.)

PAULA: We have a first class Christmas dinner, so save your appetite.

(NICK STARTS EATING WITH A WOODEN SPOON. THE OTHERS TOO, ARE USING WOODEN SPOONS.)

LIZ: How do you feel about having one of our little games after lunch, Nick?

NICK: I don't like games.

PAULA: Haven't you been playing?

NICK: What?

PAULA: Games. Santa and the little girl.

NICK: No. No games.

JOHN: You could try to be a bit more helpful Nick. It is for your own good, after all.

LIZ: Of course. He knows that, don't you Nick?

NICK: (TO JOHN, ABOUT LIZ) She thinks she's a social worker.

JOHN: Then you can help her, can't you? We are all trying to help each other here, Nick. You know that. Why don't you try to help her. She thinks...

NICK: A bloody social worker.

(THEY HAVE FINISHED EATING.)

PAULA: How did you like your soup?

NICK: I'll do the dishes.

LIZ: That can wait. The weather's lovely. Would you like to sit outside in the sun for a while before we start our game, Nick?

NICK: No games, please.

LIZ: (OVERLY DRAMATIC) Before the storm clouds gather, before the high winds blow, before everything is lost...

(THE LIGHTING SLOWLY CHANGES TO THAT OF THE BEACH HOUSE. CYCLONE SOUNDS.)

JOHN: I'll just summarise where we're at. **(RECITING)** That night, after Christmas dinner, Cyclone Marjorie hit.

(THE CYCLONE SOUNDS REACH THEIR PEAK. A BIG BANG.)

PAULA: (RECITING) What was that?

JOHN: (RECITING) Cyclone Marjorie.

PAULA: (RECITING) I meant the big bang we have heard.

NICK: (RECITING) Let me have a look.

JOHN: (RECITING) Hang on, I'm coming with you.

(NICK AND JOHN GO OUT.)

LENA: (COMES IN, NAKED.) It sounded like the electric pole crushing the car.

LIZ: (RECITING) Yes, it did. **(SHE SEES LENA.)** What the hell...

(A MIAOW)

PAULA: (RECITING) This is tragic.

LENA: Parsley, where are you? Parsley! **(GOES OUT.)**

PAULA: (RECITING) I'll check the power. **(GOES AND CHECKS THE FRIDGE.)** Shivers, the power's cut. All that food...

LIZ: (RECITING) We've nearly finished it all, anyway, Mum. They will fix it in no time, I'm sure. **(PAUSE)** Oh, shit, the television. The kids will start screaming in a minute.

(THE KIDS' SCREAMS ARE HEARD. LIZ EXITS HURRIEDLY. NICK ENTERS.)

NICK: (RECITING) It was the electric pole crushing the car. We are in deep trouble.

JOHN: (COMES IN. RECITING) The four-wheel. It's gone. It's flattened. It's a write-off.

NICK: (RECITING) My old bomb, too. Let me ring and check if we can get some help. Let me find out what's happening.

JOHN: The telephone was cut.

(NICK GOES OUT. PAULA FOLLOWS HIM.)

JOHN: (RECITING) The power lines and the telephone lines had all snapped. Both cars were crushed beyond repair. The food was enough for two, perhaps three days. There was plenty of water, fortunately. A whole day passed. There was no sign of any help arriving or things being fixed.

(JOHN LIGHTS A HURRICANE LAMP AND GOES OUT. THE STAGE IS EMPTY FOR A LITTLE WHILE. THEN PAULA, HAVING TAKEN HER WIG

OFF AND PUT HER PADDING ON, WANDERS IN AS JOYCE. NICK HAS TAKEN HIS WIG OFF AND COMES IN AS TIM, TOGETHER WITH JOYCE. JOYCE IS LITERALLY ALL OVER TIM, WHICH DOESN'T SEEM TO BOTHER HIM.)

TIM: We must do something. A whole day passed and there is no sign of any help arriving or things being fixed.

JOYCE: They'll be fixed. In the meantime, I have no complaints. I have you to talk with and I am losing weight. What more can I wish for?

TIM: I'm feeling a bit uneasy.

JOYCE: George doesn't mind.

TIM: You've been so good for me. I was nearly losing all confidence. **(PAUSE)** In my art. **(PAUSE)** Painting.

JOYCE: (LAUGHS) Look, quite honestly, sex is not very important for me. I can do without it. You can sleep with Liz if you want to. I like talking with you, about you, about your paintings. I'm trying to understand what makes you want to paint. I find the whole thing so... stimulating. I'm after your brains, Tim dear, not your body. Liz can have that. Although I must admit you are good.

TIM: I'm glad you're so straightforward.

JOYCE: Look, at my age I have no time to waste beating about the bush. I take things as they come. Why didn't you sleep with Liz last night?

TIM: How do you know?

JOYCE: I didn't hear anything. I know Liz. She's not known to shut her eyes and think of England. Usually, the neighbours can tell when

she spends the night with a man. Part of being liberated, I guess. She is rather loud. You must know.

TIM: Yes, sure. I really have no problems with that. But I somehow... feel like...

JOYCE: Like meat. That's exactly what George makes me feel like.

TIM: Oh.

JOYCE: Funny. Only women are supposed to feel that way.

TIM: Not that I don't enjoy... sleeping with her...

JOYCE: I understand perfectly. You feel like you have to deliver. All the time.

TIM: Exactly. If she could just go a bit easy.

JOYCE: D'you think it has something to do with your temperament, the way you feel?

TIM: What do you mean?

JOYCE: That you need to appreciate...

TIM: Internalise, yes. Internalise the experience. It must be an experience. I need to savour. With all my senses. You are right. I think that is it. You are so perceptive. **(PAUSE)** There is the old predator bit, too, I think.

JOYCE: What do you mean?

TIM: I know and accept all the equality and everything that goes with it. I wouldn't mind looking after the kids for instance, if we ever got married. It's not that. It's that I feel a bit funny if I am the quarry,

and not the hunter. It's a hard feeling to get rid of. **(PAUSE)** But it's true, what you said. The appreciation. I like mucking about, play... She's so... business-like. Maybe that's what I need, to balance my... I don't know. Maybe it's childishness.

JOYCE: Like being contrary?

TIM: Like a child.

JOYCE: Don't get me wrong. I didn't mean it in a bad way. We all have it. But you, being an artist, an individual... I think you react badly if you're pushed.

TIM: Pressured. Yes, I think you're right.

JOYCE: I don't think anyone could make you do anything. You have such a strong personality.

TIM: You don't think I am a giving person.

JOYCE: I wouldn't say it quite like that. That's the way...

TIM: (OVERLAPS) That's the way Liz would put it.

(BOTH LAUGH.)

TIM: Bloody social worker talk. But it is true in a sense. I need to decide to give, not be forced to.

JOYCE: I know that very well, Tim. I understand you, believe me. You are giving the world your art. But willingly, of your own accord. You wouldn't, if you were forced to, would you?

TIM: Exactly.

JOYCE: Would you like to paint me? Willingly?

TIM: What...

JOYCE: (OVERLAPS) What colour?

(BOTH LAUGH.)

JOYCE: Seriously. I'd love you to. More than anything. I'd love to have your name on my portrait. Like Leonardo's on Mona Lisa.

TIM: Sure. Once this mess is sorted out. Once we get back.

JOYCE: It will be, don't worry.

TIM: Does anyone know you're here? Have you told anyone?

JOYCE: Not really. Oh, Bobby knows. Bobby Sinclair. I told him before we left.

TIM: Who's he?

JOYCE: Oh, just a friend.

TIM: Oh?

JOYCE: One of George's old friends.

TIM: Did you tell him how long you were going to stay?

JOYCE: Yes. Two weeks, I told him. It's the third day today.

TIM: If he tries to ring you and can't get through, he'll raise the alarm.

(JOYCE IS SILENT.)

TIM: He would, wouldn't he?

JOYCE: He is not allowed to ring me here. Come to think of it, I don't even think i gave him the phone number. **(PAUSE)** It is a silent number.

TIM: Oh.

JOYCE: I couldn't.

TIM: So... No hope there.

JOYCE: No. What about you?

TIM: No, you haven't given me the phone number, either.

(TIM STARTS LAUGHING AT HIS OWN JOKE, BUT JOYCE IS IN NO LAUGHING MOOD.)

JOYCE: This could be serious.

TIM: I haven't told anyone I was coming here, either.

JOYCE: Liz never tells anyone anything and George hasn't got anyone to tell.

TIM: And of course, forget about Lena. She didn't know herself where she was going.

JOYCE: Someone, somewhere is bound to find out what's happened.
(PAUSE) They must. In the meantime, I just hope we don't run out of food.

TIM: What about fishing? Off the rocks?

JOYCE: I hate fish. Besides, we don't have anything to catch them with.

TIM: I haven't brought any tackle.

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: You've got your painting gear.

TIM: I don't think the fish would be very keen on a piece of paint at the end of a brush, do you? **(STARTS LAUGHING AT HIS OWN JOKE.)**

JOYCE: (SMILES) That's funny. I'm glad you take it lightly, Tim. I am a bit of a pessimist. I can't help thinking what we would do if nobody discovers what's happened.

TIM: One of us would have to go and get help, I guess.

JOYCE: Walk two hundred kilometres?

TIM: If we have to.

JOYCE: I guess so. You are so reassuring, Tim. Will you paint my portrait?

TIM: I've only brought my sketch book and charcoal.

JOYCE: Drawing, then.

TIM: Sure.

JOYCE: Tonight?

TIM: Yes, I'll be delighted.

JOYCE: And once we're back, I'll organise your exhibition. You deserve it.

TIM: I can't believe my luck.

JOYCE: I'm only too happy to help you, Tim. I've got the money, you've got the talent.

(LENA COMES IN, NAKED, CHASED BY GEORGE, FOLLOWED BY LIZ. GEORGE AND LIZ BOTH HAVE THEIR PADDING ON AND HAVE NO WIGS.)

LIZ: Mum!

JOYCE: What's wrong, dear?

LIZ: Mum!... Dad!...

LENA: It's all right, I don't mind.

LIZ: Put something on, for Chrissakes.

LENA: Don't you feel hot? **(GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AND GETS HERSELF A GLASS OF WATER. GEORGE FOLLOWS HER.)**

JOYCE: **(TO TIM)** This requires my attention, dear. **(GIVES TIM A KISS AND GETS UP.)**

LIZ: Tim!

JOYCE: George! **(AS SHE GOES TO THE KITCHEN)** You have bigger eyes than your stomach, don't you?

(LENA DRINKS THE WATER, GETS OUT OF THE KITCHEN, STANDS BACK AND WATCHES THE GOINGS-ON.)

LIZ: Tim! **(SITS BESIDE TIM.)** What the hell's going on?

JOYCE: **(TO LENA)** And don't you flog a dead horse, my girl.

TIM: **(TO LIZ)** Nothing. I'm going to paint Joyce. That's what we were talking about.

JOYCE: Don't be ridiculous, George!

LIZ: **(TO TIM)** Oh, yeah? Mum!

GEORGE: Kettle calling the teapot black.

LIZ: **(TO TIM)** I know what she's up to. Mum!

(LIZ GETS UP AND GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. AS GEORGE GETS OUT OF THE KITCHEN, LENA GOES NEAR TIM.)

LENA: I see her as a breathing sponge. It feeds as it breathes.

(LIZ AND JOYCE MUNCH AWAY IN THE KITCHEN. GEORGE GOES OUT.)

LIZ: He's not like Len, you know.

LENA: A huge sponge. A mountain.

JOYCE: I know, dear.

LENA: For the water, it's nice and cosy, too. Warm. As the water is purified, it's also drained of everything it has in it.

LIZ: I'm not going to let you do to him what you did to Len.

LENA: It feels lighter, but empty.

JOYCE: I didn't mean to.

LENA: For the sponge, it's just natural.

LIZ: You never do. It comes to you naturally.

LENA: Not good, not bad, just natural. Can you paint that?

LIZ: (TO LENA) You keep out of this.

TIM: (TO LENA) Yes.

LENA: (TO LIZ) All right. **(GETS UP TO GO.)**

TIM: (TO LENA) Thank you.

LENA: My pleasure. **(SHE KISSES TIM ON THE CHEEK WITH GREAT AFFECTION.)** I'd better go and check Parsley. **(AS SHE GOES OUT)** I like you, Tim. Parsley! **(GOES OUT.)**

(LIZ COMES NEAR TIM, LEAVING JOYCE ALONE IN THE KITCHEN TO STUFF HERSELF.)

LIZ: What's going on between you and Mum?

TIM: It's not like you think. Honest, Liz.

LIZ: You're supposed to be my boyfriend.

TIM: I know. I am.

LIZ: Then act the part, will you? And I thought you were different.

TIM: I am. No, what I mean...

LIZ: She's old enough to be your mother. If you don't find me attractive...

TIM: It's not that...

LIZ: As long as we get things straight.

TIM: Yes.

LIZ: Otherwise, you can just buzz off.

(KIDS' CRYING)

LIZ: (TO JOYCE) Is all the milk off? I have to feed the kids.

JOYCE: (CHECKS THE MILK.) Off!

GEORGE: (COMES IN.) The kids are crying.

(TIM GOES OUT.)

LIZ: (IGNORING GEORGE) Shit. I wish they'd hurry and fix things up. We're going to starve here in this goddamn place. It's bad enough that the TV is off. How am I going to keep the kids quiet?

GEORGE: Keep your cool, Liz. Everything will be all right.

LIZ: Look Dad, I don't care what you do with that loony girl, but you must find a way of getting help.

GEORGE: We'll be all right. The telephone exchange should realise that the line is cut.

(JOYCE COMES NEAR GEORGE.)

LIZ: There is no telephone exchange any more, Dad. It's all computerised.

GEORGE: It's still off, is it?

LIZ: Yes, I've just checked.

JOYCE: Give the kids some biscuits.

LIZ: There's only three packets left. I've already started rationing them. All the ice-cream is off, too.

JOYCE: What about some spaghetti?

LIZ: How am I supposed to boil water?

JOYCE: We must get some help.

GEORGE: It shouldn't be long. **(GOES OUT.)**

LENA: (COMES IN.) I've lit a fire outside. If you want to cook anything. Oh, I've dug up some roots. There wasn't much, but they are quite nutritious. **(OFFERS A HANDFUL OF ROOTS TO LIZ.)**

LIZ: Give them to your cat.

JOYCE: (GOES INTO THE KITCHEN, FILLS A SAUCEPAN WITH WATER AND AS SHE TAKES OUT A PACKET OF SPAGHETTI) She's a bit off her rocker, but she's all right.

LIZ: You are sounding more and more like Dad. And you always went on about Dad not minding anything. He's getting worse, you know. Look at him. He's all bleary-eyed running after our little nymph. He's off the planet. And you don't mind. It must be catching.

JOYCE: But there is nothing to mind, dear. He is harmless. He's just playing little boys' games.

LIZ: And you?

(TIM COMES IN, LOOKS AROUND, GOES INTO THE KITCHEN. JOYCE GIVES HIM THE SAUCEPAN AND THE SPAGHETTI.)

TIM: (AS HE TAKES THEM AND GOES OUT) It shouldn't be long.

LIZ: What games are you playing?

JOYCE: He is your boyfriend. I am only being friendly. Do you want me to be rude to him?

LIZ: You're after him.

JOYCE: Don't be silly. Not like you mean, anyway. It's a deal. I'm going to be his model and his patron.

LIZ: What does he get out of it?

JOYCE: Fame, money and immortality if he's good.

LIZ: What's he to you?

JOYCE: He's my artist, don't you understand? I'm finding out what makes him tick. It's fascinating.

LIZ: I still can't figure out the Lena girl. You know what they do, her and Tim? They hold hands, look into each others' eyes. They don't even talk. I had to find a bloody romantic artist of all people.

JOYCE: He's fine, Tim. Don't let this one slip away, Liz. I couldn't ask for a better son-in-law.

LIZ: He doesn't talk to me much.

JOYCE: I'd rather have what you have going with him. But at my age, and the way I look, I'll settle for talk. You can have his body, I'; have his brains. **(PAUSE)** And George can have his paintings.

LIZ: And make more money for you to spend.

JOYCE: Now, now dear, don't be ungrateful. See, we have the perfect solution.

LIZ: What if he wants to talk to me, or worse still, sleep with you?

JOYCE: We'll just have to make sure he doesn't, won't we?

LIZ: I guess. **(PAUSE)** What about the Lena girl? What does she get? What does she want, I wonder?

JOYCE: She doesn't matter.

LIZ: I don't think Tim is really interested in sleeping with her.

JOYCE: I really couldn't care less.

LIZ: I don't think so. D'you think Dad is?

JOYCE: Interested? Yes. Sleeping? Yes. Other things? I don't think so. Although he did sneak out last night. I'd hate to think what the poor girl would do with him. He's so hopeless.

LIZ: You shouldn't complain, Mum. You had a few compensations in your time. And I suspect you still do.

JOYCE: I can't complain. Mind you, he did, too.

LIZ: Compensations?

JOYCE: I wouldn't call them that. Flings. There was nothing to compensate for. At least when I was young, there wasn't. I was quite attractive, you know.

LIZ: I've seen the pictures. Honestly, I often wondered why you married him.

JOYCE: He was ambitious. I knew he'd make money. I like comfort. I wasn't wrong. He did accumulate a lot of money. The more he made, the more he wanted, which suited me, too. Of course he wanted to accumulate other things as well. There was a whole string of secretaries. He is damned efficient, of course. He'd have as many in the shortest possible time with the least effort. With the secretaries, he doesn't even have to get out of the office. Why do you think he turned his office into a complete suite?

LIZ: To impress the customers?

JOYCE: That, too. I don't know how those girls put up with him. It's got to be his money. Couldn't be anything else. I remember one. She was really pretty. And intelligent. She didn't last long, though. I don't know how they can stand him.

LIZ: You do.

JOYCE: I mean, in bed.

LIZ: That's what I mean.

JOYCE: You must be kidding. I know better.

(SILENCE)

LIZ: Len was a bit like that.

JOYCE: Poor Len.

LIZ: Yeah. Poor Len.

(SILENCE)

LIZ: It's really great that we can talk like this.

JOYCE: You're much like me.

LIZ: In some ways.

(SILENCE)

LIZ: Why don't we send dad for help?

JOYCE: He can't walk. Can you imagine him walking two hundred kilometres?

LIZ: He'd lose some weight.

JOYCE: We would, too. You know, this has been the most effective diet I've had for ages.

LIZ: I'm dying for some cream buns.

(GEORGE, TIM AND LENA COME IN WITH THE COOKED SPAGHETTI. LENA HAS A VERY LIGHT DRESS ON.)

JOYCE: Right on cue.

GEORGE: Sorry it's not cream buns.

TIM: You go ahead, we'll just have a walk down the beach.

(GEORGE, JOYCE AND LIZ SIT AT THE TABLE AND START GORGING THEMSELVES ON THE SPAGHETTI. KIDS' CRIES. THE LIGHTS GO DOWN. THE SOUND OF THE SEA. A BREEZE. TIM AND LENA WALK ALONG THE BEACH.)

TIM: I'd like to thank you. For everything. For looking after the kids, for...

LENA: (SHUSHES HIM) Listen.

(THEY LISTEN TO THE SOUNDS FOR A LITTLE WHILE. THEN LENA STARTS RUNNING IN A PLAYFUL WAY. TIM RUNS ALONGSIDE HER. THEN HE FALLS BEHIND AND STARTS RUNNING AFTER HER. LENA LETS HIM CATCH UP. THEN TIM RUNS AHEAD OF HER. SHE KEEPS WALKING. TIM STOPS AND SITS DOWN. LENA COMES AND SITS BESIDE HIM, THEN PUTS HER HEAD IN HIS LAP.)

TIM: It's wonderful.

LENA: Under the darkness, there is blue. Can you see it?

TIM: Yes.

LENA: And the fish in the sea... Can you feel them move?

TIM: Yes.

LENA: Can you feel the desert behind us?

TIM: Yes.

LENA: I like the smell of the sea. Feel the wet sand.

TIM: It's wonderful.

LENA: I feel sleepy. I'll go back.

(SHE DISAPPEARS BEFORE TIM EVEN HAS A CHANCE TO GET UP. HE LOOKS AROUND, CAN'T SEE HER. HE STARTS WALKING BACK AND ENDS UP BACKSTAGE, IN THE DARK SPOT. THE HALF-WAY HOUSE LIGHTS COME ON. TIM PUTS HIS WIG ON AND AS NICK, LIES DOWN IN THE DARK SPOT. JOHN. PAULA AND LIZ ARE AT THE TABLE, EATING SPAGHETTI.)

NICK: My whole life's struggle has been...

LIZ: Not that again!

PAULA: Tell us something new.

JOHN: Where's his pills?

LIZ: This is the sixth day. Stop it, for Chrissakes.

(FOR NICK, THESE ARE JUST VOICES. HE DOESN'T SEE ANY OF THEM. THE LIGHTS ON NICK GO UP. HE TOSSES AND TURNS. THE LIGHTS ON THE TABLE GO DOWN.)

NICK: I don't want to go. I can't leave you. I don't want to leave you. It's hot. The sun... Water... The sea... I still have things to do... I don't want to die. The sun... The nuthouse... Give me a straightjacket. I want to be free... Let me go... A straightjacket...

(THE LIGHTS ON NICK SLOWLY CHANGE TO THOSE OF THE BEACH HOUSE AT NIGHT WITH THE HURRICANE LAMP ON. NICK'S SPOT BECOMES DARK AGAIN. GEORGE, JOYCE AND LIZ ARE AT THE TABLE. NICK HAS DISAPPEARED. GEORGE, JOYCE AND LIZ HAVE NOW LOST WEIGHT AND DON'T HAVE THEIR PADDING ON ANYMORE. THEY ARE PEELING AND MUNCHING SOME ROOTS, WHICH RESEMBLE SMALL POTATOES.)

GEORGE: I guess someone has to go and get some help. It's been six days since the cyclone.

LIZ: Don't look at me, Dad. I can't possibly leave the kids. They need me.

JOYCE: Well, someone has to go. I don't think we're going to get help otherwise. I'm starving. **(PAUSE)** Where's Tim?

LIZ: With Lena, I suppose. Why don't we send her for help?

JOYCE: She'd probably just wander off.

GEORGE: She's too weak. The poor thing wouldn't last a day in the desert.

LIZ: I guess not. More's the pity.

GEORGE: I'll go and have a look.

(KIDS' CRIES. AS GEORGE GOES OUT, LENA COMES IN, FOLLOWED BY TIM. GEORGE STOPS AT THE DOOR.)

TIM: She'll be all right.

LENA: She's never done this before.

JOYCE: What's the matter?

LENA: Parsley.

TIM: She's disappeared.

(GEORGE SLIPS AWAY.)

JOYCE: George!

TIM: She'll be all right.

(LENA SOBS.)

TIM: Come on, let's have a walk.

(TIM AND LENA EXIT.)

JOYCE: George!

LIZ: Lena and her bloody cat.

JOYCE: We must do something.

LIZ: Who cares about her cat?

JOYCE: Not about the cat, dear, about our situation. George!

LIZ: Someone has to go and get help. (PAUSE) I'd go, if it weren't for the kids. They need me.

JOYCE: George!

(GEORGE COMES IN.)

JOYCE: It's all your fault, George.

GEORGE: What do you mean?

JOYCE: Don't just stand there, do something.

GEORGE: How the hell should I know where the cat is?

LIZ: Forget about the cat. We must get help.

JOYCE: George.

GEORGE: All right, all right. This calls for proper analysis. and of course, action.

JOYCE: Exactly.

GEORGE: (RATHER MONOTONOUSLY) I'm a family man. I must look after my family, my wife, my daughter, my grand-kids.

JOYCE: We depend on you, George.

GEORGE: (RATHER MONOTONOUSLY) Family comes first. Family is the foundation of society. We are a family, and the family must stick together. Through thick and thin, in sickness and in health.

JOYCE: Right.

GEORGE: That means, either we all go, or we all stay.

LIZ: The kids can't go.

JOYCE: No.

LIZ: None of us would make it, anyway. We're not fit enough. If one of us went and didn't make it, that'd be the end of us all.

JOYCE: I just can't see myself walking two hundred kilometres. No way.

GEORGE: That's it, then. It's... your boyfriend.

LIZ: Tim. No. Why not the Lena girl? Don't rule her out. She's stronger than she looks.

GEORGE: She's been living on those roots since the cyclone hit. For six whole days. That's all she's been eating.

LIZ: What have we been eating, huh? Lena's bloody roots. The kids have developed a terrible diarrhoea.

GEORGE: You must look after the kids.

JOYCE: That's your first responsibility, Liz.

LIZ: Why not send them both away?

GEORGE: And risk them not coming back?

LIZ: Tim would.

JOYCE: Lena has a hold on him.

LIZ: He would come back for me.

JOYCE: Oh, yeah? You think your sighs and screams are enough attraction for him, do you?

GEORGE: Joyce! **(TO LIZ)** Don't mind her, love, we're all a bit tense. Look, we just can't afford to take any risks. Lena must stay here, to make sure that he returns. Not that he wouldn't...

LIZ: But he would. For you, Mum, for his exhibition, if not for me.

JOYCE: Our lives depend on it.

GEORGE: Whatever action we take, we must be absolutely certain of the result.

JOYCE: Dad's right, love. This is our only chance.

LIZ: He would come back for me.

GEORGE: Sure, love, but it is better if we don't take a chance, isn't it?

LIZ: How will you stop Lena going with him?

JOYCE: I don't think anybody could. It really would be up to him.

LIZ: I guess.

GEORGE: He might want her with him.

JOYCE: Leave that to me.

GEORGE: (TO LIZ) Joycie always had a way with that sort of thing.

JOYCE: Thank you, Georgie.

LIZ: He'd come back. He'd come back alive for me. He would stay alive.
He would.

GEORGE: Doesn't really even have to come back. If he could just alert the
police, someone... That'd be his mission.

LIZ: But he would.

JOYCE: Sure, love.

LIZ: I still don't see the sense of trying to keep the Lena girl here. I can't
stand her.

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: Trust me.

JOYCE: Have I ever failed you?

LIZ: I guess not.

GEORGE: That's my girl. So, it's up to you Joycie, my darling.

JOYCE: God, I'm starving.

LIZ: Me, too. How much spaghetti and rice have we got left?

JOYCE: Hardly any, at all.

(KIDS' CRYING)

GEORGE: He should make it to the turn-off in about three days. There's a fair bit of traffic there.

JOYCE: He should walk at night.

LIZ: I'll go and give the kids some rice. **(EXITS.)**

JOYCE: Why don't you go and find a way of sending Tim here? And make yourself scarce for a while.

GEORGE: Right.

(GEORGE GOES OUT. JOYCE STARTS PUTTING THINGS ON, GIVING THE IMPRESSION THAT SHE IS ABOUT TO LEAVE. SHE FINDS TWO LARGE PLASTIC CONTAINERS IN THE KITCHEN AND STARTS FILLING THEM UP WITH WATER. TIM COMES IN.)

TIM: Joyce, we've found some more of those roots. Well, Lena did, anyway. Do you want some? **(HE SEES JOYCE IN THE KITCHEN, PREPARING.)** What are you doing?

JOYCE: Oh... I didn't want you to know. Sorry.

TIM: What's going on?

JOYCE: Look Tim. Sit down and listen. And don't argue. After all, I'm old enough to be your mother. We can't go on feeding on roots indefinitely. The kids are in bad shape. It's obvious that there is

no help coming. Someone has to go and get help. so... We've discussed the situation. George has a heart condition and Liz has the kids to look after. I am the obvious person to go.

TIM: You?

JOYCE: I said don't argue. We've all agreed...

TIM: I haven't.

JOYCE: We couldn't possibly impose on you or Lena.

TIM: But we're all in the same boat.

JOYCE: Do you think these two containers will be enough?

TIM: Look. Stop it, stop it. Just sit down. This doesn't make sense. Lena and I will go.

JOYCE: She's so skinny. She can't make it.

TIM: She's strong.

JOYCE: It will be good exercise for me. I'll lose a lot of weight. I can be quite attractive, you know.

TIM: No.

JOYCE: I can't be attractive? **(LAUGHS.)**

TIM: Stop it. It's not funny. You won't make it. Not in this blazing heat, not in the desert.

JOYCE: I can't let you and Lena go. You probably could make it, you're strong, but not poor Lena. Besides, who will find us the roots if you go?

TIM: I'll go.

JOYCE: No, Tim. I appreciate what you are offering, putting your life in danger for me, but I can't let you go. I wouldn't want to risk depriving the world of a master painter.

TIM: Oh, Joyce.

(THEY HUG IN A FRIENDLY WAY.)

JOYCE: I'll survive, don't worry. After all, I want to be the first one to exhibit the new master.

TIM: I Promise I'll return.

JOYCE: Oh, Tim.

TIM: Promise.

JOYCE: You must promise to take care of yourself.

TIM: Promise. And you look after Lena for me, will you?

JOYCE: Of course.

(TIM PUTS ON A T-SHIRT, SHORTS, SAND-SHOES AND A STRAW HAT. HE TAKES THE TWO PLASTIC CONTAINERS, MAKES SURE THEY ARE FULL, TIES THEM WITH A ROPE AND HANGS THEM AROUND HIS SHOULDERS, ALL WITH JOYCE'S HELP.)

JOYCE: Take care.

TIM: Explain it to Lena. Please. That it's all for her own good. Will you do that for me?

JOYCE: Of course. No matter what happens, we won't ever forget what you're doing, Tim. Oh, take some food with you.

TIM: No. There isn't much left and the kids need it more than I do.

JOYCE: All our lives depend on you, Tim. You must. **(GETS SOME BOILED RICE FROM THE KITCHEN, PUTS IT IN A PLASTIC BAG AND HANDS IT TO TIM.)** Take the torch, too. It may be easier to walk at night, in the cool. **(FINDS THE ELECTRIC TORCH AND GIVES IT TO TIM.)**

TIM: Thanks. Well... See you then...

JOYCE: **(HUGS HIM AGAIN.)** See you...

(TIM LEAVES.)

JOYCE: It's all for the best. **(CALLS OUT)** George!

LENA: (OFF-STAGE) Parsley! Parsley!

(JOYCE GOES OUT. THE BEACH HOUSE LIGHTS GO DOWN. TIM IS WALKING AT NIGHT IN THE DESERT. ONE OF THE WATER CONTAINERS IS NEARLY EMPTY. HE SEES LENA IN THE DISTANCE, NAKED. HE CHANGES DIRECTION AND STARTS WALKING TOWARDS HER. SHE DISAPPEARS. TIM RUNS AFTER HER, LOOKS AROUND, CAN'T FIND HER. HE TRIES TO RESUME THE DIRECTION IN WHICH HE HAD BEEN WALKING. HE IS UNCERTAIN. HE TRIES TO CHECK HIS DIRECTION, LOOKING AT THE STARS. HE TURNS THE TORCH ON AND LOOKS FOR CLUES. WHEN HE FINALLY STARTS WALKING AGAIN, IT IS IN A DIFFERENT DIRECTION. HE KEEPS WALKING THROUGHOUT THE NEXT SCENE IN THE HALF-WAY HOUSE. JOHN, PAULA AND LIZ ARE SITTING IN A CIRCLE, ALL WITH THEIR WIGS ON, BUT NO PADDING.)

LIZ: There's nothing very unusual in my story, really. I didn't want the kids. I was a good mother, though. Motherhood. I refused to swallow that whole. I knew I had to do something with my life. I wasn't going to get cooped up in some domestic drudgery. I can't help if the kids turned out the way they did.

JOHN: When you were sleeping with every man you could get your grubby little hands on.

LIZ: I... I... I had to... to find myself. Find out who I was. I had intelligence. I could be useful...

PAULA: ...to everyone except your own children.

LIZ: Who's to say it was all my fault? The whole world, the school, the television, the street, the papers, the neighbours...

JOHN: You had a responsibility.

LIZ: My first responsibility was to myself, to my own life. Shit, it would have been so much easier if I believed in life after death and all that garbage. Sorry, I messed it up this time, next time I'll be...

PAULA: There is no next time.

LIZ: Why am I to blame? (TO JOHN) You... You... You never cared about anyone else, about anything else, except your fat, greedy self, did you? You didn't even care that your daughter wasn't really your daughter. You couldn't produce a living soul, you couldn't produce anything. Buy and sell. That's all you could do. Buying what others produced and selling them to others who wanted them. You made a mint. You didn't even care about your wife, even when on the odd occasion you remembered her existence.

JOHN: I gave her a comfortable life. That was what she wanted. I worked my guts out for her. For the family. My daughter... I treated her as my very own daughter, gave her everything. Everything she ever wanted.

PAULA: While you hired your endless string of secretaries and fired them as you got sick of them. That pretty one... What was her name?

JOHN: I can't remember.

PAULA: She had a small child to support. You fired her because she wouldn't sleep with you. They had to scrape her from the railway lines.

JOHN: She could have found another job. She was a good secretary.

LIZ: But she didn't.

JOHN: People have to learn to take charge of their lives. I can't be held responsible for every failure. It's a man-eat-man world out there. **(TO PAULA)** Why do you think your husband couldn't stand the sight of you? Why did he use every excuse not to be at home with you? He'd sometimes take round trips on the train. You turned him into a machine, into a money-making machine. He couldn't even stop and think. After a while, he couldn't think even if he wanted to. What drove him to drink do you think, to his sterile one-night stands?

PAULA: He was an achiever. He was ambitious.

JOHN: He wanted to stop. But he couldn't even admit to himself that he did. Because he couldn't. You wouldn't let him. He welcomed the heart attack. It gave him a rest. And I don't mean the hospital. It was a

rest from life. The life he was convicted to live. He didn't care if he lived or not anymore.

LIZ: He was good to his daughter.

PAULA: He was a responsible man.

JOHN: He was sick of it all.

LIZ: I did my best, too, given the circumstances, given the constrictions, the prejudices, the roles...

PAULA: You can't be blamed for what happened to the kids.

JOHN: It was your life.

PAULA: It was my life. I never forced anyone to do anything. I didn't force him to make money, to keep making money. It suited us both. I didn't want him to drink, or have a heart attack. I was with him all the time in the hospital.

JOHN: You did your best.

LIZ: You were a good mother.

PAULA: I love you.

LIZ: I love you, too.

(PAULA AND LIZ EMBRACE.)

JOHN: I love you both.

(JOHN EMBRACES PAULA AND LIZ. AN EMOTIONAL FINALE TO THE SOUL-SEARCHING WITH ALL THE ACCOMPANYING HUGGING AND STROKING. TEARS OF JOY MINGLE WITH THOSE OF CATHARSIS.)

LIGHTS GO DOWN, EXCEPT THOSE ON TIM, WHO IS STILL WALKING. HE FINISHES THE WATER IN ONE OF THE CONTAINERS, THROWS IT AWAY AND TAKES A GULP FROM THE SECOND ONE. HE WALKS OFF. THE LIGHTS SLOWLY CHANGE TO THOSE OF THE BEACH HOUSE AT DAYTIME. KIDS' CRIES.)

LENA: (OFF-STAGE) Parsley!

(JOYCE AND LIZ ENTER.)

JOYCE: Poor girl.

LIZ: What a fuss about a lousy cat.

JOYCE: How are the kids?

LIZ: Wasting away, Mum, what do you expect, living on those bloody roots?
They're not even complaining that there is no television anymore.

JOYCE: We should hear by tomorrow.

LIZ: Do you think he's made it to the turn-off? It's two days since he's gone.
I miss him.

JOYCE: I do, too.

LIZ: I'm starving, Mum.

JOYCE: Have some water.

LIZ: Isn't there anything to eat?

GEORGE: (ENTERS.) Isn't there anything to eat?

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: I bet he's lost, or just went away.

LIZ: Dad, he has every reason to come back. He has us.

JOYCE: He has Lena.

GEORGE: I'm feeling faint. We must find something to eat.

JOYCE: Any suggestions?

GEORGE: We must consider every possibility. We must be rational.
Otherwise we'll all die.

LIZ: I remember this story... People on a life-boat...

JOYCE: No!

GEORGE: We must calmly think about every option. There are three of us
and the kids.

JOYCE: And Lena.

GEORGE: One option is, we do nothing and slowly die. It would be the kids
first. They are already very weak.

LIZ: Tim will come back with help.

GEORGE: And find us all dead. great help that is. We just can't wait any
longer.

JOYCE: Dad's right, love.

LIZ: No!

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: I know this is going to be very difficult for all of us, but we must
judge objectively.

LIZ: Judge what?

(SILENCE)

GEORGE: Whose life is worth more. Objectively.

LIZ: You can't mean...

(SILENCE)

JOYCE: We mustn't be emotional.

GEORGE: What we need is a calm, unemotional assessment.

LIZ: No!

GEORGE: In terms of investment, the older the person, the higher the level of investment, the higher the value.

LIZ: What do you mean?

JOYCE: Older people are worth more, dear. That's what he means.

LIZ: (PAUSE) Not the kids! (SHE STARTS CRYING HYSTERICALLY.)

GEORGE: I didn't say that, love. Shush! Shush! I didn't... Just bear with me, will you?

JOYCE: (TRIES TO CALM LIZ DOWN.) Liz. Liz. Shush...

GEORGE: On the other hand, their life expectancy is higher. We must take account of the value of their potential future. The potential return on investment can be of higher value. So... That balances out the other consideration.

JOYCE: (TO LIZ) See? (COMFORTS LIZ.)

GEORGE: This, in effect equalises everyone investment-wise. Therefore, we must look at other factors.

LIZ: The kids need me. If it's going to be me, it has to be with the kids. They can't live without me.

JOYCE: This is all hypothetical, love, don't get your knickers in a knot.

GEORGE: We must think of the family name, too. So I can safely say that we can rule out the boy. In terms of the little kid...

LIZ: You're mad.

JOYCE: We must be rational, love.

GEORGE: What we must start looking at now is quantity, the food value.

JOYCE: You'd make a feast. After all, you probably have the shortest life expectancy, with all your cholesterol and everything...

GEORGE: (TRYING TO IGNORE JOYCE) On the basis of quantity, we have to rule out the little kid as well. She's too little.

LIZ: They need their mother to look after them.

GEORGE: This leaves you and me, Joycie baby.

JOYCE: I can look after the kids.

LIZ: Mum!

GEORGE: No, the kids need their mother.

JOYCE: I can...

GEORGE: In terms of productivity, i am the earner. I generate the wealth for the family, not to mention the country.

JOYCE: Rubbish!

GEORGE: Where would you be without my money. I'd hate to see you in poverty, Joycie baby.

LIZ: Dad!

JOYCE: Lena! **(PAUSE)** Lena.

(A PREGNANT PAUSE)

GEORGE: Where would I be without you, Joycie, Joycie baby?

JOYCE: Oh, Georgie. **(EMBRACES GEORGE.)**

GEORGE: I am proud of my family.

LIZ: **(EMBRACES JOYCE)** Oh, Mum.

(GEORGE EMBRACES BOTH JOYCE AND LIZ.)

LIZ: Oh, Dad!

(AN EMOTIONAL FAMILY SCENE. TEARS OF JOY AND RELIEF. AS THE LIGHTS GO DOWN, TIM EMERGES, WALKING IN THE DESERT. HE HAS NO FOOD LEFT. HE IS BAREFOOT AND IN HIS UNDERWEAR. HE STILL HAS THE STRAW HAT ON. HE DRINKS SOME WATER. NOW THE SECOND CONTAINER IS EMPTY, TOO. HE WALKS OUT. AS THE STAGE GETS DARKER, THE MUZAK VERSION OF "OH TIDINGS OF COMFORT AND JOY" FADES IN. THE LIGHTS VERY SLOWLY CHANGE INTO THOSE OF THE BEACH HOUSE AT NIGHT WITH THE HURRICANE LAMP ON. THERE IS A KNOCK ON THE DOOR. THEN ANOTHER ONE. TIM WALKS IN, LOOKING WASTED. HE TURNS ON THE TORCH TO SEE HIS WAY.)

TIM/NICK: Water... **(HE GOES INTO THE KITCHEN AND DRINKS COPIOUS QUANTITIES OF WATER.)** Anybody home? I am sorry to barge in like this... I knocked... Hello... Sorry, but there was no answer... I do apologise. I just wanted to use your phone. People are counting on me. I must get some help. They are without food. there are two little kids, too. The phone? I don't want to bother you. Just wanted to use the phone. I'm really sorry about the state I'm in. I've been walking for three days now. Across the desert. You do have a phone, I suppose.

(HE SHINES THE TORCH TOWARDS THE DINING ROOM. SUDDENLY THE LIGHTS COME ON FULL, THE TELEPHONE STARTS RINGING, THE MUZAK BECOMES FULL BLAST AND LOUD CACAPHONIC NOISES COME FROM THE RADIO. AT THE DINING TABLE ARE THE DOUBLE LIFE SIZE, GROTESQUE PUPPETS OF GEORGE/JOHN, JOYCE/PAULA AND LIZ STUFFING THEMSELVES WITH FOOD, MAKING LOUD, OBSCENE NOISES. TIM/NICK, STUNNED, APPROACHES THE DINING ROOM. HIS STRAW HAT DROPS. HE FACES THE TABLE. HE IS NOW EXACTLY IN THE SAME POSITION AS HE WAS AT THE END OF THE FIRST ACT. WHEN HE REALISES WHAT'S HAPPENING, HE LETS OUT A PIERCING SCREAM. THE SOUNDS BECOME DEAFENING AS THE STAGE SLOWLY GETS DARKER. WHEN IT IS COMPLETELY DARK, ALL THE SOUNDS ARE ABRUPTLY CUT.)

(CURTAIN)

(IF THERE IS TO BE A CURTAIN CALL, THE ACTOR PLAYING LENA/THE LITTLE GIRL MUST BE EXCLUDED FROM IT.)

JULIET

A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

by

Gundogdu GENCER



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