

LOVING

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The front cover is Night Bird by Cordelia Blair-Stickland.

I would like to express my grateful thanks to Clare Carolan,
Joy Flanagan, George Gajek, Marie-Anne Mancio and Dennis
Mariner.

For the Performance Artists

*If we had a keen vision and feeling for all ordinary human life,
it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's
heart-beat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the
other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well
wadded with stupidity.*

From Middlemarch by George Elliot

LOVING

The Tales of Jack and Adelia

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‘So Wilkinson, my boy, what are you going to do when you leave school?’

‘I should like to be a film star, sir.’

‘A film star, oh, yes, that would be nice. We would all like that wouldn’t we, armfuls of cash and an endless supply of beautiful women, that the sort of thing?’

‘Yes sir.’

This conversation, conducted with my tutor at the beginning of sixth form, has stayed with me. It’s surprising how many odd snippets of conversation rise out of the memory bank, not least because they are so pertinent. I also catch myself inventing future dialogues for myself and these are even more telling. I might imagine how I will be received home having qualified as a star pupil at the Royal College of Music or I might play out an interview with the jazz critic on the radio. I am studying singing with piano as my second subject, but my fantasies of fame, the natural vanity of youth, are overblown.

In my first year I dedicated myself to jazz, cinema, women and beer and in the second year I added theatre and sleeping to my list of essential activities. Not surprisingly I failed the second year and I was given a series of options, one of which was not to return. I had to retake theory and composition in order to continue.

So far things have gone well and I am enthusiastic about classical subjects for the first time. I am preparing for my examination performance. I have adapted the opera *Apollo and Daphne* by Marie-Anne Bisset and I am making it into a duet for a singer and dancer to perform. My problem now is that I have fallen in love and I am so much at sea that I have lost all concentration. I can’t stop thinking about Julia.

This morning Mrs. Pageant, my singing tutor, is taking me through some voice exercises, preparing me for this afternoon’s rehearsal.

Mrs. Pageant's instruction is intense and her attention to detail is unbelievably rigorous. I engage with the facial exercises she has contrived to warm up my voice, but my mind is trying to determine how I might best apologize to Julia. I tried to reach her on the phone this morning but she was not to be contacted.

Mrs. Pageant and I are now practising voiced consonants and specifically the 'v' as the word 'love' is a prominent feature of the libretto. She tells me that I must add sufficient vocal tone to give the 'v' a vibrant, buzzing sound. We move onto the pronunciation of 'voice ... vision ... virtue ... valour ...', and then start to sing the first line of the libretto, "Your beauty invades me." The second line is, "I beg you, don't vanish", and the third, "I yearn for your love." Mrs. Pageant tells me that I am singing, "I yawn for your love", and she makes me repeat it until she is satisfied with my delivery.

During the final exercise we work on the refrain, "My voice is my devotion to a vision so divine." She asks me to sing 'myvv-oice' and 'devv-otion', and I do as she asks, but my devv-otion is not directed at myvv-oice, it is directed at Julia who retreated from me when I tried to kiss her. Now we are attending to 'avv-ision so di-vvine' and Mrs. Pageant insists that I am singing the 'v' on both pitches when it should only be sung on one. I sing it through, but the di-vvine vision of my beautiful Julia is my real preoccupation. 'Well, in a way you are getting it right,' Mrs. Pageant tells me, 'but your singing is not beautiful this morning. If this piece is to have any resonance, you must think of the vision of loveliness that dances before you and sing like a nightingale.'

I would sing like a nightingale if Julia were here to forgive me and tell me that she loves me, but this, I fear, will never be. After a short session on, "I love you", which is to be sung like, "I loviev", we move on to the songs.

'I see your vision nearing,
To delight my ravished senses,
To revive my deep devotion,

To want you as beloved ...’

If only Julia would delight in delighting my ravished senses and not insist that my ravished senses remain ravished senses. When I get to “love me, love me, love me,” Mrs. Pageant insists that I am singing ‘lovah me’ and she is a little exasperated with my efforts. She asks me to repeat the phrase endlessly.

‘I will verify my love,
Just say you’ll never leavvme,
Say you’ll not deceivvme,
Say you will believvme,
And lovvme... lovvme... lovvme.’

Eventually I sing this to her satisfaction and she rewards me with the suggestion that we take a break. The very second that Mrs. Pageant leaves the studio I run to the students’ common room, make straight for the phone and dial Julia’s number. I have no luck getting through and this luck does not improve the more I repeat the dialling of her number. Mrs. Pageant is in the studio when I return. ‘Ah good,’ she says, ‘We will now focus on your movements and the musical qualities of this piece you are to perform.’

I will myself to concentrate as she settles herself on the piano stool.

‘The sequences of notes in this work reflect a world that is perpetually on the move. Listen to this ... and this ... Can you hear that? Away it goes, as if the sounds were leaving us and flying out of the window. Even when the music is slow it seems to flow in a direction. You can’t listen to this and not think of movement. Our ballerina dances ahead of the music, but you, you are in pursuit of it. You are in pursuit of her and the music.’

I pursued Julia too rigorously.

‘The libretto is constructed around the chase, so your vocalisation must give expression to it. Your voice must change with the

developments in the narrative and so must your posture and your movements.’

Julia had no pleasure in being chased.

‘As the dancer flies around the stage, you must continually twist in her direction and you must succeed in making your voice fly after her. If the work is to be read as a pursuit then the quality of the chase must be the measure of its success.’

I made a fool of myself and now I have lost her.

‘When you arrive on stage you have just killed Python. You are elated and completely full of yourself. You are Apollo, the pride of all the land. Byron calls him, “The sun, in human limbs arrayed ...”. You are full of light and confidence and you must fill the world with your voice. You must arrive on stage with a certain swagger and bounce for it is your swanky self-confidence that is your downfall. When you sing, “I offer Jove my victory”, you must boast about your exploits with a level of garrulous conceit that is beyond anything you would normally practice. You are sickeningly self-confident. “Evil revenged by valour, the villainous serpent slain, his vast vindictive body, vanquished from the plain.” You must swim in over-indulgent vanity when singing this.’

I cannot do this. I have never been able to do it.

‘When the boy appears on stage with his bow you burst into laughter and start to ridicule him. He is about to shoot his arrow, but he is stopped by your laughter. You have no idea that this is Venus’s boy, Cupid. Full of bravado, you tell the boy that he should leave warlike activity to a hero like yourself. You must have insult in your voice and heartlessness in your laugh. You do not even honour him enough to address him directly. You direct your words at the audience, inviting them to share in your ridicule of the boy. You have no notion that Daphne, the mountain nymph, is close by. She is too fast and silent for you to notice her. You are still enjoying the admiration of the audience when the cheeky Cupid lets loose from his bow the arrow that hits Daphne. She changes then and becomes awkward and self-consciousness. She ceases her carefree

dancing through the woods and hides nervously behind a tree. The arrow has made love a repellent thing to her and she is no longer innocent of its dangers.’

I probably made love a repellent thing to Julia.

‘Cupid then fires at you the arrow that causes you to fall hopelessly in love with her. Your jokes and your vanity are at an end. Daphne, realising the danger, tries to escape, but you turn and see her. This move away from the audience is the last time you will look at them or engage with them. You become totally fixated upon Daphne. You are awestruck and made dumb without any songs to sing. Your move away from the audience and towards Daphne is crucially important. You must know how dramatic this shift in orientation can be.’

I know how swiftly Julia shifted her orientation.

‘Daphne starts the dance of her escape at a highly energetic pace. You, on the other hand, overwhelmed by her beauty, are still and silent. When you first find your voice, it is the voice of a boy; wide-eyed, open and innocent. You long for Daphne and you follow her everywhere knowing that you will do this endlessly. She flies from you whenever you manage to get near. You start by expressing the depth of your love, assuring her that you mean no evil intent. When you sing, “It is for love that I pursue you...”, it has to be the most tender, sonorous love song that you have the heart to sing. It is open and fresh, like love in the first bloom of spring.’

When my spring burst forth for Julia she received it with disapproval.

‘In these early songs you must be upright and your singing must be uplifting. With each new sequence your movements and your posture must change. Gradually, as Daphne continues to evade your advances, you begin to bend low and stretch out towards her. You start to plead with her and your songs become more tragic. This transition will only read if the lightness and tonal clarity of the early songs has registered with the audience. If you have ever been in love, remember how you felt in the beginning, take this quality into

yourself and use these feelings to become the lover in your performance.’

Well, if words could pierce a heart as Cupid’s arrow pierced Apollo, then Mrs. Pageant’s words have truly succeeded here.

‘As the pursuit continues Daphne is overcome with exhaustion and your confidence increases. The clear expressive poetry of this morning’s lesson characterises this middle section. Your songs must reach out to her in purposeful tones for the beautiful sound of your voice is your only means of winning Daphne. You will never catch her in the chase. You may be, as Byron suggests, “... The Lord of the unerring bow ...”, but you are, first and foremost, the god of music and poetry. It is your voice that makes you shine.’

But this god of music and poetry is too lovesick to sing.

‘In the final phase of the middle section you start to plead with Daphne. It is here that your phrases remain incomplete. She flies from you, robbing your songs of meaning, but as her strength fails your words begin to captivate her. You must think of captivating her, not of capturing her. You must never take hold of her. The more your songs search her out the more her dance will read as a desperate need to escape. Remember, both of you are desperate. Fate has delivered the pair of you a destiny that you are desperate to fight against.’

I am indeed desperate. Julia I suspect is not.

‘Do not let the beauty of your partner fool you into thinking that she alone can carry the action. We are delighted and charmed by her movements, but your gestures must match her athletic flights or the partnership will appear unequal. Invite her to join you. Entice her. Reach out and show how keen your passion is.

The moment I reached out for Julia our romance was at an end.

‘This reaching out is not a grasping action. You are not making a rude intrusion upon her. She is within reach. You must hold her without force. This is the place where you are finally together. She must never feel that she has been captured. Fate, not you, has

caused this. It is the charm and gentle tenderness in your tone that will win the day.'

Could gentle tenderness win the day?

'The music increasingly flies from us and the notes begin to fade. The percussion has ceased. Only the strings accompany you. Daphne collapses with exhaustion, but she returns to her feet. She is still as graceful as a bird, but she can only flee from you in short bursts. When you sing, "On the wings of love, my precious bride ...", we should imagine that you have eventually joined with her.'

Could I find such a voice to charm Julia?

'The final section begins with a great cacophony from the orchestra. Once again you are shocked into silence. The violins are calling out, they are pleading for help. You are bewildered. Suddenly, you realise that Daphne is calling to her father, Peneus, the river god. She is pleading with him to change her form so that she can escape from you.'

I am bewildered.

'The woodwinds return and Daphne's subtle limbs are seized with stiffness. You are frozen in amazement. By your gestures alone you must indicate that something horrendous has occurred. You have no words for it. You have no songs to sing. You slump to the ground as the nymphs enter and place branches in her hands. They fix the headdress of leaves on her head and cover her body and legs in a bodice of bark. Daphne has been transformed into a laurel tree. She is immobile and rigid. Her feet, like roots, are stuck fast in the ground.'

I have no words for it, no songs to sing.

'Daphne has been transformed into a tree and you move towards her and caress her. Your caresses must be gentle or you will throw her off balance.'

I tell Mrs. Pageant that 'I will be as gentle as a lamb. I will caress the air around her and weep.' She gives me a studied look that expresses some uncertainty.

‘Wearing Daphne’s leaves is now the closest you will ever get to her. When you sing, “I will have you as my crown ...”, you must make it a cry of remorse. A cry that is as delicate as a flower. It is a lament. Hearts should ache. You are broken and you will never be the same again.’

I will never be the same again.

Mrs. Pageant sings.

‘My love will never waver;
I will vaunt your verdant bough,
I will make you live forever,
Wear you woven on my brow.’

I fall silent in admiration of the beauty of her singing.

‘Can you imagine his pain? These are words of loss. It is a song of death. Is it possible that you know death? Do you have enough love in you to sing this?’

Such words, what sorrow, without hesitating I say, ‘Yes’.

‘Excellent, I will see you after lunch.’

‘I will see you after lunch’.

With these words Mrs. Pageant leaves the studio and the morning has ended. I run to the phone dial Julia’s number and Julia answers. I have a choking pain in my throat, but my delight in her voice echoes through me and I explode with extravagant laughter. Then I apologize for my behaviour last night and promise to be gentle and considerate to her in future. Julia laughs. She says that she accepts my apology and asks if this is the only reason for my call. I can’t believe that it can be this simple. I am forgiven. I tell her that I love her and ask if we can meet later. Julia says that she has already made other plans for this evening.

It is now some forty years later and I have just fallen for another woman called Julia. As soon as I heard her name, the image of my first Julia came back to me with startling clarity. I could remember her laugh, her walk and her way of conversing. I remembered how electric it was to kiss her and how wonderful it was to embrace her. I recall that I had to apologise more than once for being over aroused by her. I was consumed with passion for her and yet, extraordinary as it may sound, I have absolutely no idea how our love ended.

How is it that memory works like this? It cannot be possible that after dedicating my days to loving her, to pursuing her, that she could simply slip away from me unnoticed. I have no idea when or where the break occurred and I cannot remember if we discussed our relationship in any serious way. We did not end it dramatically. There were no more rows. I didn't continue to pursue her after college. I didn't write passionate letters to her and I have no memory of having to live with a dramatic sense of loss or remorse because we were no longer together.

I have no idea how I knew that our romance was at an end. It just ceased to exist. What was I doing? Did she just disappear? When we are young we can so easily move our attention to different things, we move so effortlessly to different places. I wonder what became of Julia. I would dearly like to tell her how I felt about her. Dear Julia, I wish you were with me still. I can't stop thinking about Julia.

Consequences

My grandmother, Nonna Antonietta, lived her whole life in Venice, in a house on the Fondamenta Nuove. When she was a child, her father ran the bar on the ground floor and she lived with her family on the upper floors. My grandfather, Nonno Vincenzo, was not from Venice. He was a country boy, from Puglia in the south. Before he was a man he ran away to Brindisi and worked on the boats. That's where he learned to cook. He worked on a ship that travelled the Adriatic and after a few trips to Venice he decided to stay here. He never returned to Puglia.

Initially, Grandpa cooked in a trattoria on the island of Sant' Erasmo. He cooked for the labourers who worked in the vegetable fields. One day the owner of a restaurant in the Campo Santa Maria Nova tasted my grandpa's wonderful cooking and he asked my grandpa to work for him. This is when Grandpa moved to Venice. He rented a room in my grandma's house and it was love at first sight. After they were married, they took over my great-grandpa's bar and converted it into a trattoria. Grandpa did the shopping and the cooking while Grandma served the meals and attended to the money. They were very successful. My father was their oldest son and by the time he was old enough to work, my grandparents owned a restaurant on the Calle Stella. That's where I live. My parents run the restaurant there now.

My grandma is buried next to my grandpa on the island of San Michele. My grandpa loved vegetables and my grandma loved books. He told me stories about people in the olden days and she told me stories about the people she knew. Grandpa took me to buy vegetables on Sant' Erasmo and Grandma read me stories and played consequences with me. I was the favourite granddaughter and on the day we buried my grandma I sat looking out from their house across to the island of San Michele and resolved to find someone who could make me feel precious.

After working at this for a while I realised that finding even one suitable substitute for my grandparents was not an easy task. I had no siblings and my parents were too busy running the restaurant. I didn't have a special friend and after testing my various cousins I determined that they had no talent for such a role. I was beginning to feel what it might be like to fail at my first serious endeavour when I discovered Stefano.

Stefano, a year younger than me, lived next to the Trattoria on the Fondamenta Nuove. He showed intense concentration when I talked about the journeys we would make together and when I tested his ability to play consequences, a light shined out of him. Later I learned that this light was called inspiration. I was delighted when Stefano agreed to be my best friend and to ensure his commitment, I wrote out the aims of our shared adventure for us both to sign. We were to travel to the island of Sant'Erasmus when it was fine, read stories when it was wet and play consequences every day that we spent together. I also wanted to study people so that I could talk about what they did, but I did not tell Stefano about this. I couldn't find words then to tell him that we were to be pioneers of understanding whose knowledge would someday be useful to others.

Stefano and I travelled everyday. We spent all our pocket money on tickets for the vaporetto and for lunch we ate pastries and cakes that I smuggled from the restaurant. We often went to San Michele to lay fresh flowers on my grandparent's graves, but most of our time was spent exploring Sant'Erasmus. We knew every inch of this quiet, peaceful island and the gardeners taught us everything there is to know about growing vegetables. The last thing we did before leaving the island was play consequences and we played it just as Grandma and I had done. We would sit on the pier with our feet in the water, looking across the lagoon to Burano, and alternately made little additions to a story that we developed together. The colourful houses on Burano seemed to be calling to us and one day Stefano and I decided that we must go there. It was crowded

and noisy and not what we had imagined, but when we were exploring the marshes to the west of the town we saw in the distance the campanile of Santa Maria Assunta on Torcello. We both wanted to go there immediately, but it was too late so we went the following day. Before long Torcello became the site of our daily pilgrimages and we adopted it as our home. It is as old as can be and has very few houses. The piazza is so under used it is covered in weeds. Apart from the great basilica and a lovely old church there is little else, but it was our very own lost world and it was the perfect place for our story telling.

The path from the lagoon to the dusty piazza follows a canal. Four large houses sit next to the path and there are three restaurants, one of them with many expensive boats moored nearby. On the opposite bank there is nothing, only marshland. Many ghosts inhabit this landscape and Stefano and I talked to them about the times when the basilica was built. The basilica is a magical place. We were once allowed to climb its campanile and from there we could see the entire lagoon. We played in the basilica for hours. There was always a particular place in its intricate landscape that we hadn't inhabited before. Every square metre of the floor and walls told a different story and the mosaics fed our appetite for extraordinary thoughts. The Last Judgement was my favourite. If people upset me I secretly sent them into this world where the serpents were free to crawl in and out of their skulls.

Stefano and I never paid a visit to the basilica without talking to the blue Madonna. She is surrounded in gold and she takes up the entire wall behind the altar. We told her everything about those things that concerned us and on many occasions she interceded on our behalf. These were heavenly days and before they ended we would sit on the Ponte del Diavolo with our feet dangling over the canal and play consequences. When it was my turn to start I would begin with a girl and when it was Stefano's turn to start he would begin with a boy.

One day a little girl told her mother that she had seen an angel. The mother thought that she had seen the picture of an angel, but the little girl told her that she had seen a real one and she invited her to see him.

The mother went with the little girl into the garden, but the mother had a leg that didn't work very well, so had to walk very slowly. The little girl, leaping and running, soon reached the angel's beautiful coach.

When the angel saw her he told his coachman to drive off and the coach vanished before the mother arrived. The little girl cried and her mother wiped her eyes. Then the little girl said it probably wasn't an angel.

The mother said that she would meet a real angel one day and they walked back to the house. For some reason the mother was now walking very smoothly and forever afterwards no-one could ever guess that she had a funny leg.

Then they noticed how quiet everything had become and suddenly they heard a strange cry, high up in the air. They looked up and saw an eagle, but it was bigger than any they had ever seen or read about.

The eagle sat on a tree and stared at them. It was so big it could easily eat them up. They looked at its big scary eyes, praying it had already eaten supper. Then the eagle laughed and flew back to the mountain where it lived.

When the mother and the little girl arrived back at the house they discovered that the banquet they had made had vanished. They didn't know what to do and they didn't want to go and tell the giants that the banquet had disappeared.

The little girl ran to find the magician. When she told him of their trouble he said that he was just about to come to the party, as it was his job to entertain the giants. He took his big kettle off the stove and took it to their kitchen.

He filled it with water and special herbs and when it started to boil the banquet reappeared. This time the table was a mile long. Then a

horrid looking ogre appeared. He was very cross, because he had made the food vanish.

He said that the girl must now go and live with him as a forfeit for getting the banquet back. The magician couldn't help her this time, but as she was leaving he gave her a special potion from his kettle to keep her from feeling sad.

When the little girl arrived at the ogre's castle she saw a young boy sitting on a throne. The ogre took off his mask, he wasn't really an ogre, and he bowed to the boy. He said that the boy was an emperor who had been sent here for telling lies.

The ogre told the girl to kiss the emperor. When she did he said if she agreed to marry him he could return to his own palace. The emperor said he lived on the other side of the world and the girl agreed to marry him.

The giant eagle returned to take them to the emperor's land, but the winds kept pushing them out to sea. They had to hold fast to the eagle's wings and after many hours they landed on a sandy beach surrounded by cliffs.

On top of the cliff was a castle, but they could not climb up to it, so they had to travel for miles over sand dunes to get there. As they were approaching the castle the soldiers in the castle saw them and fired their guns.

This was to warn them of a deep ravine, but the children didn't know this so they hid. The next morning they heard a cricket singing a very sad song. He was sad because he couldn't see and he missed the flowers and the leaves on the trees.

The cricket was also hungry and wet and cold. Then an ant came along and when he heard the cricket's sad song he showed him a hut where he could live. Inside there was something for him to eat and a cricket's coat and shoes.

The cricket sang the ant a beautiful song and then suddenly he could see again. He then saw a leaf floating to the ground, but the leaf was crying because the wind had blown it off the tree and now it was going to die.

So the cricket told a twig about his unhappiness and the twig told the branch and the branch told the tree and the tree shook itself. And it shook so hard that it stirred up all the leaves and soon they were all back on the tree.

When the tree saw all the beautiful colours of the leaves that had been on the ground he was very happy and he asked the wind not to blow too hard. The wind blew very gently, just strong enough to whistle a song with the leaves.

When the Emperor and the little girl woke up they discovered that the ravine had disappeared so they could now go to the castle. They arrived at the walls and tried to climb a rope that hung from a tower, but they could not climb up.

They both started to cry, but the giant eagle, hearing them, came flying down from the mountain. He sprinkled some powder over them to make them grow and they were so tall that their heads were as high as the windows.

They looked in and saw the people having breakfast and then they heard the voice of the castle. It told them that the door was open and they could come in, so they became their real size and went into the castle.

When the people recognised their emperor they danced for joy and made a big procession to take him and the little girl to the city. They crossed over rocks and cliffs, through a valley and over a fast flowing river.

Then they saw the blue towers of the city, but a cloud came down and covered them in silver spray. It filled their eyes and they could not see. The emperor was about to fall over the edge of a precipice when something held on to him.

It was the tail of a magic monkey. The monkey rescued the Emperor and then said that he had to be off in a hurry as he was in danger. He took a handful of magic stones from his pocket, threw them on the ground and then disappeared.

Then a big bad rat came rushing through the woods and swore by his tail that he would catch the monkey, even if he had to hunt him

forever. He started to spin round and round, chasing his tail, and then he disappeared.

Suddenly a witch appeared and asked where her rat was. She was very cross that he had disappeared and she was just about to cast a spell on them when she fell asleep because she had cast too many spells already that day.

Everyone fell asleep and the next morning they found themselves in a beautiful garden. Two boys were standing looking at the apples on an apple tree and the younger one told the little girl that she looked like a princess.

He said that he wanted to marry her because she was so beautiful and the little girl blushed. The older brother said that she wasn't a princess because she was too poor, so the emperor took out his jewels and showed them to him.

Then, at this very moment the witch woke up and snatched the jewels. She was still very angry and now she was strong enough to cast a spell on them. She gathered up her bag of spells and started to utter her magic words.

Suddenly the giant Madonna from the basilica appeared and sent the witch swirling down into the ravine. The Madonna lifted them all up in her arms and took them to the city where they lived happily ever after.

We often introduced the big, beautiful, blue Madonna from the basilica into our stories. She finished them for us when we were too tired to carry on, or when we got into difficulties. Sometimes, when I was frightened at night, I would speak to her and she always answered me. Stefano often spoke to God when he was in trouble. For him, God was a very important man who had to be obeyed. He was always trying to find out what God wanted of him so that he could do it. I didn't speak to God and when I did his answers came too late. I thought that he was probably too busy fighting the devil. I was never interested in the devil, so I ignored both of them.

I never told anyone about this other than Stefano. He didn't think that I would be punished for saying such things, but it is certain that the grown-ups would have done. I loved him for that. These thoughts were my precious secrets and it was very important to me that nothing bad ever happened to me on account of them. I was never punished, even when I promised the Madonna that I would do something in return for a favour and broke my promise. I took it for granted that I was different, that I should not be held by the restrictions that constrained others.

During the second summer of our being together Stefano suddenly declared that he wanted more time to play football with his friends. He asked if I would mind about this. I thought about it very carefully and decided that he was a luxury I could not live without. One day, after playing consequences, when we were still sitting on the ponte del Diavolo, I told Stefano that we would have to get married. He smiled and I was relieved that he was not alarmed by my suggestion. I said that we would have to show each other our secret parts if we were to be married and Stefano understood this. We stood up and walked into the marshes on the other side of the bridge. Here we were hidden in the reeds. He pulled down his trousers and pants and I lifted my dress and pulled down my knickers. We stared at each other for a short while and then we rearranged our clothes. I kissed him gently on the lips and told him that we were now married. On the way home I asked Stefano if he felt any different now that we were married. Stefano thought about this and he told me that he felt special.

'Will we have to live together now?' he asked.

'No,' I said, 'that must come later. For the moment we will not tell anyone or they will ruin it.'

Stefano agreed, but he was more subdued than usual.

I felt aloof and very special. This, I decided, was what I had always wanted. Marriage defined me and set me apart from other children. When I reached home my mother asked where I had been. I said that I had been playing consequences with Stefano. I could never

have communicated the importance of our activity to her or explain that it was too serious to be regarded as play.

My mother often asked why I didn't spend more time with my girl friends, but I loathed answering questions about myself. I hated being asked what I liked and I was very touchy about receiving advice. I regarded other people's thoughts about me as intrusive. I was outside their world and they knew nothing about me or about the importance of the task I had set myself. I didn't realise it then, but I kept many things hidden from myself. I only wanted to know about the part of me that I invented.

Soon after this Stefano told me that his family were moving to Brindisi. His father, who worked for the customs department, was going to be made a Captain. I was charmed that he was going to that part of the country where my grandpa came from. I liked the symmetry of it.

'How soon will you go?' I asked.

'In two weeks time,' he said.

I didn't complain to him about it. I knew that this kind of thing always happened to adults and sooner or later it was bound to happen to me.

'Now I will get to know what it felt like to be a widow,' I told myself. I would add the experience of his loss to my collection of research on feelings. It was to be one of my experiments. The next day I sat in my grandma's house on the Fondamenta Nuove, looking across to San Michele, and made another solemn resolution. I would have no more friends and I would spend my days reading books. This is exactly what I did. I read and nursed my broken heart. I had no idea how difficult it would be to live with a broken heart.

Partners

After scraping a pass at the Royal College of Music I went to Manhattan where I saw a number of live events called 'Performances'. These inspired me to think of my talents in a new light and when I returned to London I found a flyer in a bookshop inviting participants to take part in 'open performance sessions'. The group running these workshops called themselves 'Performance Artists' and they were based in Chalk Farm. I had no idea what to expect, but I was eager to find out.

It was a dark evening when I made my way to the run down industrial building that was the venue and I felt a little intimidated. Inside there were than a dozen young men and women chatting and laughing together. They welcomed me nicely and asked what I did. I told them that I was an out of work singer and that I played piano three nights a week in a hotel lounge. This amused them. They were mostly, artists and writers. One of them told me that everyone attended the workshop on the understanding that they would carry out instructions to the best of their ability. This seemed reasonable. He said that I would soon get the sense of it.

I took off my coat, placed it with the others at the end of the space and studied the performers with interest. When they agreed that it was time to start, the man who I first spoke with gathered everyone's attention and told us that we would do a warm up exercise. We were to run around the space as fast as possible without colliding into each other. We all stood quietly while he counted to ten and then the participants started to career around the room at high speed. They flew in every direction, like disturbed ants. I too began to dart this way and that, avoiding contact, but getting very close to collisions. Some played the game dangerously, giving themselves very little space to avoid crashing into others. Before long, two bodies collided and hit the floor. A third body quickly joined them. Then the mobile ones appeared to attack the

prone ones, darting and hurdling over them as they struggled to be vertical. Contact was still avoided where possible, but it was obvious that the chaos would only increase.

‘Freeze,’ shouted the man who had instigated this activity and everyone stopped mid action as though they had responded to a pause button. They were very good at holding their positions. I was breathing like I had just run a marathon and wobbling on one leg. Then I realised that the other performers were moving very slowly. I could just perceive that they were moving to an upright position. It was a beautiful action.

‘Interaction exercise,’ called a female performer and she picked up a large book lying on the table and read from it.

‘Using any words and gestures, address someone for thirty seconds. Repeat the activity with other performers until an agreed trigger causes you to stop. We should divide into two groups for this’ she said. ‘Simply freeze when you do not want to continue.’

The group divided naturally into two. Most performers started by addressing each other one to one, but a few addressed the side or the back of other players. The address was generally in the form of words and actions, but some expressed themselves by action only and some talked without displaying any particular gestures. There was very little consensus about the length of time thirty seconds was and before long it was impossible to recognise any form out of the cacophony of sounds and the complexity of gestures. I addressed a woman who addressed the back of a man who turned and addressed her, just as she turned and addressed the profile of a woman who was addressing another man. The man was addressing the man next to him and, when he turned to address another man, he turned to address the profile of a woman who then turned to address him.

I noticed a very attractive woman in the other group and decided to break ranks and stand next to her. I stood at her side whispering and then I went down on my knees and repeatedly made proposals of marriage to her. When she turned to face me, I started to offer her my undying love. She smiled and I was pleased that my conduct

amused her. She placed her hands on her heart to indicate that she was touched by my intentions and then she turned her back on me and addressed another man. Having addressed her for more than a minute, I turned away, but almost immediately I turned back again and expressed my appreciation of her beauty. Then I noticed that my previous group were standing still and silent and only a few in this group were still active. I froze.

After we had all been still for a few seconds everyone laughed and repeated their experiences to each other. I smiled at the beautiful woman, but I was too embarrassed to talk to her. There was too much that I wanted to say. I discovered that these were 'warm up' exercises and we were now going to carry out a sustained improvised performance. The guy who seemed to be running this picked up the large book, found a page and called for everyone's attention.

'This performance is governed by instructions,' he began. 'The instructions indicate how words and props are to be used.'

He returned the large book to the table threw dice and read from it, 'The verbal strategies are: One; give instructions to another performer. Two; talk continuously about a single topic without repetition.'

He turned to another page, threw the dice again and read, 'The prop strategies are: One; work with a prop that you can move continuously. Two; find a prop that will keep you off the ground. Let's go back to our previous groups. Each group will choose two performers by chance.'

I stood with my second group, next to the beautiful woman, but this made the groups unequal so I returned to my first group. Someone placed crosses on two pieces of paper, folded them and put them into a hat along with similar, but blank pieces of paper. I chose a crossed paper, so I was to perform together with a tall woman with mousy coloured hair. It was agreed that a pair from the other group would start and they chose which of the verbal and prop instructions they would work with. The woman was required to speak

continuously and find a prop to keep her off the ground and the man was required to issue instructions while keeping a prop in continual motion. She chose a ladder and he chose a broom. I watched them intently.

The woman climbed the ladder and started to describe all the members of her family. The man swept the floor and instructed her to move up and down the ladder. The man gave his broom to the woman, pulled the ladder against the wall and instructed her to sweep away the cobwebs that had gathered in the corner of the wall and ceiling. He then pulled the ladder to another position along the wall and instructed her again how to sweep. She continued to talk about her family and he continued to give her instructions about the presence of cobwebs. He then pulled her and the ladder about the room as fast as he could, instructing her to attack the cobwebs. After a while, he discovered that the ladder was easier to move if he stood between its legs and pushed it. The woman, like Don Quixote astride an unsteady horse and with a broom for a lance, followed his instructions to do battle with a great number of demon cobwebs that the man conjured for her. She was now inventing ancient members of her family.

I was greatly amused, but I frequently turned to gaze at the beautiful woman who had been the subject of my declarations of undying love. Now and then she smiled at me knowingly. There was something about her that held my attention. I was breathing her in. I remember exactly how she looked.

Then it was time for me to perform. I stood with the tall woman to choose our instructions. It occurred to me that she was reticent and difficult. I felt nervous about working with her. I was required to talk continuously without repeating myself and she was to give me instructions. I had to have a prop that I moved continuously and she a prop to keep her off the ground. She chose a chair and I did also. The task of talking continuously preoccupied me more than the prop did. In fact I was terrified and I had no time to think.

Then an image came to me as fresh as a dream remembered upon waking up. It was in fact a memory of a day in my life when I was about ten or twelve. I stared in the direction of my performance partner. She sat on her chair facing the audience. Her feet were on the horizontal bar at the front, her elbows were on her knees and her head was in her hands. I walked around the space with my chair and began my monologue.

I can see the head of a Mexican boy about ten years old. Sweat is pouring from his face. He is under considerable strain. The Mexican boy is holding onto two boots that are placed on each of his shoulders. The camera pans out to reveal that he is supporting a man on his shoulders. The shot pans out further. The man who is standing on the boy's shoulders has his arms tied behind his back and he has a bandanna over his eyes and a noose around his neck. The noose is attached to a branch of a tree. The boy is balancing his father, preventing him from hanging. Two cowboys are sitting on horses nearby.

One of them says to the boy, "if you're lucky someone will come and rescue you before your old man falls off." They both laugh and ride away. They are in a desert landscape, in the middle of nowhere. The camera returns to the boy. I am transfixed by his struggle to prevent his father from hanging on the noose.

My performance partner stood on her chair and instructed me to place my chair next to hers. She stepped from her chair onto mine. She then directed me to move her chair to the other side of my chair, the one she was standing on. When I had completed this she stepped onto her own chair again. I continued talking.

This was an image I saw on television one morning when I was about the same age as the Mexican boy. I was not supposed to be watching television and my father was trying to gather everyone together to go for a walk. I had the volume turned down so as not to

attract attention, but my father came into the room. I turned the television off and ran out. I was shocked by what I had seen and I did not want my father to see it. I ran downstairs to a little place in the basement under the front door. It was a storeroom, but I thought of it as my workshop because the tools were kept there. It was a place where I made things. I sat down in the semi-darkness thinking about the film images I had just seen. I had not seen such violence before and I could not comprehend how it was possible for the two cowboys to do such a thing to a boy.

My performance partner repeated her instructions. Every time I moved a chair she stepped onto it and we travelled in a straight line across the performance space.

I was desperate to return to the film, but I could not tell my father how important it was for me to do this. The boy could not stand there for long before the weight of his father caused him to drop to his knees. Someone had to rescue them. I wanted to save them from this terrible fate. The unfairness of being delivered this unbelievable image and then have it taken away from me was too much. I felt that I could never calm down until I knew how this disaster was resolved. I wondered if the boy would feel responsible for his father's death if he fell. What would I do? Would I run away or stay and watch my father die? What was the father thinking about? I could not talk to my father about this. I repeated the image to myself. I could see the Mexican boy's sweating face, his father balanced on his shoulders. What would I do if I had my father hanging from a noose above my head? Would my feelings for him change if I were in that situation? What would it be like to be responsible for his life? How sad would I be if he died?

By this time I had facilitated my partner's move to the other side of the performance space and she was standing on a chair by the wall.

She then instructed me to take the chair that was free and to place it in the middle of the room.

When I was certain that my father had stopped his prowling I went to my bedroom to look for two cowboys so that I could re-enact the scene. I did not have a hanging man or a boy with his arms up by his shoulders, but I did have a cowboy with arms out, ready to draw his guns and another one with his hands up. To make them look like Mexicans I filed off the guns and holsters and cut off the cowboy hats. I tied the hands of the 'draw your gun' cowboy behind his back and he became the father and the 'hands up' cowboy became the son. I wrapped wire around the son's hands to connect them to the legs of the father. I found a tile that I could use as a base, but there was no glue in the workshop. I needed superglue to stick the Mexicans to the tile. As I was making for the garden shed I bumped into my father.

My female partner directed me to return and stand with my back to her. Without any warning or new instructions, she leaped onto my back and assumed the 'piggy back' position. I picked up her chair and moved it around as best I could. We remained in this position for some time.

My father told me that I should get ready as we were going to the park. I insisted that I was too busy making something and I returned to the workshop, throwing the bolt across the door. I could hear my mother and father talking. She was telling him to let me be and he was grumbling about me being tied to her apron strings. There I was, trying to save my father from certain death and all he could do was to act like the cowboys. I wanted him balancing precariously on my shoulders, vulnerable and reliant upon me. I wondered what I would tell my mother if I had failed to save my father from hanging.

With the woman on my back I began to think that she imagined she was playing the father in my narrative. She was not light by any means and I felt strangled by her arms that clung tightly around my neck. When I could not remain standing still any longer I began to move, carrying her and the chair with me. The woman instructed me to carry her to the chair in the middle of the room. I was greatly relieved when I deposited her there.

In the workshop I settled to the task of making a base for my Mexicans. I cut some wood to act as my base and proceeded to dig out two holes with a chisel. These holes were to receive the legs of the Mexican boy. I made the holes too big, so I had to bang little pins into the toes of the boy to achieve more stability. I liked it that the boy was sinking into the ground under the weight of his father. I tied string across the father's eyes in imitation of the bandanna and gazed long and hard at my desperately balancing figures.

The woman then instructed me to take my chair over to the opposite wall. After I had completed this she directed me to carry her to this new position. I picked up another chair, went over to her, turned around and allowed her to get on my back again. I hated her for doing this. She was definitely playing the father in my story, but she was also playing the horrid cowboys because she was demanding that I carry her. I imagined her smiling derisively on my shoulders, disrupting the story and robbing me of its meaning. I carried her with great difficulty, feeling like the victim of her cruel joke.

My Mexicans failed to stay in place for very long and I spent a considerable amount of time attempting to balance them. I then decided that the way to support them was to hang them from the noose around the father's neck. I wasn't certain whether this would spoil the effect of the heavy father standing on his young son, but I went to the garden and cut off the end of an apple tree branch. I pulled off the leaves, returned to the workshop and nailed the

branch to the side of a large, brick-like piece of wood. I made a noose out of string and then hung the father and the son from the branch.

Halfway between the chairs I came to a halt, dropped the chair I was carrying and dropped to my knees. I could not sustain this kneeling position, so I put my arms down on the floor to support her weight. I was now in the position of a donkey. Gradually, the woman moved out of the 'piggy back' position and sat on my back as though she were riding side-saddle. I did not move and she did not instruct me to do so. I continued talking, but my sentences became slower and the gaps between them grew longer.

At first the son's feet didn't reach the floor and then when I lengthened the string it was too long and the son was not in a vertical position. Once I had settled this I gazed at my work and considered how they might be rescued. I imagined the Mexican boy trying to figure out what his chances were, given that time was running out. The noose I decided was too far away from the branch.

I could no longer support this woman who had become a bossy pile of luggage on my back. I eased myself down to the floor carefully because I had to give her enough time to adjust her position without falling off and touching the floor. I lay flat on my stomach. The woman's bottom was on the top of my back and her feet were resting on my legs. I remained there, static, pinned to the floor. She gave no further instructions and she sat very still, expecting me to cope with her weight bearing down on my chest. I continued with the narrative, but my voice was quiet and strained. I felt like a survivor in a collapsed mineshaft, my small voice being my only means of communication to the rescue team.

Maybe ... if the noose was shorter ... it would be possible ... for the son ... to run from ... his supporting position ... climb the tree ...

and pull his father ... up to ... the branch ... before he was ... strangled.

Then the audience started clapping. The woman got off my back and I stood up in a dazed state. I could never have imagined then that this woman and I would live together for the next two years. I have no idea why I allowed it to happen. Our years together can be characterised by the pattern of behaviour we had established as partners in the performance space.

Connections

I have arrived for the 'Open Lecture' at Ca' Foscari early so that I can get a seat at the front. I like to be close enough to sense the speaker and get the full effect of the performance. Today Luciano Berio is talking about Music and Literature. I don't know him, but I have just read the programme notes. He was born in a small town in Liguria and he is now professor of composition at the Juilliard School in New York. Come September I will be studying at Ca' Foscari, a degree in Anglo/American Language, Literature and Culture. Yugh! It sounds so awful; too many words and subjects here for a course on literature. I can't find a university in Italy that offers a course in writing and I can't leave my country just yet. First I must improve my English then I will go to London.

My mother says that I am not making the most of myself. She says that I am an attractive young woman and I should go out more and enjoy the company of girls my own age. Imagine if I dressed up and ran after boys as they do, she would soon voice her objections and demand that I pay more attention to my studies. No fear of this though, I spend most of my time writing. With writing I can live in my dreams. It helps time flow beautifully. Walking does too. I have walked every island and every pathway in Venice and of course I still go regularly to Torcello. Writing, walking and reading, that's all I have. I have read everything I can find: Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Lampedusa, Verga, Svevo. I am now looking for other authors.

Two men enter the auditorium to enthusiastic applause. One sits in a chair and the other stands at the lectern. They are both very handsome. 'I will not waste many words introducing Luciano Berio,' the man begins. 'You know him well as the pioneer of music whose works are internationally regarded as modern classics. This afternoon he is going to talk about the threshold between the new and the borrowed, between music and literature. I give you Luciano Berio.'

Great applause as Berio comes to the lectern. ‘Boundaries,’ he begins, ‘are the place where things become blurred. I am intrigued by this place. I listen harder here than anywhere else. I like it best when music connects with distant points, when it is allowed to pursue a very wide transformational trajectory. I like to invite interventions that send music in every direction. I actively seek out these possible invasions. Today I am going to talk about the wonderful invasions from literature that I have invited into my work. I will start by playing something for you. In this composition I wanted the listener to pass from a ‘poetic’ listening space to a ‘musical’ listening space. This musical listening space is based on poetic material that I have transformed into music. The first work I will play is called Thema. In it I use the ‘Sirens’ episode from Ulysses by James Joyce. Italo Svevo once said that when Joyce had finished a page of prose he imagined that he had made a page of music. I do not imagine that my music makes a piece of prose, but that it creates a space where everything comes together.’ He nods to someone in the control room and sits down. A woman’s voice fills the auditorium.

Bronze by gold heard the hoofirons, steelyrining impertnthn thnthnthn. I am not sure that I am catching every word. And a call, pure, long and throbbing. Longindying call. Berio has amplified and distorted the voice. Smack. La cloche! Thigh smack. Avowal. Warm. They are lovely words. A sail! A veil awake upon the waves. Lost. Throstle fluted. All is lost now. And Berio is distorting everything. Pearls: when she. Liszt’s rhapsodies. Hissss.

Berio speeds up some lines of speech and slows down others. He causes the voice to echo and stutter and I wonder if this is some kind of dream. I don’t know where I am. I seem to be lost. It is better when I think of myself as the music, then I am searching with it and know where I am. I make brief arrivals and then almost at once I am searching again. Each time I am in a bigger space. It is so big I can only get lost. The woman’s voice is now repeating itself over her own voice. I am not listening to individual words or sounds

now. I am lost in the layered beauty of the sounds. But now it is coming to an end. It is over. The auditorium is quiet. There is applause. Berio returns to the lectern.

‘So, in this work I am making a reading of Joyce’s text within certain restrictions dictated by the text itself. I am establishing a new relationship between speech and music. Suddenly Mr. Bloom’s day in Dublin takes another direction. It is no longer possible to differentiate between word and sound, sound and noise, noise and poetry, poetry and music. Everything is relative.’

I listen to Berio’s words, but my mind is awash. I am floating. I hear phrases like ‘electro-acoustic transformational possibilities’ and regard them as music. ‘Sound families and groups of syllables’ become exactly that. I move in and out of understanding. ‘The scale of vocal colours and consonants.’ ‘The voiced and the unvoiced.’ ‘Elements marked by abrupt breaks or sonic discontinuity are converted into periodic or pulsed ones and then they are stitched together into continuous lines of sound.’ I love him. ‘Elements that are initially continuous, like sibilants, become periodic and ultimately discontinuous through electronic manipulation and transformation.’ I listen intently and feel my own transformation. ‘Periodic or rhythmically repetitive sound elements are rendered first continuous and then discontinuous.’ My world becomes a discontinuous sequence of rhythmically repetitive events. ‘All these transformations are edited. I superimpose identical elements with varying time relations, frequencies and filtering processes.’ He is describing me. This is what I do.

Suddenly, there is loud applause. The other man returns to the lectern and informs us that we are to take a break and return to the auditorium in twenty minutes. I stand up with other members of the audience and file out into the lobby. Tea and coffee has been provided in one of the side rooms. As I enter I feel that it might be too crowded for me, but my need of a drink lures me in. The audience are queuing up to help themselves from thermos flasks that are placed at the front of a table. The lemons, milk and sugar are in

the middle of the table and plates of biscuits have been placed at the back. The space above the table is filled with arms reaching above, below and around each other.

The flasks are not clearly labelled and some get tea when they want coffee and some get coffee when they want tea. The flasks will only release their liquid if a particular spot on the lid is pressed in a particular way and this too is creating difficulties. Some, having failed in their attempt to press the flask for liquid, have given up and are relying on those who have developed a particular skill for filling cups to provide them with refreshment. The cups are handed back to the waiting crowd, but some get coffee with lemon in it and some get tea with milk when they want it black. No-one, unless they are next to the table, gets biscuits.

The old gentleman next to me looks perplexed. His cup has overflowed into his saucer and he cannot reach for a biscuit until he has reduced the liquid. He empties the saucer and part of the cup's contents into another cup on the table, wipes the cup and saucer with a napkin, adds some milk and then grabs as many biscuits as he can hold.

I am satisfied with a cup of black coffee and I commence my move away from the table. I stand next to another gentleman whose cup and saucer is also swimming in black coffee, but he is too far from the table to pour away the excess liquid. He holds the saucer in both hands and sips from the horizontal cup. When he has created some space he pours the contents of the saucer into the cup. This is not an easy task with so many bodies moving in every direction.

The kindly ones, who have mastered the craft of thermos pressing, remain at the table and ask others about their choices and the amounts they prefer. The eager recipients shout their requests over the shouts of others. Soon the dance of arms extends from the space above the table to the space between the table and the remainder of the crowded room. When the plates of biscuits become properties in this dance the clamour increases. Some need napkins to wipe tea and coffee stains from their clothes, adding outrage and

recrimination to the sounds in the room. There is a plate of biscuits heading in my direction, but the angle at which it is being delivered is too steep for gravity to hold and the load of biscuits is delivered to the floor.

The crowd does not diminish, the activity does not become less hectic and the process of getting a drink does not get any quicker. The people at the back of the room are intent on receiving refreshment but they do not provide any space for the people at the front to exit. Nobody moves anywhere and the chatter that flows over all this includes insistent views about Berio's talk. Suddenly, a voice on the loud speaker informs everyone that it is time to return and the previous movement of cups and saucers goes in reverse. I leave my cup on the windowsill and return to the auditorium.

Berio and a few others are on the stage talking happily while the audience take their seats. The gentleman who introduced Berio asks to us to be quiet and the maestro comes to the lectern.

'The next work I will play for you is Sinfonia. The title for this work refers to my ambition to create a simultaneous sound of various parts. I am interested in the interplay of a variety of things, situations and meanings. The musical development of Sinfonia is constantly conditioned by a search for balance. I am looking for identity out of the complexity of voices and instruments. I want to establish relations between the spoken word and the sung word. I want the sound structure of the whole to be the work. This is why the perception and intelligibility of the text should not be taken for granted. It is an integral part of the composition and it should enjoy varying degrees of intelligibility. The hearer's experience of almost failing to understand is essential to the very nature of this composition.

'I am going to play you the third part of Sinfonia, a section that lasts about twelve minutes. It is perhaps the most experimental work I have ever written. It is a tribute to Gustav Mahler and, in particular, to the third movement of his Second Symphony, or The

Resurrection Symphony as it is sometimes called. I treat this third movement as a generative source, from which are derived a great number of musical figures ranging from Bach to Schönberg, Brahms to Stravinsky, Berg to Webern, Boulez, Pousseur, myself and others. The various musical characters that are constantly integrated into the flow of Mahler's discourse are combined together and transformed as the work progresses.

'The libretto, like the music, is also complex. Using the self-reflexive monologue from Beckett's *The Unnamable* as a basic pattern, dozens of other textual threads are shuttled through the narrative loom to form a tapestry of language in all its forms. There are fragments of German, Yuletide solfège, snippets of song, radical slogans, clichés from the classical music crowd and various sighs, exclamations, gasps and grunts. I have set these familiar musical and verbal objects in a new perspective, a new context and light where they can unexpectedly take on a new meaning.

'The presence of Mahler's scherzo in *Sinfonia* is like a river running through a constantly changing landscape, disappearing from time to time underground, only to emerge later, totally transformed. Its course is at times perfectly apparent, at others hard to perceive, sometimes it takes on a totally recognisable form, at others it is made up of a multitude of tiny details lost in the surrounding forest of musical presences. Now we will listen to the music. Can we have the music now please?'

The auditorium is filled with a hush of mystery. Sounds emerge from the silence.

Where now ... keep going ... and now ... there is nothing more restful than chamber music ... I ... say I ... la ... la, la, la ... do, far, me ... there is nothing like exercise ... there's not even a small mountain on the horizon ... a man will wonder where his kingdom ends ... keep going ... what ... keep going ... a danced poem ... all round an endless exchange ... da ... see ... sea ... this represents at least a thousand words I was not counting on ... I may well be glad

of him ... it seems that Daphne has been counting the seconds while nothing has happened ... an obsession with ... what ... and in the end everything, the walls, everything yields, opens, flows like pale rain ... yes, I feel the moment has come for me to look back ... I must not forget this ... I have not forgotten it ... but I must have said this before since I say it now ... but these are noises ... oh! so there is an audience ... it's a fantastic audience ... keep going ... whispering ... whispering ... I shall make my own peace ... and I shall not live ... they say that I'm alive and not in the womb either ... even that takes time ... keep going ... it's as if we were routed ... that the earth will have to wait ... one doesn't know what it is ... maybe it's a kind of competition on stage with words forming ... where now ... who now ... and now ... now I will say my own ... if I can remember it ... I must not forget this ... I have not forgotten it ... but I must have said this before since I say it now ... I'm listening ... well, I prefer that, I must say ... I prefer that ... well, I prefer that ... oh, you know ... I suppose the audience will ... well, yes there is an audience ... it's a public show ... you buy your seats and you wait ... perhaps it's free ... a free show ... you take your seat and you wait for it to begin ... perhaps it's compulsory, a compulsory show ... you wait for the performance to begin ... it takes time ... you hear a voice ... perhaps it's a recitation ... that's the show ... reciting selected passages over and over again ... someone improvising ... you can barely hear it ... that's the show ... you can't leave ... you're afraid to leave ... you make the best of it ... you ... but you came too early like me and it's only beginning ... it's just begun ... he'll be here at any moment ... it'll begin any moment ... that's the show ... waiting for the show ... to the sound of a murmur ... you try and ... be ... perhaps it's the ... because it's the air descending, flowing to a lake full of colours ... and the spectators, where are they ... we didn't notice any ... anguish or ... never noticed you were waiting alone ... for the fools in the palace ... waiting ... waiting alone ... that's the show ... waiting alone for it to begin in the restless air ... while every now and then a familiar passing hand

comes through, accompanied by noises ... waiting for the songs to begin ... for the sounds ... for there to be something else to do ... picking your way to the corner ... trying to overcome the incessant ... what ... he says that the simplest noise could stop the ... but there'd be nothing more to say ... be reasonable ... perhaps you're blind ... probably deaf ... the show is over ... all is over ... but where now is the hand ... the helping hand ... it's a long time coming when you are far away ... that's the show ... waiting alone ... you don't know where ... you don't know for what ... for a hand to come ... to draw you away ... somewhere else ... perhaps its worse ... where now ... keep going ... when now ... keep going ... what did you expect ... they don't know who they are either ... did you hear it ... keep going ... stop ... stop ... keep going ... yes, there ... stop ... you ... I'm just ... I see it ... I hear it around me ... it holds me, covers me ... if only this voice would stop for a second ... I long for a second of silence ... I would know ... if I had known it was going to start again ... it's late now and it's still talking incessantly ... it barely stops talking, unceasingly ... talking ... outside of itself ... it's late now ... we will never hear again the rush of the stream ... in a chamber, dimensions unknown ... do not move ... what ... what was that ... the fact is I troubled no one, but I did ... and after each group disintegration the name of Mayakovsky hangs in the clean air ... ha ... air ... hair ... he ... ha ... da, de, do ... and when they ask why all this, it's not easy to find an answer ... for when we find ourselves ... face to face ... now ... here ... and they remind us ... all this can't stop the wars ... can't make the old younger or lower the price of bread ... **say it again louder** ... it can't stop the wars ... can't make the old younger ... ignore the price of bread ... we can't erase the solid truth outside the door ... we can only nod ... but no need to remind you ... perhaps at certain moments it's ... what ... and tomorrow we'll read that Eindruke made tulips grow in my garden ... and altered the flow of the ocean currents ... we must believe it's true ... there must be something else, otherwise it would be quite hopeless ... but it is quite hopeless

... unquestioningly ... but it can't go on ... it ... say it ... not knowing what ... it's getting late ... where now ... when now ... I have a present for you ... keep going ... page after page ... keep going ... going on ... call that going ... call that on ... just wait ... it's barely moving now ... almost still ... should I make my introductions ... we have Olive Simpson, first soprano ... Nicole Darde ... second soprano ... Christiane Legrand, first contralto ... Helene Devos ... second contralto ... Philip Sheffield, first tenor ... Joseph Noves ... second tenor ... Ward Swingle, first base ... Jean Cussac, second base ... but now it's done ... it's over ... we've had our chance ... there was even for a moment hope of resurrection almost ... we must collect our thoughts ... for the unexpected is always upon us ... in our rooms ... on the street ... at the door ... on the stage ... thank you Mr. Boulez.

Silence...

Later that summer I read Beckett's *Unnamable*. It was the first book I read in English. I fell in love with his profoundly beautiful voice, so conscious of itself, aware only of its own existence. I felt saved and connected to things that I already knew but was too dumb to voice. I wrote to Berio, thanking him for *Sinfonia*.

'It introduced me to eccentric joy,' I told him, 'and confirmed my voice. It enabled me to keep going and prevented me from wasting away under the cover of my querulous feelings.'

Say it again louder.

'It introduced me to eccentric joy and confirmed my voice. It enabled me to keep going and prevented me from wasting away under the cover of my querulous feelings.'

Home

I feel dreadful. I wish I'd not drunk so much. I wish I'd not stayed up so late. I was arguing with Richard, the stupid ass. He thinks that avant-garde artists are committing spiritual suicide! I only visited him to collect the key to his studio that I need to use today. I am to perform for three Arts Council assessors who will decide whether to give me a grant or not. The studio, on the fourth floor of an old warehouse, is in an unbelievable mess. I remove the debris, tidy the materials, clean the walls and floor, paint the multicoloured sections with white emulsion and move my props in.

Three o'clock is approaching so I have no time left to rehearse. I put on my performance suit and open the bottle of wine that I bought for my guests. They might look more favourably upon my work with alcohol inside them. I have already consumed the pack of lagers I found in Richard's fridge, but I still need a drink. I have eaten nothing, but it's too late to go out now. I sit in my performance armchair and wait for my guests. I could sleep now. I wish I had not stayed up so late. I wish I had not agreed to do a performance. I wish Mrs. Pageant were here to encourage me.

I will tell you about my performance. It's called Home because I repeat my arrival home nine times. I perform in a space about four metres square and this occupies one end of the studio. My furniture props, a small coffee table and an armchair, are placed in the middle of the square. My repetitive actions are all facets of one scene. Like a cubist painting they present a whole out of fractured components. There are thirty components in each scene, one lasts fifty seconds and the shortest are five-seconds long. They are all divisible by five and I must count them precisely in my head, for they coincide with sounds on a pre-recorded tape. Most of the sounds are the telephone, but there are also recorded snippets from the Allegro con brio movement of Beethoven's Eroica symphony.

The action continually turns round, giving the audience an opportunity to view it from different sides. There are nine repeating scenes and each scene starts from a different corner of the square, travelling round the square in an anti-clockwise direction. I start from the rear right corner, travel diagonally to the front left corner, then along to the front right corner and back diagonally to the rear left. I start the next scene from here and travel a similar route, ending up at the front left and then start the next scene from here. I have to move the furniture ninety degrees during each scene to facilitate the repetition of my actions.

The difficulty is that not all of the five-second components occur in the same order and they all progress differently, using one of four different methods. Some sequences are built additively, some subtractively, some are static and some are built inconsistently. The actions, the words, the props and the state of my costume all respond to these types of development. The audience may see the same scene nine times, but they do so from a different angle, in a different sequence and with new content each time. They see variations on the same theme. It's like a complex dance that I must count precisely. It requires considerable presence of mind.

The doorbell rings. I press the buzzer to release the door downstairs and prepare myself to greet them. The woman who walks in is Constance Merewether, the Theatre Panel representative. She is very smartly dressed and asks if the two members of the Visual Arts Panel have arrived. I tell her that they have not and this annoys her. I offer her a glass of wine, which she declines adding that she would like me to get started as she has an important engagement to attend to after this.

I walk over to the cabinet, pick up the bottle of wine and place it on the coffee table, next to my tape recorder. I walk to the other end of the studio, take a few deep breaths, straighten my tie, walk back to the performance space and turn on the tape recorder. I pick up my coat, scarf, box and bag and walk to the rear, right-hand corner of the space. I fix my face in a broad smile. I am holding the coat over

my right shoulder, my index finger through the coat hook tab, and I'm holding a woman's scarf in the same hand. In my left hand I'm holding a travel bag and between my arm and my body I'm supporting a large, gift-wrapped box. I am leaning forwards as if I'm flying into the house. I hold this position in a freeze until a sound from the tape recorder cues me to begin.

'Bang.' It's the sound of a door slamming shut. I hold my coat up to a wall that has no hook and the coat falls to the floor. I am still smiling, 'Hello Bee, I'm home.' I move to the back of the chair, lay the scarf over it, and turn it through ninety degrees. I hold out my big present: 'Are you there, Bee?'

'Dung.' It's the recorded sound of the lowest note on the piano. I let the present drop to the floor, pick up a rose, smell it and put it in my buttonhole. I move across the front of the space and languidly pretend to push a door open.

'Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.' I pick up a newspaper from the seat of the chair and sit on the floor to read it. 'Ta, tee tum, tee tum tum tee tee.' I stand up, leaving the newspaper on the floor and sit in the armchair. I take a pill from a bottle that is on the table, put it on my tongue, pour myself a glass of wine and use the liquid to help me swallow the pill. I can feel the effects of the alcohol. This is a disaster. I have put the real bottle of wine on the coffee table rather than the performance bottle. The bottle with grape juice in it is still in the fridge. I dare not think about the repercussions of this. I drink the wine, stopping only to throw back my head in an effort to get the pill down my throat. I do not succeed. I take the pill out of my mouth, put it on the table, place my empty wineglass next to it and swivel the coffee table through ninety degrees.

'Ring, ring, ring, ring,' the sound of a phone ringing. I lift the handset. 'Hello.' I listen to it, tap the phone against my hand, press the reset button and listen again. No response. I look at the handset quizzically and replace it on its base. I pick up the handset and dial.

‘Brrr brrr, brrr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.’ These sounds come from the tape recorder. There is no response. I replace the handset, pick up the scarf, bag and coat and walk to the rear left-hand corner to take up my starting position with the big smile: ‘Hello Bee, I’m home.’ I offer my present: ‘Are you there, Bee?’

‘Bung.’ The tape recorder plays another low note from the piano and I drop a smaller box to the floor. It is supposed to be funny, but I get no response from Ms. Merewether. I pull my jacket off, throw it to the rear right-hand corner and again make a gesture with my arm to indicate that I am hitting a door. ‘Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges’. I repeat the game with the pill, taking several gulps of wine. I throw a newspaper to the floor and move the table through ninety degrees. The phone rings. I pick it up: no-one. I dial.

‘At the third stroke it will be 11:18 and 50 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.’

I put the phone down, pick up my things and assume my arriving home freeze in the front left-hand corner. I hang up my coat on the fictitious hook: ‘Hello Bee, I’m home.’ This time I add a growl while pretending to look at myself in the mirror: ‘Are you there, Bee?’ She isn’t. I drop the present.

‘Dong.’ The notes from the piano move up an octave each time. I take off my tie; throw it to the front right-hand corner and rush with determination across the space. ‘Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.’ I pour myself another glass of wine to help swallow the pill, play around with a cigarette and then move the table through ninety degrees. I am swaying not acting. I am drunk.

‘Ring, ring, ring, ring.’ No one there. I lift the receiver and dial. ‘At the third stroke it will be 11:25 and 10 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.’

I throw a newspaper to the floor and return with my props to the start: ‘Hello Bee, I’m home.’ I take out another newspaper and an identical but smaller gift-wrapped box from the bag and put the

newspaper in my mouth, growling at myself: 'Come and get me.' I laugh as if it were a joke: 'Are you there, Bee?'

'Bong.' I drop the present, take off my shirt and throw it to my left. I bash the door. 'Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.'

'Ring, ring, ring, ring.' Still no one on the line. I dial.

'Brrr, brrr, brrr, brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.' I count the rings. No reply. 'Hello Bee, I'm home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha.' I pick up a woman's shoe, admire it and shout: 'It's me, Bee. Are you there, Bee?'

'Pang.' I drop a smaller present. A recording of the music I have been humming comes from the tape recorder. I put my shirt on, while shouting and waving my arm. 'Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.' I pour myself another glass of wine and drink greedily, forgetting about the pill. I tuck my shirt in my trousers, turn around and lose my balance. I fall headlong into the chair, bashing my kneecap.

'Ring ring, ring ring.' No-one. I dial the clock.

'At the third stroke it will be 11:30 and 30 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.'

'Hello Bee, I'm home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It's me, Bee.' I hold up the scarf that I have been carrying: 'You dropped your ...', but I give up on the sentence. I go to the chair and offer up my little present: 'Are you there, Bee?'

'Tang.' Beethoven's Eroica starts again. I put my tie round my collar and stumble painfully as I throw my arm extravagantly. 'Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.'

'Ring, ring, ring, ring.' I listen to the phone, drop the receiver and dial a number. 'Brrr brrr, brrr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr, brr brrr.' There are nine rings, but I replace the receiver after eight. I pour myself another glass of wine, drink from the bottle and giggle as I spill wine on my shirt. I pick up the pill bottle, shake it to the rhythm of a Salsa beat and throw the newspaper into the air. I'm in the front left-hand corner. There is music. 'Hello Bee,

I'm home. Grrrr. Come and get me, ha, ha, ha, ha ...' I freeze. I am lost. I cannot remember what to do next. I panic and go for the chair. I know that I have forgotten something. I see the shoe on the floor, pick it up and throw it to my left: 'It's me, Bee.' I hold up the scarf: 'You dropped your ...'

'Ping.' The piano note should accompany the offering of my box. I'm late. 'Are you there, Bee?' I drop the present, pick up the jacket and put it on while hobbling across the space. 'Goes through into the lounge; bang; knocks the door off its hinges.'

The music starts again. I have no idea which scene I'm in and my leg hurts. I take out a wallet from my coat pocket, open it and throw piles of receipts into the air. I do the same with the newspaper. I pour myself a glass of wine, drink in large gulps and suck on the pill bottle like a baby drinking milk. I take a coin from my pocket, spin it in the air, catch it, place it on the back of my hand and offer it to Ms. Merewether, inviting her to choose heads or tails. She does nothing. I move the table ninety degrees.

'Ring, ring, ring, ring.' 'Hello.' There is no-one there. The music starts again and then stops. I dial the clock.

'At the third stroke, it will be 12:40 and 25 seconds. Beep. Beep. Beep.'

I return to start at the front right-hand corner. 'Hello Bee, I'm home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It's me, Bee. You dropped your ...' and without finishing, I point the scarf in the direction of the entrance. There is an envelope on the floor in the place where the doormat should be. I pick it up and open the seal. I place the scarf over my eyes: 'Is this a surprise?' I ask, holding up the letter before dropping it onto the chair. 'Are you there, Bee?'

'Ting.' I let the tiny pearl-like present drop to the floor. I am accompanied by the beautiful sounds of Beethoven as I take the rose out of my buttonhole and throw it over my shoulder. It's an injured man who goes through into the lounge and knocks the door off its hinges. I sit in the armchair and send the newspaper flying in every direction. There is hardly one bit of floor that is not covered with

debris. I take dozens of credit cards from my wallet and add them to the mess. The music has stopped and I am completely drunk. I dial the clock and as I am about to return I hear the phone ring. I pick up the bottle rather than the phone and pour myself another glass of wine. The Eroica starts again and I drink long and pleurably. All is lost now. I pick up my coat and bag from the floor and assume my original starting position in the rear right-hand corner. I wait for the sound of the door banging shut, but I am waiting too long. The music starts again and I am not sure that it should.

‘Bang.’ ‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr. Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha. It’s me, Bee. You dropped you’re ... Is this a surprise?’ I hold up the envelope. I open it, read the letter and drop it on the chair.

‘Are you there, Bee?’ I slump dejectedly to the floor falling heavily on my wounded knee. I take a great quantity of playing cards from my pocket and throw them into the air. I pick up my rose and sniff at it in perfect time to the music: ‘Sniff, sniff, sniff.’ I put the rose in my buttonhole, walk slowly and quietly while knocking the door off its hinges and dial the clock.

‘At the third stroke, it will be 12:45 precisely. Beep. Beep. Beep.’ I put down the handset, pick up the bottle of wine, carry it out of the square and stand by the wall drinking from the bottle.

‘Ring, ring, ring, ring.’ I have no intention of answering the phone. I have drained the last drops, but the phone continues to ring so I lift the handset. Someone is there and I speak to them: ‘Hello Bee, I’m home. Grrrr ...’ I take the phone with me to the edge of the performance space. ‘Come and get me. Ha, ha, ha, ha ...’ I walk past Ms. Merewether. ‘It’s me, Bee ... You dropped your scarf on the ...’ I am now by the door. I open it and walk outside. ‘Is this a surprise?’ I stand silently in the hallway. The performance has ended. I come back in through the door and look directly at Ms. Merewether. She claps. I walk back to the performance table and put the phone down. I give her my best formal bow. She claps again. I sit down in the performance chair. I pick up the bottle, look at it and return it to the table.

I laugh: ‘Ha, ha, ha, ha.’ I take off my jacket and drop it on the floor. I growl and feel slightly sick. Ms. Merewether says that she loved the sniffing of the rose in time with the music. I nod. She says that the repetition embarrassed her and asks why I do it. I shake my head and she asks if I see the work as a tragedy.

‘A tragedy!’ I exclaim. ‘You make it sound like a play in the theatre. It’s a performance. I’m a boy in a box, not a character in a play.’ She shrugs her shoulders. I notice her beautiful collarbones. I tell her to think of the performance as a dance, but she says it still goes over the same territory without leading anywhere. I tell her that it’s a journey, but she insists I should have more to say about the character. I tell her that he is a product of the structure and we argue about the importance and function of structure.

‘So you are inviting us to consider this performance on the basis that there is a geometry holding the drama together?’ she says and I say I am. She doesn’t think this is enough. I walk over to her, sit in the chair next to hers and stretch my wounded leg out to stroke my knee. Constance Merewether studies me carefully.

‘I love it that you use the word geometry,’ I tell her. ‘It isn’t exactly accurate, but it’s a much better term than tragedy. It has a sense of space about it. The performance plays with space. It’s just a dance with a few words. That’s the only logic that governs it. It’s more interesting than yet another theatrical display of tragedy.’

Constance is offended. She rails on about tragedy but ends by telling me that she likes my boy in the box. She wishes that he would do more than arrive home.

‘Sometimes, getting home is an achievement in itself,’ I laugh. Constance laughs; there’s something attractive about her. I gaze at her neck, her collarbones and her shoulders. A heaving rhythm starts beating in my chest. Can it be that Constance has a heaving rhythm beating in her chest? I feel warm and nervous. We are gazing at each other without saying a word. This is lasting too long. We break eye contact. She looks at her watch and says she must be going. She stands up and I stand next to her, very close. Suddenly

she is moving her head towards me and lifting her arm towards my shoulder. She is going to kiss me. The world goes blank and I lean my head forward. She kisses me on the cheek. I can feel it like velvet. She looks at me, smiles and puts her hand into her handbag. She takes out a tissue, screws it up and licks it. She says that I have lipstick on my cheek and rubs it with the tissue. I remain completely still. I am looking at her face as she concentrates on her task. Slowly and purposefully she places a kiss on her finger. She lifts her finger and presses it gently against my lips. I am silent and very still. Not even my eyes are moving. My lips have used up every potential I have for sensory experience.

‘It was exciting having an exclusive performance. I must go now or I’ll be late. Goodbye. I hope that we will meet again soon.’

I have a lump in my throat. Constance is walking towards the door. She turns her head and moves her fingers gently, waving at me. She leaves the studio and closes the door behind her. I take a few steps forwards, a few steps backwards and then I fall into the chair. I look at the bottle, lift it up and growl. I pick up the scarf to wipe my face. I get to my feet and feel the pain in my knee. I don’t know in which direction to go. I hobble to the window. I try to lift the lower section but it does not move. I pull on the handles and feel my back go. It’s a dry click and I know what it means. I hold myself completely rigid, praying that my worst fears are not confirmed. They are. I cannot move. My back has frozen. I see Constance walking down the street. I watch her until she is out of sight. I stay at the window, staring at the empty street. I should try to take a few steps, but I am stuck at the window. I have no idea how I am going to get home. ‘Come and get me,’ I laugh.

Falling

In the spring this year I arrived in London. I organised to live with Cathy and Robert Smithson in Chalk Farm as their au pair. They have two young daughters, Carla and Sophie. I take them to and from school, cook their supper and stay with them when their parents are out. I have also enrolled on an English course at the Literary Institute. On my second day here I was out walking when I passed a big old shed, called The Roundhouse. Outside there was a poster advertising Recital 1 (for Cathy) by Luciano Berio. I was so excited. I took it as a sign, a happy connection between my old and new life. I bought two tickets and asked Cathy if she would like to accompany me. Cathy was already busy, but Jack, her brother, who lives in the adjoining flat, agreed to come. Jack describes himself as a performance artist. He is very handsome.

In the Berio performance a curtain was placed across the middle of the space. Cathy Berberian sang on one side while the orchestra played on the other. First she sang of her frustration at the lateness of her pianist and then gradually, as the orchestra became increasingly independent of her, agonised about the near impossibility of performing an opera. Afterwards Jack and I went to the pub and talked about the performance. He loved it and I felt very proud of my connection with Berio. I went to bed that evening knowing that I felt considerable attraction towards Jack and as the weeks passed I began thinking about him non-stop.

Our encounters were brief and occurred in the kitchen where I was preparing supper for Carla and Sophie. When I realised that Jack enjoyed visiting his nieces at this time of day I interrupted my cooking with frequent glances at the front door and pleaded with it to deliver him to me. I would cut the carrots and glance at the door, put them in a bowl and glance again, add a little olive oil and glance again. Every little action punctuated with longing. I also introduced a number of anti-pasta dishes to extend the meal-time; a little more

Mortadella, a few more olives, and another glance at the door. Carla and Sophie were always engrossed in their chatter.

‘You know Abi? Well, in the playground she said that we were not allowed to skip there because the ground isn’t strong enough. And she said that we couldn’t play ball or hopscotch either. That’s weird and I don’t believe it, do you?’

‘No, the playground is the ground. You can do anything you want on the ground, it never breaks.’

Drain the spaghetti, stir the sauce, taste it, take the pan off the heat, add it to the pasta, each action demanding another glance at the door. My anxiety increased as the possibility of seeing Jack diminished, but his attendance was rare so I got used to feeling desolate. I lived for suppertime, but hated the pattern of my watchful actions, the continual gazing at the door after chopping the spinach, the tomatoes and the onions, after stirring the sauce, after tasting it and while the girls ate. I loathed this door when it never opened and adored it when it delivered Jack to me. Everything I did, I did for Jack, even cooking, though he never ate with us. One evening we performed together. Sophie and Carla were in the sand pit.

‘The queen is waiting for you in the castle.’

‘Oh, my poor queen, I can’t save you from the wicked witch. The sand’s too soft and covers me when I try to climb up to your room.’

‘Let’s pretend you can climb up this time and you take me to a party.’

‘OK, wait, I will have to comb the queen’s hair first.’

I went out to get them in for supper and when I returned Jack was in the kitchen. Carla told him that I had promised to do a performance for them after supper and Jack asked if he could watch. I said no, but the girls insisted that he could. This was too embarrassing for me so I suggested that Jack and I perform together. The girl’s thought this an even better idea. I told Jack that I intended using the cooking utensils as instruments and Jack immediately picked up a pan and a spoon and started banging them together. I took up the

broom and made twanging noises, pretending that it was a guitar. Then I started marching with the broom, as a soldier marches with a rifle. I swung it round close to Jack, almost hitting him and he fell to the floor. The girl's demanded an endless repetition of this and only Cathy's insistence that they get ready for bed saved us from repeating it all evening. I wanted Jack to stay with me, but all we managed was a few awkward shuffles of the feet and some broken sentences. We said good night and I returned to my room. I drew a red heart and kissed it.

I had no idea how one life could get so tied up in another life. Even when I was in the street I looked about constantly in case I could see Jack leaving or arriving home. Even the sight of his car was enough to make my heart flutter. Actually, any car with a VW insignia on it could do this.

Another major preoccupation of mine was my friendship with Sophie and Carla. I relied on them to attract Jack to the kitchen and I even developed strategies for keeping us together in the kitchen for longer. I taught them how to play consequences. It was very different to the one I played with Grandma and Stefano.

'Once upon a time there lived an elf and what happened was a storm broke out and all his friends runned away for shelter.'

'And he didn't know where his friends went and he was very sad by himself.'

'A little girl saw him and she went to her mummy and asked her for some pink star cakes and mummy said "that's a funny breakfast".'

'But she didn't know that it was for an elf that had lost everybody he loves in the storm. The little girl took her star cakes to the elf.'

'And as she was going along she saw some daisies and some violet flowers, and some purple flowers, and some pink flowers and some lovely red shoes.'

'So she put them on and ran to give the elf her star cakes and flowers.'

‘The elf did not want to hold the flowers, so the little girl told him that they were magic flowers and it’s what the boys needed to cheer them up.’

The meals that I cooked for the children also became more elaborate; my fantasy was of course that I was cooking for Jack. I added a splash of white wine to the children’s fried chicken or expensive mushrooms to their tomato sauce and soon I started to eat with them. I told Sophie and Carla that in Italy everyone commented on the food and before long they developed the habit of describing how good the food tasted. Cathy thought that this was hilarious and one evening after she ate with us she asked if I would sometimes cook for her. I agreed of course, thinking that there was always a chance that they would invite Jack to join us.

Sure enough, the day came when I cooked for Jack. I was told that a modest meal would suffice, so I decided that asparagus with egg and wine sauce as a starter, followed by fettuccine with Parma ham and cream was modest enough. The children were boisterous that evening and when I asked them to leave they complained.

‘But we haven’t finished our game. I want to be mummy now.’

‘No we’ve finished that, let’s do a dressing up game.’

‘Oh please let me be mummy.’

‘OK then, I’ll be a naughty girl and throw the food on the floor.’

‘No, I’m the mummy who has to dress you up for the party.’

‘We still haven’t played the blood game with the tomato sauce.’

I got them out of the kitchen pretty quick after that and I returned to musing about how I might lift my romance with Jack a step further. I knew from his hints and his pleasing gestures that he found me attractive, but I had to develop this spark into something more concrete. Then, as I was preparing myself to greet him with a kiss, he entered the kitchen. Our eyes lit up, but then I turned away with embarrassment. I hated myself for this. All that I managed to do was to ask him coquettishly if he would talk to me while I prepared the meal. His reply was that he preferred listening to my lovely accent and I threw him a smile that he could not possibly resist. I held onto

Jack's words like a gift as I broke off the tough ends of the asparagus. I could feel his eyes upon me as he talked about his performances and I moved delicately, conscious of my beauty and my performance. I went through the evening as though I were in a dream. Jack ate very nicely. You can learn a good deal about how someone will make love from the way they eat.

The adult cooking days when Jack was absent were very difficult for me and the task of preparing two separate meals was exhausting. On one occasion though, I learned some interesting news from Cathy about her brother. It was a hot evening, even by Venetian standards, and the children kept disturbing me. They wanted more water in the pool or another towel to use and then they discovered hundreds of caterpillars. They insisted I go to the garden to see them. Then they discovered some caterpillar eggs, which they described as gold, and I was called again and when they saw that the ants were eating them I was called yet again to rescue the caterpillar eggs from the ant attack. When I returned to the kitchen I discovered that the children's sausages and their basil and tomato sauce were burnt.

I rescued what I could, gave the girls extra bread and proceeded to prepare the adult meal, chicken in a sauce of tomatoes, onions, celery and carrots. I always chop vegetables at an alarming speed, but on this occasion, because Jack was not visiting, I chopped with considerable anger. I could no longer preside over the great clashes of opposing forces that pulled at me. I hated feeling so lost in my undeclared love. It was like being enveloped in a primitive emptiness. I bashed the cupboard doors, banged the pans and stormed about the kitchen as though engaged in a battle. The children stared at me and left the table as soon as they had finished eating.

The supper with Cathy and Robert started with awkward silences, but after I tried a few tentative questions about Jack it grew more interesting. I was surprised how cautious their replies were and when Cathy started to mention 'Jack's situation' I couldn't resist

probing further. Cathy then told me that Jack was impossible, that he had caused the family any amount of heartache and that his father was now insisting that he find a proper job to pay off his debts. That evening I went to bed with a different set of pictures of Jack in my head, but it wasn't long before I spiced his actions with desire. The nights were always the easiest time.

These are the memories I continually replay in my head. Today I am cooking supper for ten people, including Jack and me. It is Cathy's birthday. She enters the kitchen to say Jack has decided not to stay for supper, because a friend of his is performing and he must go. I damn him, silently. Up to now, everything has gone well and the food's almost ready. I can hear horrid Jack's voice in the living room. I will him to see me before he leaves for his precious performance.

I finish making the salad and lay out the Prosciutto. Everything is perfect. I open the oven door, take out the zucchini dish and rearrange the various pots and casseroles to make a space to warm the plates. I pick up the plates and place them at the bottom of the oven. The door is not closing properly, so I open it and discover that the dishes on the top shelf are too big. I pull out the shelf, but the front casserole dish is jammed and does not move. The shelf moves forwards, the casserole at the front stays fixed and the dish behind it falls off the back of the shelf and down the back of the oven. The contents, fillets of sole in a béchamel sauce with spinach and Parmesan, spill out. The sauce turns brown as it cooks on the surface of the oven. I can already smell the burning. I scream. 'Oh no, oh no,' I cry, adding some choice Italian swear words. I dive into the oven, take out the plates and start wiping the oven with a towel. Everyone piles in and Cathy asks what has happened. 'Oh my God, Oh my God, I'm sorry, I am so sorry.'

Cathy pulls me up, moves me aside and takes me into her arms. I sob and sob. Some people, including Jack, are dealing with the oven while Cathy tries to calm me. She insists that no one will miss one

dish of food and when I continue to sob she suggests to Jack that he take me to the performance. Jack agrees. His agreement penetrates my distress. I return to my room to wash and apply fresh make-up. I take a last look in the mirror, blow a kiss to my reflection and float down-stairs like a princess. Jack is holding the front-door open. As we depart Cathy calls out to us to enjoy ourselves.

I am in the beloved VW and I know that this is my chance to win him. I talk non-stop, even as we are walking along the street, even as we are entering the venue. The performance is in a large studio. It is a solo performance by one of Jack's friends. A little man enters with a suitcase. He opens out a fold-up table and at great speed he takes from his suitcase a collection of objects and plays with them on the table. The audience laugh and Jack does too, but these actions strike me as being serious. It only lasts for twenty minutes or so and soon we are in the pub opposite the studios.

The bar is very crowded and shouting is the only means of conversation. Everyone is enthusiastic about meeting up. I can feel Jack's hand on my back. I want it to be more than a sign of his support and every nerve in my body is conscious of it. I decide to test his willing sensibility by gently slipping my hand into his. We squeeze our hands together, quickly and automatically, and then separate. Then we catch each other's eye, smile briefly and break contact. I have 'yes' ringing through me.

The performer greets Jack and Jack tells him how much he enjoyed his show. Jack introduces me and I tell him that I was very moved by his performance. This pleases him. He asks Jack if he is travelling over this weekend and Jack says that he is. Jack then turns to me and says that he is off to New York on Saturday to perform in a film. I want to speak, but I can only touch Jack's arm, my heart is in my mouth. I manage the words 'how long?' and Jack tells me that he will be away for six weeks.

'So I might never see you again,' I tell him, with great meaning. 'Oh, I am sure you will,' Jack says confidently and continues to talk about where he and his friend will meet up. As they say goodbye,

I'm beyond anger and jealousy. I tell Jack that I want another drink and as soon as we are alone at a table, tell him about how I arranged to cook so that I could sit next to him at supper, all the efforts I made to be near him, about my love, my loneliness and my vulnerability. I tell him about drawing hearts with my finger on his windscreen. Jack is shocked. I laugh. I laugh at myself, at my foolishness.

Jack wants to explain why he cannot start a relationship with me and I tell him that I know everything about him. He smiles, but it is a sad smile. He says that we should return home as it is getting late. In the car he talks about the film he will work on. As we turn into our street I accuse him of carelessly flirting with me. He claims that he couldn't help it. I tell him that he should invite me to join him in New York and he tells me that he cannot.

'I'm escaping because I don't want a job to pay off my debts.'

'I don't care about what happens to me,' I tell him.

'I care for you too much to put you in danger.'

'I don't know what danger you mean; being deserted is dangerous.'

Neither he nor I are ready for the final goodbye. We sit in the car. I ask why he will not take me to New York, but he doesn't reply. I scrutinise him. I tell him that I am going to scream. He says that he is sorry. I take hold of his hand and Jack pulls away. I get out of the car, slam the door shut and storm across the road. Halfway up the steps Jack grabs my arm. I shake him off. He asks if we can meet before he leaves for New York. I stare at him, leaving silence in the air and he shakes his head. I go up the remaining steps, unlock the door and step into the hall. I slam the door towards him, but Jack pushes forward to stop it closing. He follows me in.

Cathy's still in the kitchen. She shouts to us to join her for a drink.

Jack and I walk into the kitchen. We are not looking at each other and sit down at opposite ends of the table. Cathy is sitting with two female guests and all look exhausted from a surfeit of laughter.

Cathy pours us both a glass of wine while her friends use tissues to wipe their eyes. They keep repeating phrases to each other which set

them off on further bouts of laughter. Cathy asks if we enjoyed the evening. I tell her that I was treated to a tragedy in the finest English tradition. They do not know what to make of this and I sense that they don't want me to explain. I wonder if the news about Jack's imminent departure would cause another interesting reaction.

'Did Jack tell you he's going to New York?' I ask.

'To do what?' Cathy asks, turning rapidly to Jack.

'To work on a film,' he says.

'When?' Cathy asks, folding her arms.

'Saturday,' he replies.

Cathy's face changes; she has darkened. 'What about your job?'

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

'Oh! You will, will you. You will need ten jobs by the time you get back from New York. Are they going to pay you this time?'

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

'Your expenses! Well, isn't that generous of them. From now on you're on your own, Jack. Why is it we always discuss your problems and try to sort things out for you? Tell me why we do it when you are continually flying off into one kind of trouble or another? You have no excuses do you? Well I've had enough.'

'And I've had enough too,' Jack storms back, enough of feeling guilty and I've done too much penance on account of very little.

Well done Adelia, it's a relief to have it all out in the open at last.'

I am twitching. The two guests do not know how to react. Jack and Cathy glare at each other. Both are trying to stare down the other. It's an odd way to conduct a family feud. Cathy breaks first.

'You are crazy and you will never learn,' she says.

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

'See if I care,' Cathy taunts him.

'While we're on the subject, Adelia's coming with me.'

I look up at Jack. The others turn and stare at me.

Running

Last night I had a dream. I was running through a landscape thick with trees. I could hear the wood's inhabitants, gaunt forms in the undergrowth, whispering in a jargon that was entirely unknown to me. I imagined that these bands of uncouth natives lurking behind the trees were waiting for an opportunity to jump out at me. There were no houses or friendly inhabitants to be seen and as I ran from my pursuers the sound of their voices got louder. I was exhausted from running, so I stopped and shouted at them to leave me alone. There was no reply, but suddenly I heard a loud crack from the other side of the forest and turning sharply to run away I stumbled in a rut and fell headlong on the track. I woke in a panic.

My life is running away with me. I never imagined that it could go at such a pace. I have made it, big time, but I am always a hair's breadth from disaster and with a family to look after I'm running scared. Adelia was pregnant before I finished the first film and with Vincenzo not yet three she is expecting another. She is out at Hampton Bays, avoiding the city heat, but she must be back here by the end of the week. The midwife is anxious about her being so far from the hospital. I am running around, doing up a run down apartment and learning the lines of my next film.

My first film, Parties, was an improvised affair. There was no storyboard and no written dialogue, just locations and the instruction to enjoy the parties. It was the hit of the year for 'expanded cinema', but not everybody loved it.

The doorbell rings. It's the electrician, come to read the meter. I show him the cupboard under the stairs. He asks where I'm from and I tell him, 'London.'

'My Mom's been to London,' he tells me, 'to see the Queen's castle.'

I inform him that Buckingham Palace is where the Queen lives and then learn that his Mom went to Windsor Castle. He asks if I have

been there and I say yes, but it's not really in London. As he is leaving he says, 'Maybe you bumped into my Mom.'

They are a funny bunch, these New Yorkers. Yesterday I had the carpet layers here. They were discussing a television programme about the first American Moon landing being a hoax. The programme showed a film crew shooting the landing in a studio and the carpet layers argued about its veracity all day. At first it was heated but later they were laughing hysterically. I have no idea what was so funny. I spent most of the morning out at the phone booth on the corner phoning the phone company who refuse to run the cable until they have received the paperwork. Most of the afternoon I spent phoning plumbers because I need a connection on the sink waste-pipe to fit the washing machine waste-pipe to. The guys who delivered the fridge and the washing machine couldn't do it. Anyway a plumber should be turning up soon.

Two months after Parties was released I was given a part in a film called Jazz Band. I was ecstatic, but later I realised that this film acting business runs on automatic and it doesn't suit me. The activity is too broken up. I lose my sense of geography and cannot find where the meaning lies. I've started taking lessons.

The doorbell rings again. It's a chap with the baby gear, a cot, a cradle, a bath, a high-chair and even a mobile to hang up in the bedroom. I get him to show me how the cot goes together and he asks where I'm from. I say that I'm from London and he asks what the weather is like there this time of year. I tell him that it's about seventy.

'My god, you could run in that heat. What you doin' here?'

'Making movies.'

'What you been in?'

'I did a film called Jazz Band. It will be released next month.'

'What's it about.'

'A bunch of musicians who are all running from something or someone. Matt, a white guy has made it to New York and discovers that he is a great singer. A jazz band is interested in him and one

day, while the lead singer is running from the law, Matt covers for him. The manager runs into him and notices that he is wearing black makeup and a row breaks out. The manager gets hurt in the scuffle and the band has to make a run for it. I'm the pianist and I'm running from a sax player in another band who suspects that I've run off with his wife. She is running him ragged. No one in the band knows who the drummer is running from, but he's running from everyone because he is a Soviet spy who defected to the States.' The doorbell rings again. It's the plumber. The deliveryman tells me that he must run along and promises to check out the movie. I show the plumber where the pipes run. Once he is settled under the sink I inform him that I must run to the phone to talk to my wife. I tell him that I am expecting a delivery of beds and ask if he would let the guys in. He agrees and asks where I'm from. 'London', I tell him. I make three attempts to remember Adelia's number and then get her on the phone.

'Hi Delli, I'm phoning from a booth because the phone company will not run the cable until they have received the paperwork. How are you feeling?'

'Not too bad. Emmy took Cenzo to the beach this morning to give me a rest. All that running tired him out. He's sleeping now.'

'You should sleep too. I doubt that I will be finished here before five. If I have a good run I will be with you at about nine. Hey, guess who I ran into?'

'Tell me.'

'Stuart Sherman. He performed Portraits of Cities, do you remember?'

'Of course, I met him in London. I loved his films best, especially the one about the ocean liner leaving the harbour. Oh, and the one with the glove waving in the sea and the one about the tea-towels with the candle and the glass of water. Oh, and the aeroplane taking off and ...'

'He's just back from Europe and he's doing a run at Franklin Furnace. I saw it last night. He's so good. The new piece is called

The Erotic. He's still standing at his small table playing with stuff that he bought on 42nd Street. He did everything imaginable with these objects and he does it so fast, the world becomes a blur.'

'Sounds wonderful, I hope I can see it. Are we moving in on Thursday?'

'Yes, we have to.'

'I wish I could stay here. It's much better for Cenzo to be here.'

'Now Delli, we've been through that. The care is all set up here.'

'But I'm more relaxed here and Emmy says that she'll help me.'

'Look, let's not discuss it now. I must run back or the beds will be delivered while I'm out. I left the plumber fixing the washing machine connection. I was just checking that you're OK. Take a rest. I love you. See you tonight.'

Stuart Sherman is more real than film actors. He knows how to construct meaning out of very little. He operates his objects, they operate him and the performance operates us. We are drawn into his world and made part of it. It's a complex dance of language without a word being spoken and the actions fly so fast they flicker. 'Fusion frequency' it's called in the movies. It's where still images running at twenty-four frames per second fuse in the eye and give the appearance of motion. Stuart's multiple actions fuse in the brain and give the appearance of meaning.

As I enter the apartment the plumber is placing his tools in his bag and the washing machine is spinning loudly. The beds have not arrived which is a worry because they come flat packed and I need to put them together before I go. I ask the plumber if he wants cash and he says that it sure beats peanuts. Then he asks what I'm doing in New York. 'Acting', I tell him and he wants to know what I've been in. 'A musical', I tell him and he wants to know what it's called. I tell him that it doesn't have a name yet, because they keep arguing about it. He asks me to tell him about it.

'I play a highly-strung composer and my librettist is a frenetic gangster. We are magic at writing musicals, but we can't work because he is running from the mob and I'm running nowhere. I've

retreated to a small slum of an apartment where there is no room for a piano.’

The doorbell rings and I run to the door. The guy asks if I am expecting two beds and I tell him that I am. Suddenly the apartment is filled with a bunch of sturdy guys moving great brown packages and mattresses into the bedrooms. I sign the delivery-note and they depart. The plumber tells me that the washing machine is working fine and asks if we manage to write a musical in the end.

‘Yes. My partner escapes from the mob and lives with a woman he was previously running from because he owed her money. She runs a no-hope entertainment agency, but suddenly she runs into a guy who wants a musical. I fall for the woman who lives in the tiny apartment next to mine. She has transformed it into a Hollywood Egyptian film set for a Maria Montez movie. With a shoestring budget she does my place up in similar fashion and when we knock down the wall between us there’s room for my piano. In reality, the sets get bigger in each scene, but don’t tell anyone else about this. So, when the whole floor’s transformed into a musical wonderland, we write this great musical and Broadway’s ours. It’s very sweet.’
‘Sounds great, I’ll go see it. I hope to run into you again.’

We say goodbye and I return to the bedroom. The great packages of brown cardboard are very intimidating, but I throw myself at the task of opening them. Once I am sitting on the bedroom floor surrounded by the bed assembly artefacts and instructions, I turn on the tape recording of the dialogue for *Captive*, my next film.

Are you all right?

Yes, thanks. You were quick off the mark.

Yes, I was built with reflexes.

Where you from?

Balboa Bed

London.

... Assembly Instructions

Sorry about your jacket.

... *This bed*

Oh that's OK. I'm sorry about yours.

... *has been inspected*

But at least I'm in one piece.

... *for quality prior to*

No, he just ran at me and pulled me into the alley.

... *shipment.*

Do you want to call the cops?

... *It is recommended*

No, it aint worth it.

... *that two people*

Will you be all right now?

... *assemble the bed*

Sure, but can I buy you a coffee or something? I owe you a drink.

No it's fine.

... *per the following*

Come on, I want to thank you.

... *instruction*

OK, you can buy me a drink. I'm Toby, by the way.

... *to avoid*

I'm Christine. You were quite an opponent for that guy.

... *bodily*

I don't recall what I did exactly.

... *injury or damage*

Well he ran off fast enough.

... *to the bed.*

Let's go in here. What can I get you?

... *Please refer*

No I'm buying. What are you having?

... *to the care*

A bud, thanks.

... *and maintenance*

You want a bourbon with it?

... *sheet for*

Sure, why not.

... *care of*

It's strange drinking with a stranger.

... *your product.*

Yes, I have no idea where I am.

... *Carefully unpack*

Let's sit over there, where it's quiet.

... *the headboard*

Sure, after you

... *and place it*

Here's to you.

... *as close as possible*

Thanks and here's to you. No more run-ins with weirdos.

You're ... you know ... you're nice, you're kind.

... *to its final*

How do you know? I might be a weirdo.

... *assembled location.*

Well you were kind out there.

... *Unpack*

It's true, I'm kind.

... *side rails*

Are you always like this?

... *(left/right)*

Like what?

... *and lay them*

Kind, and a bit shy, but willing to help, even if it gets you into trouble.

I'm not in trouble. I'm too conventional.

... *in position*

Wait 'til you've been here awhile, you'll be black and blue like the rest of us.

Excuse me, Sir, do you know this lady?

... *near the headboard.*

Yes, she's my wife, Christine.

... *Unpack the footboard*

Your wife, eh. Sure she aint someone you've just run into.

Hold on a minute. Who the hell are you?

... *and lay*

Detective Sergeant Mason and I'm looking for a woman who fits her description.

Then look elsewhere. We're on holiday here. Tourists, you know about tourism?

Where you from?

... *in position*

London.

... *at the end*

Well I don't know what you run on over there, but over here we try to keep calm.

My God, what a schlock. Lucky you can think on your feet.

Do you know what he was on about?

... *of the side rails.*

No.

... *Remove fastening bolts*

You're looking a bit wound up by him.

... *from the headboard*

You're a smart cookie, that's for sure.

... *and footboard.*

Are you in trouble?

... *Place the*

Don't ask, you don't wanna know.

... *side rails onto the*

That guy who attacked you, he didn't just run into you did he?

Nothing gets past you does it?

... *mounting lip*

No, so you may as well tell me about it.

... *of the headboard.*

Let's just say that if I were in London I could keep calm.

Are you going to London?

... *Place the side rails onto*

There or somewhere equally far away. Would you like to take me?

For some reason I imagine that I would have to hide you in my suitcase.

Well, you could be generous and pack a tea chest.

You're funny. Do you need to be smuggled out like illicit goods?

Yes, but once we're out of here you can declare me.

Well I declare.

... *the mounting lip*

I'm serious.

... *of the footboard.*

Yes, I can see that.

... *Line up*

So, Mr. Quick Response, respond.

... *the holes in*

In what capacity should I take you?

... *the side rails*

Well you've already declared me as your wife.

... *with the holes*

I ... well, I'm ... er, I'm flattered, but ... um no, I've gotta say no.

Toby, please don't say no.

... *in the headboard*

Why not, what are you asking?

... *and footboard*

I need your help.

... *and insert screws.*

Christine, I'm sorry, but I don't need this right now.

... *NOTE:*

Need what? I just want you to help me get out of here.

... *Do not*

But what does this help entail? You appear to be rather accident-prone.

But I don't have to be, not if you help me.

... *tighten screws.*

But you need a lot of help. ... Place the

Yes maybe, but just say yes.

... *metal centre*

If I get you out of the city, is that enough?

... *support*

Oh, thank you.

... *into position*

I didn't say yes.

... *and screw*

You did Toby. I knew you were kind. Do you have a car?

... *firmly*

Sure. Where exactly do you want to go?

... *into the headboard*

I have a sister in New Jersey. No, I'll just get her into trouble.

So where will you be out of trouble.

... *and footboard.*

I don't know. How long can you be away from work?

... *Screw centre*

I'm a doctor. I have to be at the clinic first thing tomorrow.

... *support*

Phone in sick.

... *into the side rails.*

I run a clinic, it doesn't take sick notes. I have to be there at eight.

Oh Jesus. We can't get anywhere in that time.

... *Tighten*

So what do you want me to do, chuck in my job?

... *side rail screws*

OK, I'll just run around until I'm picked up.

... *into headboard*

Couldn't you lie low until the weekend?

... *and footboard.*

I could. Could I stay in your apartment?

... *Remove*

Dear Lord, this gets worse by the minute.

... *the long*

I'll get better by the minute at your place.

... *metal slat*

If I do this, I don't want any more shocks.

... *fasteners*

I'll be as good as gold, I promise. Say yes.

... *from the*

And when you are out of here, that's it, right?

... *top of*

Sure whatever you want.

... *the side*

No other add-ons or entanglements?

... *rails.*

What are you suggesting? I'm not running an escort agency.

... *Carefully*

I don't want to be tangled in whatever it is you're mixed up in.

Don't worry you're too straight for my taste.

... *roll out*

Just making sure ...

... *slats in*

Oh sweetheart, thank you. XXXXX

... *between the*

What the hell was that about?

... *side rails.*

The creeps who're after me, one of them just looked into the bar.

... *Replace*

Are they dangerous?

... *metal slat*

No, just crazy. As soon as the coast is clear we've gotta run.

... *fasteners*

You could be the crazy one for all I know.

... *and tighten*

Is that how you see me?

... *down.*

Well, I wouldn't vote for you if you were running on a law and order ticket.

Look Doc, I aint running for anything and I aint running just to be on the run, I'm running to stay alive. Don't run out on me now. I could be dead by the time they run the morning's headlines.

Delivery

Stroking a child's head for a few minutes as they fall asleep is the best antidote to hours of anarchic play that I know of. I am flat out spent and 'Cenzo is having his afternoon nap. For the past week my back has been as stiff as a board. I still have two weeks to go before number two arrives. Another boy, we think. I kiss Cenzo's cheek and go downstairs. Emmy is washing up. I tell her that she shouldn't do this.

'Awe come on,' she says, 'its nothin'. You gotta take it easy.'

'But you should be looking after Sam.'

'Not today, Sam has his lunch at 'the Rest' on Tuesdays.'

'What's 'the Rest'?'

'It's a bar down by the harbour, 'Cap'n Norm's Rest'. He likes to see his fishing chums now and then. He does precious little else since he retired. I don't know why he can't settle down to anythin'. He was supposed to get a boat with Neil before he ran off with that woman from the fish store. You know Neil Webster?' I shake my head. 'Nice enough fella. I wonder whereabouts they's livin' now. Always liked the name Neil, somethin' straight about it. There was that other Neil fella on the TV last night. Did you see it? The astronaut, what's his name, Neil something?'

'Neil Armstrong. I didn't see it.'

'Yep, that's him. I was shocked that they accused him of never goin' to the moon. They said that the astronauts was just in some big hangar somewhere in the desert making a movie of it, like Hollywood. Something about the flag flying when it shouldn't have. Don't make any sense if you ask me and it aint right to speak like that without proper facts. They made fun of him, this Neil Armstrong fella. They showed him, or someone what looks like him, telling people that the reason he wanted to go to the moon was because an old a neighbour of his, when he was a boy, was trying to get this woman to have sex with him and she told 'im that he could

have sex with her when the kid next door landed on the moon. That's why he did it they said. Its impossible aint it?'

I burst out laughing and Emmy stares at me.

'But it's funny Emmy. Surely you can see the funny side of it.'

'Naw. It couldn't have been him; it must have been some actor or other.'

Minutes later I am still wiping the tears of laughter from my eyes and Emmy has also seen the funny side of it. When we have exhausted ourselves, Emmy returns home and I settle for a nap on the sofa. The phone rings. It's Jack.

'Hi Delli, I'm phoning from a booth because the phone company will not run the cable until they have received the paperwork. How are you feeling?'

'Not too bad. Emmy took Cenzo to the beach this morning to give me a rest. All that running tired him out. He's sleeping now.'

'You should sleep too. I doubt that I will be finished here before five. If I have a good run I will be with you at about nine. Hey, guess who I ran into?'

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'Yes, we have to.'

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‘Now Delli, we’ve been through that. The care is all set up here.’
‘But I’m more relaxed here and Emmy says that she’ll help me.’
‘Look, let’s not discuss it now. I must run back or the beds will be delivered while I’m out. I left the plumber fixing the washing machine connection. I was just checking that you’re OK. Take a rest. I love you. See you tonight.’

I see Cenzo’s tractor in the lane and decide to bring it in before some truck runs over it. I waddle out front and see a guy walking towards me, waving his arm. He lives in the woods further down Wild Duck Lane. I only know him as the old European. I stand and wait for him to join me.

‘Have you still got your mailbox?’ he asks.

‘Yes I think so.’ I turn and look at my mailbox. ‘It’s still there.’
‘Someone has stolen mine. Good health to him, I say, but it was an original American model that I was quite fond of. It was fixed to the old oak, but not well enough it would seem. I will have to get another. The postman is now leaving my mail on the ground. Yesterday I found a package the size of a ham sitting by the Lane. It was reinforced with lacquer red seals, evoking some folkloric heavy-handedness, and the only word that was clearly visible on it was ‘BOMB’.’

I look at him in horror.

‘I couldn’t read the other lettering. It was written in a hand so shaky it was bordering on Arabic. I took the package inside and used my best eyeglasses plus the OED magnifier to unscramble the mystery. It was posted in Bombay, India, nothing to do with bombs at all. It was addressed to Jeffrey. My name is Jerzy, so maybe the postman got us mixed up. Do you know Jeffrey?’

‘No, I’m sorry. I don’t know him.’

‘Jeffrey Smithson. Someone told me that he is now hospitalised in New Jersey somewhere. Anyway, if you know anyone who knows where Jeffrey is, please mention that his package is sitting on my

baby-Steinway. It smells of various exotic herbs so it should be worth collecting.'

I tell him that I will look out for Jeffrey and Jerzy walks back down the lane.

Sam, Emmy's husband, is travelling towards me from the opposite direction; he looks almost as dodderly as I feel.

'Hot 'nough for ya?' he calls.

'Too hot Sam. You bin to 'the Rest'?'

'Yep. Spent too long drinkin' though. Saw Tommy Whittle. You know Tommy Whittle?' I shake my head. 'Well you should. What a fella. Phew, I'm jist about ready to keel over. Is Emmy still with you?'

'No, she's only been gone a few minutes though.'

'Kin you give me a glass of water, Delli? And I'll tell you what, I'd like to sit down with your air-conditionin' on me for a bit.'

'Sure Sam. Why don't you get your own air-conditioning?'

'Oh, I can't be bothered with it.'

We go in and I pour him some ice-cold water. Sam sits down in the armchair and I tell him that I've got to lie on the sofa and take a nap.

'Sure, you git some shuteye. Don't mind 'bout me. I'll be on my way in a bit. I'll tell you 'bout Tommy Whittle though shall I?' I nod my head. 'I was sittin' in 'the Rest' when I heard him comin' up the wooden steps. I didn't see 'im so I didn't know it was 'im at first. Clunk, step, clunk, step was all I heard. Then in he comes, his foot in plaster, leanin' on a crutch and covered in cuts and bruises. He stands just inside the door and tells Frank, the barman, and me 'bout his adventures. Tommy can talk the hind leg off a donkey, that's for sure. Thought he was never gonna stop. Got caught out at sea in that thunderstorm we had a few nights back. Got thrown all over the damn boat he did and thought he was gonna die. Well he didn't die, but he got hisself a broken ankle and a lot a sore bones. Anyway, he spent two days in the hospital and then they sent 'im home. Of course, the first thing he wants is a drink, so he tells Frank

that he aint got no money and caint git to the bank before tomorra, and asks if he can have a drink on the tab. “You know the rules,” Frank tells ‘im, “no money, no booze.” Well, I couldn’t believe it. I couldn’t let old Tommy hobble out on ‘is own without a drink could I?’

I’m barely aware of Sam’s question. His words are like a breeze blowing on my face. I am sleeping and everything in this world is a long way off. I am trying to figure out the distance between my excitement and my composure; for some reason I need to measure it, to know the full force of the contrast between the two. I will not know what decisions to make if I can’t gauge the exactness of the situation. I know that I am dreaming. I am telling a stranger that it is impossible for me to leave Cenzo behind. Cenzo is holding his breath, but the man continues to insist that my boy cannot accompany me somewhere; to the hospital I think. I shake Cenzo to make him take a breath and continue to explain my position to the man. Cenzo has given in to stupefaction, rigor mortis has set in, apart from his eyes that is, and these move between the man to me and back again. The man asks if he can make a phone call. ‘That’s what I told her,’ he says. ‘She won’t listen. Says it’s impossible. Yes, immediately. Her waters have broken.’

I wake with a start. My legs are covered in liquid. My waters have broken. I turn towards Sam. He is still sitting in the chair, fast asleep. I move slowly, quietly and make my way to the bathroom. I put my soiled clothes into the laundry basket, wash myself and go to the bedroom. I have almost nothing to wear. I do not know what to do first. I decide to wake Sam. As soon as I am close to him the thought occurs to me that he might be dead. I shake him, call his name and tell him to wake up, but Sam gives no response. He is indeed dead.

A disconcerting heat fuels within me. I am afraid and I am sad. I do not move. I have too many decisions to make before I can move anywhere. I should phone Emmy. How can I tell her what’s happened? I don’t think about it, I phone Emmy. There’s no reply.

I'm relieved. I want to phone Jack. Should I wake Cenzo? I should phone for an ambulance. I should phone for two ambulances. I phone emergency services and tell them my neighbour is dead and my waters have broken. The woman asks if I want police or medical assistance and I tell her I want to go to the hospital, I am about to give birth and my neighbour has just died in the chair. She tells me I should not leave for the hospital until the police arrive and then asks if I can drive myself to the hospital. I shout at her. 'I don't need the police, I need two ambulances.'

My voice breaks up on ambulances and I am crying. The woman asks for my address and tells me to stay by the phone. Now what do I do? I don't want to wake Cenzo until it is time to leave. I go to my room and pack some clothes in a bag. Pain strikes at me in bursts and with these contractions the world becomes something I can't see. I sit and stand alternately, glancing now and then at Sam. I write a note for Jack, telling him that Cenzo and I are at the hospital. I feel deep anxiety now. I imagine that Cenzo will not be able to accompany me, I don't know why. There must be someone there to attend to him and Emmy can't look after him, not with Sam dead. Oh Sam, what is Emmy going to say when she sees you? What will she do?

I hear a car pulling up. It's the police. They enter and their big, noisy presence fills the house. They are not moving fast or talking loudly, but they travel with a whole lot of agitation around them. The frenetic cacophony must come from the adrenal they pump around their bodies. I hate adrenalin. It makes me sick, especially now. As I am explaining the situation I see Cenzo standing in the doorway rubbing his eyes. I put my arms out to him and he runs to me, throwing his arms around my legs. I stroke him and say that he and I are going to the hospital. Cenzo stares at me, his eyebrows high on his forehead.

There is a banging on the back door. It's Emmy. She is calling from outside. I go to the door and see that the doorknob has fallen to the floor. I call to her and learn that she has the knob belonging to the

other side of the door in her hand, along with the spindle. I tell her to return it to the hole and when she does I place my knob on the spindle, turn it and tell her to push the door open.

‘What’s happened? Why are the cops here?’ she asks.

I take her hands in mine and turn my head to where Sam lies in the chair. Emmy knows immediately what has happened. She cries Sam’s name and runs to him. She kneels before him and takes both his hands.

‘Sam, Sam, what in heaven’s name have you done? You don’t want to leave yet, do you Sam? What has happened to you to get like this?’

‘I’m sorry Ma’am, but he’s dead.’ The policeman tries to get her to stand up.

‘I know he’s dead, you dummy.’ Emmy pushes him away. ‘I can see that, can’t I? I can still talk to him if I want to. He’s still my husband. I can say what I like to him. Sam, Sam how on earth did this happen to you, Sam?’

Tears fill my eyes. The other policeman wants Cenzo and me to leave the room, but I go to Emmy. I rub my hand on her back and she bursts into great sobs. Then she stands up and we hug.

‘I got to go to the hospital, Emmy. My waters broke when I was asleep and when I woke up Sam was dead. I thought he was asleep. He just wanted to rest in the air-conditionin’ for a bit. I thought he’d fallen asleep and then I realised that he was dead and I tried to phone you, but there was no answer and then I phoned for an ambulance and the police came and Oh Emmy I’m so sorry.’

‘Now don’t you distress your self, not in your condition. You just get along to the hospital and have a good strong baby and if it’s a boy you can call him Sam.’

‘I will Emmy; if it’s a boy I will call him Sam.’

I take Cenzo out to the front of the house. A policeman follows behind with my bag. Jerzy and the ambulance arrive in the drive at the same moment. Suddenly my legs crumple beneath me and I fall to the ground. A spasm has collapsed me. I can feel panic from

everyone. The policeman tells the medics that I am about to give birth and they lift me onto a stretcher. They lift the stretcher onto a trolley and push me towards the ambulance. I put my hand out to Jerzy.

‘Can Cenzo stay with you until Jack arrives?’

‘No, I am staying with you Mama,’ Cenzo cries out.

‘Do you like cats?’ Jerzy asks him. Cenzo looks shocked. He nods his head.

‘I’ve got fifteen of them. Do you want to help me feed them?’

Cenzo squeezes my hand tightly. ‘Can you whistle?’ Jerzy asks.

Cenzo shakes his head. ‘Well, you will have to learn, because they will not come unless we whistle for them. Would you like me to teach you?’ Cenzo lets go of my hand, but he doesn’t say anything.

‘How about philosophy, can you talk philosophy?’ Cenzo shakes his head again. ‘Well that’s no good. The cats like to listen to a good discussion while they’re cleaning their paws. What can you talk about?’

‘Tractors,’ Cenzo says. The contractions hit me again and I cry out.

‘Tractors now let me see, tractors. If I asked you questions about philosophy and you replied with some facts about tractors the cats would probably like that. They’re very keen on modern philosophy.’

‘Can I bring my tractor?’ Cenzo asks.

‘Sure you can.’

Cenzo runs to the porch to fetch his tractor. I realise that Jerzy is a genius and I feel jealous that Cenzo will enjoy his company and not me. Cenzo returns on his tractor, a big smile on his face.

‘Daddy will be here soon,’ I tell him. ‘Come and give me a kiss.’

Cenzo gives me a cursory kiss and he and Jerzy walk off down the lane practising their whistles.

The medics lift me into the ambulance. One of them places an oxygen mask over my nose and mouth and tells me to breathe deeply. I can only screw up my face and hold my breath. The

ambulance is going incredibly slowly. I take the mask off and scream at the driver.

‘Get a move on.’ Then I scream at the medic. ‘What’s the fuckin’ matter with him? Why can’t he put his fuckin’ foot down? Have you any idea how fuckin’ painful this is? Arrrrrh ...’

I feel a needle in my arm and then there’s a great lurch deep inside my bowels. There are two bodies fighting to inhabit the same space. ‘The baby’s coming,’ I scream and then I scream every fucking nasty word I know. But I’m happy. The baby is coming out, right now. I know it. I’m pushing and shouting and pushing and shouting and with another horrendous push the head comes out. I keep going. It leaves me.

‘Hey, it just dived out. It dived straight out into my arms. She couldn’t wait.’

‘She?’

‘Yes Ma’am. It’s a girl.’

It’s a girl. I can hear her crying. ‘I want her. Give her to me.’

‘Just a minute. Not so fast.’

He cuts the cord, wipes her and then places her on top of me.

‘Well hello my little one. You were eager to get out. I’m going to call you Antonietta after Grandma and we’ll play consequences together, just as she and I did. You will see; its good fun. Life’s just one big game of consequences; I can tell you that for certain.’

Preparation

An abundance of colour covers the elaborate decorations in the hotel lounge. It's an oasis of exuberance and I wonder about the secrets it knows and about the many liaisons that might have occurred here. Tonight I would like to know just one of them. I gaze at the ornate ceiling with its frescoed scenes of embracing figures and breathe in its voluptuous eroticism. Nothing that is depicted alludes to anything overtly erotic, but the figures, caught in acts of delicate and restrained caress, have an excited sensuality about them.

I clasp my hands together, twist them so that the backs of my fingers touch my chest, and push my hands away, palms first, making my fingers crack. I must prepare myself for the evening ahead. I take a sip of wine, emptying the glass, and wonder what I might do to stop feeling so edgy. There is a battle raging inside me. The performance that is expected of me this evening is impossible. I need to express things that I do not feel and I am confused and crabby about it. To perform with a woman I can't abide and to address her gracefully and charmingly as though I felt great sensuality from her is a tricky business. I shall earn my wages tonight. I make my way to the bar and give the piano a friendly tap as I pass. The manager is happy for me to play it and I feel in need of its gentle distraction this evening.

I order a glass of wine and stand gazing at the lounge. Its historic reputation as the place for extravagant pleasures lends it an air of confidence. No doubt it continues to act as a magnet for those who enjoy the exotic sport of gazing and being seen. I wonder why my excitable condition has slipped into melancholy and nervousness. I take another sip of wine and sit at the piano to play.

I'm as rest - less as a will - ow in a wind - storm

I'm as jum - py as a pup - pet on a string.

I'd say that I have spring fever,
But I know it is - n't spring.

My sounds fill this delightful world of animated scenery and I will
the music to awaken my sensuous memories and charm my
romantic instincts. They must be lying in wait for some suitable
charge to raise them to the surface. I entreat this intimate landscape
of enchantment to focus my wayward concentration and soothe my
perverse sullenness. I improvise furiously.

Is - spring not - spring just - spring main - spring
Off - spring fledg - ling change - ling weak - ling
Some - thing no - thing this thing that thing
Fin - ger - ing lin - ger - ing mal - in - ger - ing.
I'm as rest-less as a will-ow in a wind-storm ...

I think about stolen kisses, unexpected contacts and bodies that
touch lightly in passing. The illicit seconds are the ones that feed the
imagination most and last the longest. I think about bodies quietly
desiring one another and try to recall a scene that has previously
inspired me. My performance must have some chance of success.

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

I receive a modest round of applause from a few and an enthusiastic
response from one who is obviously a fan. Most guests have
concerns other than a need to announce their interest in jazz piano. I
play another tune.

The sleep - less nights The dai - ly fights

The quick to - bog - gan when you reach the heights
I miss the kis - ses and I miss the bites
I wish I were in love a - gain.

I watch an old couple greet one another. They call each other's names and hold their arms out. The man takes the woman's hands and kisses both of them, one, two, three, four times. He holds her hands up and then they hug and kiss each other on the cheeks. Both the woman and the man have tears in their eyes. The man takes out a handkerchief and wipes the tears from the woman's cheek. They kiss again, hold hands and gaze into each other's eyes, exchanging compliments.

Endless slights and bites and plights
Smites and spites and midnight fights
Lets ignite the sybarites
And en - ter - tain our love a - gain.

Greeting is the most charming of public gestures. There is the one, the two, the three and even the four-kiss welcome and each can vary between the virtual kiss and the full contact variety. The position and movement of the hands should also be noted. I love the hands. Their position and the quality of their contact reveal the full intention of participants. The face and the eyes may verify the success of an encounter, but it is the privilege of hands to instigate action. The adventures of the fingers are the avant-garde of the desire for contact, for these sensuous implements, full of ambition and artifice, know best how to dance and explore.

Be - lieve me sir I much pre - fer
The clas - sic ba - ttle of a him and her
I don't like quiet and I wish I were in love a - gain.

The gentle patter of hands means that my fan has departed. I play another.

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

Another couple greet each other with a quick hand-to-hand squeeze. Simple, effective and full of charm, it almost defies description. It is the most pleasantly reciprocal way of saying 'hello, I love you', that any couple can perform.

Be - witched, bo - thered and be - wil - dered
He pitched, smoth - ered and en - dan - gered
She pinched, col - oured and man - oeu - vred
En - riched, coif - fured and un - both - ered

My wandering improvisations soar around and within the underlying tune and fill the lounge. I attend to the notes and feel delight in this tune that can remain intact despite extensive manipulation. It's a mystery and a pleasure. And one should not forget about the fingers. They mould desires and express sensuality with such abundant ease. It is extraordinary that they are capable of moving in line with one's feelings, as though they enjoyed an intelligence of their own.

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

I start the next tune without a break.

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

I think about how I will greet Sonja in the scene we are shooting this evening. We could do it as the old couple did, but we are new lovers not old friends. Could I undertake the hand-kissing ritual or is it altogether too formal? The man lifting the woman's hand and placing it on his lip speaks entirely of his dedication to her, of his love and his promise to honour her. It would correspond in spirit to what we have to achieve, but it is out of keeping with our characters. I dare myself to do it.

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

The dare brings a smile to my face. I want to be the one who determines what happens this evening. It might help melt some of the resentment I feel towards Sonja. So far I have done everything for her and I have received nothing in return. With deliberate abandon I showered her with love and made her the centre of my world. I made her feel beautiful and performed as though I adored her. She remained cool and off hand and took my generosity for granted. I danced to her tune and now I feel used. No, it's worse than this, she drives me mad and her arrogance appals me.

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

Someone claps very loudly. I nod an appreciative head and begin again.

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

Sonja will have nothing more from me until I have something in return, some encouragement at least. I too want to feel special. I get so little attention these days. How can she imagine that other lives exist only to please hers? What does she think will happen if others also feel real? She trusts no one, she can't afford to.

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

With the excited applause I rise, take a bow and return to the bar. Sonja is the cause of my grumpiness, but realising this is not going to make the task of performing with her this evening any easier. To feel reluctance now is entirely ironic. We have almost finished. All the later scenes when our love has matured and we become accustomed to each other's company are complete. The exterior location work and all the studio shots were done during the summer. We are now on the last of the internal scenes, which includes the days when we first met. I am never going to look like I'm driven by an uncontrollable attraction towards her at this point. We should have filmed it chronologically. How can I greet her with a loving kiss now? It will kill me to sit with her at the table, talking of my overwhelming attraction towards her.

I remain at the bar with my third glass of wine. The technicians are moving around the lounge talking about where they will run wires or position their equipment. When most of the guests are fast asleep we will be filming here, pretending that the place is in full swing and pretending that Sonja and I are in love. I take a gulp from my glass of wine and gaze at a couple sitting nearby and playing with each other's hands.

The man has the back of his right hand on the table and the woman has her left hand over his. His thumb moves gently up and down, stroking the back of her hand. His fingers move under her hand, caressing her palm, and her fingers dance slowly over his palm. Together they slowly intertwine their fingers in, out and around each other, their hands twisting this way and that. There is not one part of each hand that has not received some affectionate contact. Their hands must be tingling with the charge that flies between them. He supports her fingers with his right hand and slowly travels his left middle finger over the back of her hand. He is stroking the soft terrain created by the lines of her veins.

Their little sensitised hands, tenderly twisting and dancing together, do not stop and their passion for contact does not wane. The energy that passes between them is almost palpable. He twists his fingers over her hand and caresses her skin with his thumb. She turns her hand and plays with his fingers. The contact is delicate, almost as if she were only touching the air that surrounds his fingers. She moves along his upturned palm to the hairs on his lower arm, barely touching him. Sometimes their fingers touch accidentally as they brush past each other and they smile.

The movements are now almost imperceptible, but their vitality remains. The fingers might be conversing with each other as they hover above the table. The text I must deliver this evening comes to me. I say it to myself without taking my eyes off them. I am seduced by their empathy and mesmerised by their caress. They fill me with admiration and I take in their pleasure like an infusion. I

breathe in the strength and support they give each other and feel very sad. I may never love like this.

He places his middle finger under her fingers and delicately lifts them to his lips, placing a gentle kiss upon them. Their eyes meet and they smile at each other. I put my glass down and walk away from them. I want to make love like this. I want to know what their fingers and hands feel. I want to perform like this, but I cannot mimic their gestures, assume their romance and feel their love while holding Sonja's hand. I secretly blow them a kiss of thanks, leave the hotel and walk in the evening air to breathe in the beautiful gestures they bequeathed to me.

I return and as I enter the hotel I am informed that I am late for the pre-shoot meeting. I join the other actors and film crew and Daniel Meunier, the director, is cross at my late arrival. He informs me that they are discussing Sonja's arrival at the hotel and I tell him that I will take Sonja's hand and kiss it elegantly. They all think that I have been drinking. Sonja informs me that it is agreed that she will run across the lobby and throw her arms around me. I know this is her idea for she said it as though it were the only course of action worthy of consideration.

Daniel asks the technicians to finalise the camera and light positions and suggests that we discuss how to play our romance at the table. I invite Sonja to sit next to me and tell her that we should hold hands. I take her hand, which has the quality of clay, and demonstrate how I would like to do this. Sonja pulls it from me and I ask her to give me a chance to explain. I take her hand again and Sonja starts to attack.

'I am completely unimpressed with you, Jack. Your carefree attitude is impossible to work with. I do not understand what all this weird stuff about holding hands is about and I'm fed up with having to initiate all the moves myself. Why is it up to me to engineer our loving relationship without encouragement or support from you?' I stare at her, dumbfounded and then smile, it's a satisfied smile. I laugh. Sonja slaps me across the cheek and walks out of the hotel.

It took us thirteen takes to do the entrance scene and our scene at the table was so lacking in energy it was like an office meeting on Friday afternoon. It was shorter than planned and too dull to warrant being in the movie. I was certain they would cut it, but when the film was being edited Sonja and I were asked to return to the studio to re-record our dialogue. We managed it with a modicum of tenderness in our voices and eyes that never looked at each other. We were informed that our dialogue would be played over a still image of us sitting at the table.

Some months later I attended a preview and I awaited this frozen image of us with some anticipation. We did not appear to hate each other and I actually rather liked it. It gives the impression that time has stood still while we remain wrapped in our own universe. It remains on the screen long enough to get to know the scene in detail. I recognised the waitress and the barman who are standing at the bar immediately to the right of Sonja and me. She is putting something into his hand. They are the couple that played so nicely with their hands. I never imagined that they were actors.

I asked the technician to give me a photograph of it and then I asked him to enlarge the section around the hands of the waitress and the barman. The performance of this couple, even as a static image, is elegant, full of grace. Their eyes are fixed upon their hands. The middle finger of his left hand extends upwards into the palm of her right hand and her middle finger dips down into the palm of his hand. Their mouths are open and their faces are smiling, beatifically.

Bewilderment

I had been thinking of returning to Italy, but neither Cenzo nor Antonietta would contemplate leaving New York, so I had to make the best of living here. I got myself a job, writing for a magazine and oddly enough I feel like an American now. I have just set up an interview that could make my name. I am going to talk to the wife of released Middle-East captive, Bill Williams. Bill refused to give any press interviews on his return, but surprisingly, Josie his wife has agreed to talk to me. She sounded very ordinary and very polite when I spoke to her on the phone. My editor was truly impressed and I was very proud of myself, but now that I am driving to their house in Vermont I feel rather nervous. I don't know if Bill will be there or whether he even knows about the interview. I am thinking about the pain Josie must have suffered while he was a captive.

I drive off the main highway as instructed and see the small group of houses where I must turn again. The road becomes a lane, turns sharply to the right and the house is here. It is hidden from the lane by a very beautiful garden. I enter the drive, park and stand looking at the house. It is wooden architecture, simple and full of confidence. A labrador comes to me, wagging its tail, followed by a woman. I know this is Josie. She introduces herself and asks if the journey was comfortable.

'Yes, thank you. You have a lovely garden.'

'Yes, thank you. It has taken some years to reach this point.'

We step into the house and Josie escorts me into the living room.

Before me stands a man. He is smiling and he reaches out to shake my hand.

'This is my husband, Bill,' Josie says. 'He's the famous one.'

Bill invites me to take a seat and Josie asks if I would like some tea.

I say that I would and Josie departs for the kitchen.

'So, you have been home more than a year now,' I say to Bill.

‘Yes. I’m getting into the swing of it again now. I don’t like crowds and even social gatherings bother me sometimes, but generally I’m OK.’

‘Do you continue with your research?’

‘A little, scientists never stop working altogether.’

‘Were you working in Beirut?’

‘No, I was visiting a colleague there. I had been working on Quesham Island in the Persian Gulf. It’s an ideal location for bioprospecting.’

‘Is this what you specialise in?’

‘Yes, bioprospecting is the search for biologically useful materials, usually chemical compounds. I would search in remote, virtually unexplored areas, targeting highly diverse ecosystems and poorly known species, particularly soft-bodied invertebrates. It was a monastic kind of life, but I enjoy solitary occupations.’

Bill falls silent and I imagine that he has said something that causes him to reflect.

‘I didn’t appreciate the loneliness of captivity though. Sometimes my only contact with another captive was through the wall that separated us. There were only two brief occasions when I was in a shared space.’

‘Did you know why they kidnapped you?’

‘No. There was no way to question the truth of it. I just counted myself lucky that I was still breathing, though there were times when I could hardly breathe at all. The malicious indifference of my captors created panic in me. It was a coldness that made me shiver. Even when it was boiling hot I would shiver.’

‘It sounds like torture?’

‘Yes. How anyone can intrude so violently upon another body is beyond me.’

Josie returns with a trolley containing a flowered tea set and a plate of cakes.

‘Are you talking about Beirut?’ she asks.

‘Well I was talking about my captors.’

Josie smiles at me and gives me an encouraging nod.

‘Did they communicate with you at all?’ I ask.

‘No. If they visited me in the cell after they had beaten me they never referred to it or gave me any reasons for it. They wanted it forgotten.’

Josie places a cup of tea on the table next to me, hands me a napkin and offers her plate of cakes. I take a sponge cake with lemon icing.

‘Were the beatings part of something they had to achieve?’

‘No. I told them that it made no sense to beat me; that it was punishment enough that I was their captive, but they just laughed. If I tried to resist them they dealt me stronger blows, so I knew how I had to behave.’

‘Why did you refuse to speak to the press about your experiences?’

‘Oh, I’m not so keen on journalism you know. You’re OK, I like you. But that’s enough of me. You have come here to talk to Josie. I’ll leave you to get on with it.’

‘Nonsense,’ Josie puts in, ‘you just go right ahead and talk. He can’t just talk to anyone,’ she says, turning to me. ‘I’ll show Adelia the garden later.’

‘But Adelia is from a gardening magazine, she wants your words not mine.’

This shocks me. I never said anything to Josie about a garden magazine.

‘I won’t publish anything you say unless you want me to,’ I tell him.

Bill lifts his glasses and rubs his eyes. I think about turning on my tape recorder and reject the idea. Josie is smiling and nodding at me. I can’t possibly reveal to them this confusion about gardening.

‘Did any of your captors speak English?’ I ask Bill.

‘One of them did. One time I tried to gain his sympathy. I told him that my wife would be praying to his God for my safe return, but he just laughed. They saw me as a pathetic beast, something they could vent their frustration on.’

‘It must be horrid to live with such confusion.’

‘Yes, sometimes isolation can hurt more than a beating. When I was injured I concentrated on my recovery, but once I felt healed my anxiety returned. Once you forget about the sensibilities that define you, lethargy and then depression set in.’

‘Have you written about this since returning home?’

‘No. I write but not about my imprisonment.’

‘Did you only refuse to do interviews, because you dislike journalism?’

‘Yes and no. I didn’t know how to express my feelings and I didn’t trust those smart journalists to show any kind of sensitivity. If I told them that lethargy is death and a beating can obliterate lethargy, they would misinterpret it. “He prefers a beating to being left alone,” they would say. I just wanted to be left alone with Josie again.’

‘Did you fantasise about revenging yourself?’

Bill shakes his head. Josie says that Bill couldn’t inflict pain on anyone. She takes his hand and asks if he would like to take a rest now.

‘They were pathetic,’ Bill says, ‘and I felt sorry for them, but you don’t want guys like this in your head all the time, much better to think about the things you love.’

Josie places the plates and cups on the tray and returns to the kitchen.

‘I had recurring dreams about Josie,’ he says. ‘I was always looking for her, but I never found her. I was surrounded by hundreds of confused and frightened people and I would retreat down an alleyway and sit with my arms folded over me. I could see the legs of the hurrying crowd from this position and I hugged myself into a primitive state and licked my wounds. I was more animal than human at these times and I had to get used to being like this. It was the only way I knew of surviving.’

‘Were you left in the dark?’

‘No, there was always some light. Even in a basement. In one place they closed shutters against the windows, but they were poorly

made and small amounts of daylight shone through. I suffer from claustrophobia and without these tiny chinks of light I would have gone mad. Seeing the promise of a new day gave me hope. I used to play a waking up game. I would open my eyes, think fresh thoughts and when they got stale I would close them again and pretend that I was asleep. Then I would repeat the act of waking up. On a good morning I had many fresh starts.’

‘How long did they leave you alone?’

‘Generally I saw someone each day. There was one chap, Ali, he always came at midday. He never beat me, just hosed down the cell and gave me some bread and water. He had no English, but I understood him. I was very grateful to him.’

‘Did they move you from place to place?’

‘Yes. This was always a nightmare. I remember Ali and another man coming for me early one morning. They tied my hands behind my back and put a blindfold on me. I was only outside for a few moments, but I blessed the open air, the blazing heat and the startling brightness for those few moments.’

‘Is this when you were rescued?’

‘No. I was being moved. I was bundled into the boot of a car; God, how I hated that journey. As we drove over the damaged roads the wheels collided with great holes and I was bashed violently. I couldn’t bear it, but once the car left the shell-torn streets and we were travelling on smooth roads it was worse, because claustrophobia kicked in. The jolting kept me breathing and prevented the panic. On the smooth roads I had to will myself into an animal state to survive. It was a kind of hypnosis. I became an animal hiding in the boot of a car, convinced that this was the only place I could avoid death. I lay still, licked my wounds and forgot about not being able to breathe. I felt like a frightened animal when I was pulled from that car.’

‘Was the next place better or worse?’

‘Oh much better. It had windows covered with louvered shutters and I could see everything clearly. It was a modern house, recently

vacated. Neglected remnants of domestic life lay around just as the owners had left it. These discarded fragments were like pieces of treasure to me. I held them, caressed them and kissed them. I thought of my family and cried. I hadn't cried for a long time.'

'Were you alone there?'

'Only for a few days. I woke up to the sound of a door being slammed shut and there, standing in my bedroom, was a man wearing nothing but shorts. His thin body was covered in wounds and bruises and blunt scissors had been used to butcher his hair. His appearance was how I imagined mine to be. It was Martin. We nodded to each other and this was our only communication. We didn't run and hug each other; we were too embarrassed and broken to deal with another's presence. We were bewildered. He wandered around the house and I went back to bed. It's impossible to explain how hard one is hit by violent captivity. We silently accepted how weird we had become, how overwhelmed and resistant we were. We didn't have any emotions to give and we needed time to prepare ourselves before meeting.'

'It's almost impossible to understand.'

'Well, he was breaking up the only world that I knew. My survival depended on a few, very small repetitions and I could not deflect from practising these.'

'How long did the stand off last?'

'After a while Martin returned to the bedroom. He took no notice of me; he started pushing against the shutters to see if they would open. Then he began picking through the fragments on the floor. He picked up a plastic rose, put it to his nose and sniffed at it. We both started laughing and with the laughter everything opened up. It was like a river bursting its banks; great floods of emotion poured from us. This was one of the greatest moments in my life.'

'Martin said that meeting you was like rediscovering humanity.'

'Oh it was Martin. He was the one. He found the book of Jalal 'Uddin Rumi's poems. He could read Arabic and he translated for me. It was Rumi's poems that reintroduced humanity to our lives.'

‘Do you have a translation of them?’

‘Would you like to hear them? I know them by heart.’

‘Yes please, I would love that.’

‘This is an ode.’

Those who don't feel this Love pulling them like a river,

Those who don't drink dawn like a cup of spring water

or take in sunset like supper,

Those who don't want to change let them sleep.

*This Love is beyond the study of theology, that old trickery
and hypocrisy.*

If you want to improve your mind that way, sleep on.

I've given up on my brain; I've torn it to shreds and thrown it away.

*If you're not completely naked, wrap your beautiful robe of
words around you, and sleep.*

Bill looks at me. Josie is smiling and I say that it is very beautiful.

‘This one is called, That Journeys are Good.’

If a pine tree had a foot or two like a turtle, or a wing,

Do you think it would just wait for the saw to enter?

You know the sun journeys all night toward the east.

If it didn't, how could it throw up its flood of light at dawn?

And salt water climbs with such marvellous swiftness to the sky,

If it didn't, how could the cabbages be fed with the rain?

*And the grain of sand left its father – its father was a boulder –
and only then it became introduced to the oyster and became a
pearl.*

*Have you thought of Joseph lately? Didn't he leave his father
in tears, going?*

*And didn't he then learn how to understand dreams and
give away grain?*

*And that man with the long nose, didn't he leave his country
– forced to – and only then learned how to travel through*

the three worlds?

And you, if you can't leave your country, go into yourself.

Be a ruby mine, open to the gifts of the sun.

*Your travel could be from your manhood to the inner man,
or from your womanhood to the inner woman.*

By a journey of that sort earth became a place where you find gold.

So leave your complaints and self-pity and yearning for death.

*Don't you realise how many fruits have already escaped
out of bitterness into sweetness?*

Silence hangs in the air. The air seems changed. I feel changed.

'You and I have spoken all these words,' Bill says.

You and I have spoken all these words,

*but as for the way we have to go, the words have not
been preparation.*

There is no getting ready, other than Grace.

My faults have stayed hidden.

One might call that a preparation!

I have one small drop of knowing in my soul.

Let it dissolve in Your Ocean.

There are so many threats to it.

Inside each of us, there is continual dying.

Autumn. Our leaves fall and are blown out over the water.

A crow sits in our blackened limbs and talks about what's gone.

Then the generosity returns.

*Spring, moisture, intelligence,
the scent of hyacinth, rose and cypress.*

Weep, and then smile.

Don't pretend to know something you haven't experienced.

There's a dying that's necessary.

Then there's breath again.

Very little grows on jagged rock.

Be ground, be crumbled, so that wild flowers will come up

where you are.

You've been stony for too many years.

Try something different, surrender.

I have crumbled.

'Shall I make some more tea?' Josie asks. I nod my head.

'I was completely ready for these poems,' Bill says. 'The book is called *Sell Your Cleverness And Buy Bewilderment*. It's not easy to explain how important this little injunction is, but it changed my life. I bought bewilderment. It suits me.'

'I am speechless. I could never write about this.'

'Good, but you must write about Josie's garden. It's one of the world's great delights. It's a landscape with a voice. There is no area in Josie's garden bigger than this part of the room that doesn't have a name. It's inhabited but no one inhabits it.'

'How did you meet Josie?'

'We met at a gardening conference. Josie was talking about the potential of gardens in extreme environments like Beirut and I was talking about the rich chemical compounds that could be harvested from gardens in the sea. That's why she is happy to talk to you. We love to talk about gardens.'

Guilty

I generally enjoy the early stages of the film-making, but the last thing I need now is another movie to act in. I haven't been in good shape recently. I'm working too hard. Even my social life feels like work. I need to enjoy myself more. I'd settle for a beautiful woman who wanted to spoil me. As it is, I am filled with consternation; I might even call it foreboding. I rarely have feelings like this. I'm not the sort of guy who has premonitions, but this morning I just know that the day is going to end badly. I put it down to the prospect of working with Sam Payne. I worked with him once before on a pilot for a film that never got made. Sam directs films on the premise that to get what you want it is always better to be angry. He has to have his own way and he is incapable of listening to a word anybody says. He wouldn't give you an oily rag that he found on the street, especially if he thought that it might be useful to you.

Today the main players are meeting at the film studios to go over the dialogue. The film is not based on a novel so we must spend a little time on characterisation so that Arthur Paxman can develop the script. Arthur is driving me to the studios. I also worked with him once before, on *The Girl Next Door*. It was a good script, but as we head for the hills I realise that I don't have any great feelings about working with Arthur any more than I do Sam. He isn't unpleasant, but he constantly refers to himself and he has so many opposing views it is difficult to trust him.

With such weariness upon me and with such a dislike for the major players you might well ask why I agreed to act in the film and the answer is simple; Penny Fields. The prospect of working with Penny intrigues me. Actually, this is not the truth of it. I have become rather preoccupied with Penny of late and Arthur, I realise, has a similar preoccupation. In his case the preoccupation is with Lydia, the character that Penny is playing, not Penny herself. He is

worried because Sam wants to make Lydia into a dumb blond. They argued about her when they last met.

I do nothing to add to Arthur's anxiety, but he raves on until he is entirely wound up about what he refers to as Sam's tired old stereotypes. One minute he threatens to walk out on the film and the next he is bragging about his superior insights. He asks me to decide whether Lydia should be a hopeless piece of white trash or an intelligent woman and when I ask for alternatives, Arthur ignores me. I cease attending to him. Arthur can say what he likes. Before the day is out Sam will have his own way, come what may. Sam could make you doubt that you ever had a discussion, let alone that he had agreed to change anything. It's a strategy for driving you mad.

The film is called *Chance Encounters* and Lydia Harris is a poor, white, single mother who works as a waitress in a late-night diner. Arthur wants to make her a political figure, someone who fights for the things she believes in. I feel some sympathy for this view, but I cannot put up with Arthur's overbearing ideology. The health of the world could not possibly depend on how Lydia is at the beginning of this movie. For me the most important thing is how the story develops, how the chance events occur and how they enable Lydia and me to turn our lives around. I play Winston, a once a successful journalist, who starts the film in no better shape than a 'down and out' on the Bowery.

Arthur and I arrive at the studio and greet everyone, everyone that is except Sam. No one knows where he is and he is not answering his phone. Arthur hands out copies of his trial script for the first scene and we all look it over casually. I sit with Penny, drinking coffee and discussing acting in a light-hearted fashion. She laughs frequently. She says that she finds the process of 'finding a character' very difficult, but her descriptions of the advances and retreats she makes are entirely amusing. She does a little performance to illustrate how she might feel her way in the dark and how she is continually surprised and then disappointed by her

discoveries. Her ability to make fun of herself fills me with admiration. She is very 'knowing' and I love her sparkling inspiration and sharp intelligence.

I ask Penny what tactics she uses to get out of the dark and while her mouth smiles her brow is questioning. I tell her I sometimes imagine how another actor might act and she agrees she often takes a successful female character and converts it to the role she's playing. I encourage her to tell me more. She says she has also imagined herself wearing an extraordinary costume, something that's nothing to do with the part, and she performs as though she were wearing it. She asks me to reveal other games I play and I tell her about my theory for 'the absence of acting.' When I explain my thoughts on this Penny calls me a concept man. I laugh. She says that there is too much of the clown in her to do the profound things. I feel embarrassed by my theoretical bravado. I want to hug her and tell her that I was behaving indulgently, that I had used cleverness in an attempt to impress her, but I can't do this. I try again to explain my thinking. It is hard to justify why I want to obscure dramatic occasions and why I do not want to reveal a character until the very last moment. My attempt is a fumbling, rather self-conscious affair. The more serious I become the more Penny jokes with me. Eventually I give up and admit that seeking to deny the actions that make a thing theatrical is academic. Penny continues to tease me, saying that I should be soundly beaten for such nonsense, but when she notices that I am offended by her words, she asks me not to be put off by her silly banter.

'Try again,' she bids me. 'Describe how you might work on Winston.'

'Oh, I don't know,' I tell her. 'If Winston has lost all sense of his involvement with the world, as I imagine he has, then I suppose that I would look for gestures that promote the opposite impression to his lack of commitment.' Penny gasps.

'Why?' she asks. 'If the audience expect non-commitment and they get fully engaged confidence, they will be confused.'

‘But if he is attractive, they will be happy to wait for his true self to emerge. I am increasing the tension around him and a little tension is good for a character.’

‘Great, so now I’m really tense. I am expecting you to slouch about and you’re wandering about in a completely decisive way. What next?’

‘I don’t give the full on version of slouching about; I play indifference in small, detailed aspects of action, looking for little gestures that might express indifference. Maybe the signs are in the way I use my hands or the way my eyes wander. If the audience connect with these gestures then he intrigues them. Once they trust their view of him he will become real, they’ll feel they own him.’

‘Where on earth did you learn all this?’

‘From performance artists mostly. For them there is no fixed law that states that an emotional condition should be the product of any action that is undertaken.’

Penny laughs and claps her hands in applause.

‘Just like the clown who weeps,’ she says. ‘Will you show me how to do it with Lydia? I want to abandon acting to find her. It’s appropriate isn’t it, given that the title of the film is Chance Encounters? Is it something we can do together?’

‘Of course, we could have fun with it,’ I say. ‘One proviso though, we must keep this to ourselves. Neither Sam nor Arthur could accept that we were doing anything but clouding the waters. For them paradox is a perversion.’

At this point, as though on cue, Sam arrives. He looks very pleased with himself and there is no sign that we are going to be treated to his usual belligerent behaviour. He apologizes for his lateness and suggests that we get started immediately. The only preamble Penny and I receive about our characters is a request that I adopt a cynical and depressed tone for the reading and Penny adopt an innocent and slightly bubbly one. I share a meaningful look with Penny. Arthur says nothing. He has obviously decided to keep his powder dry.

The first scene of the movie opens in the diner. It's Lydia's first night. There are no props for us to play with, only tables and chairs, and no other actors present to support us. Penny begins by walking about the room, acting as though she is serving a few customers in the diner. She is being jolly and very charming. I wander in, make straight for a table, sit down and gaze out of the window.

'Hi, how ya doin'?' Penny asks, reading from the script.

'I'm fine,' I tell her.

'So, what can I get you?'

'I'm fine, I don't need anything.'

'What you gonna do, just sit there?'

'Sure, if that's all right with you. It's cold out there.'

'I was told no bums, so if that includes you ...'

'Look, I aint no bum OK? Laura didn't mind me sitting here, just as long as I didn't take up anyone's place. Where is Laura anyway?'

'She left. I'm her replacement. Aint you got no home to keep warm in?'

'No, I left.'

'What in the world you do that for?'

'Look, you gonna just stand there and ask questions all evening?'

'Nope, but when the manager comes in I'm gonna tell him that I asked you to leave, but you refused. It's my first night here mister and I need this job. I have a family to keep and you aint gonna wreck it for me. OK?'

At this point Sam interrupts the action and asks Arthur if he has changed the script since their last discussion about Lydia. Arthur tells him that he has, but he has stopped short of making her a cartoon character. 'I need to believe in her,' he says.

'Listen, I don't give a damn about your beliefs,' Sam retorts. 'You have given Lydia an aggressive attitude in the opening scene and it's too heavy.'

'Sam, it's important that she appears to know her own mind.'

'No, no, no, no, no,' Sam cries. 'She's the kind of girl that changes happen to. She wants to remain the same, but keeps coming across

surprises. Her life surprises her and these changes should also surprise the audience. Lydia should say less, keep sweet and appear innocent for a while, or the later developments will lose their dramatic impact.'

'Sam, I think that you are being a bit short sighted here,' Arthur tells him. 'For me, Lydia is a born activist. It is Winston who is the reluctant one.'

'For God's sake, Arthur, are you going to remain a fool all your life? The whole point of the film is that she is an unlikely activist. She can't possibly be someone who shouts her mouth off at every possible opportunity.'

Before long their words are hardly enough to contain their feelings. They are one step away from grabbing each other's throats and they threaten rejection and reprisals if the other does not agree. Penny and I, William, Sam's assistant, and Ida, the casting director sit silently and uncomfortably. I have no intention of getting involved, but suddenly I too am shouting. My words just leap from me and I am loud enough to wake the dead. I can hear myself claiming that Penny is a comedian, a view that cannot be justified by anything Penny has done previously. They are all staring at me and Sam tells me that this has absolutely no relevance either to the film or to the argument. I look at Penny, who appears to be bewildered.

'Penny hasn't been given the chance to show herself yet,' I tell them. 'Give her the opportunity and she will make a great film out of this pile of mediocrity. She will probably earn herself an Oscar into the bargain. You need to shut up for a while and give Penny and me the space to find the characters ourselves.'

'OK mister wise guy,' Sam interjects, 'so if she's the comedian, who the fuck are you, the juggler?'

'Well, none of it is as simple as you would like to think, Sam. You imagine that Winston is weak and lost and broken, but this aint all, he's angry and he's always been angry. He's angry because his journalism is dumb and his marriage is finished. He can't live at home because he hates everything about it. The invented rituals, the

wilful ordering of things that needn't be ordered, all these things attack him. He never knows who he is or what he's supposed to be. Whatever he does, he gets it wrong, that's why he's out on the street; it's the only place where no-one can judge him.'

I am not listening to myself. The words just keep coming.

'Winston's the kind of guy who needs a shack in the mountains or a quiet shed down the end of the garden. It's this or death. Everything is too much for him. Money disappears at an alarming rate and his dreams are filled with galloping horses that he clings to desperately. His anger and his hunger are beginning to extinguish the little light he has left. He cannot continue being a non-stop support machine, it is destroying him. Imagine his wife. Her big fear is that if he pleases himself too much he will end up doing nothing. And this is exactly what he does do. She can't stand his withdrawn melancholy so she demands even more commitment. Then he gets the ultimatum.

"Either get moving or get out." Poor confused Winston; he can only see himself as the guilty party. There is nothing he can do. He can't make anyone understand that he can't perform anymore, so he just stops. He can't stop anything around him so he stops himself.

Imagine living like this, on the street, all life stopped. All he can do is walk. It takes months to walk off this kind of anger and even then all he is left with is the silence of helpless guilt.

'It's Winston who should say nothing at the beginning of this movie, not Lydia. How you gonna write lines for a guy who says nothing, Arthur? How you gonna sit down and write that kind of tragedy? You can't. And you can't write Lydia's lines either. You don't know enough about comedy to do that. Do you know how comedy and tragedy work together and overlap in the same character? No. But Penny and I do and we might find it for Lydia and Winston if we are given the chance. Improvisation is the only way to develop a script like this and Penny and I are the improvisers. Just listen and watch for a while and then think about writing the script.'

‘Well heaven save us all,’ Sam declares. ‘If we’re in this state now, God knows where we’ll be when filming starts. Let’s take lunch. Maybe food’ll cure the hangovers or whatever’s eating everyone today.’

Penny smiles, picks up her bag and takes my arm, marching me from the studio where she gives me a kiss and bursts into laughter. ‘Holy Moses, what was all that about?’ she asks. ‘Was it commitment or non-commitment? There was certainly no absence of acting.’

I shrug my shoulders and laugh nervously. She takes me to a restaurant and once we are seated with a glass of wine Penny asks if my outburst was a strategy to get some improvisation time. I tell her that it was and insist that we perform an improvisation for them after lunch. Penny is a little perturbed by this.

‘You want to return and improvise the opening scene now?’

‘Sure. All we need is a little structural thinking and we’ll be underway.’

‘OK, so what’s structural thinking?’

‘Well, let’s start with the fact that you are noisy and I am quiet.’

‘Great. Nothing like choosing the easy job is there?’

‘But if you’re to be noisy you must have a tactic to help you talk.’

‘Good thinking,’ she says, nodding wildly.

I give Penny some examples of structural strategies by talking about The Theatre of Mistakes and an exercise they did called The First Conversation Piece. I can’t remember it exactly, but I tell her that we should speak continuously without using any adjectives or nouns and use only two verbs. She has no idea how this is going to help and she asks what I expect her to say. I say this is what I expected her to say and she asks if she has said it. I say she should say anything with ‘say’ and ‘expect’ in it. This doesn’t exactly fill Penny with confidence, but we continue playing with the words. I didn’t expect you to say what you said. – He’s expecting her to say it. – He didn’t expect him to say it. – She didn’t say what he said she would say. – . She said she should say it and not expect him to.

As soon as Penny is in the swing of it she realises that she could keep this up for hours. We agree that I will say very little and carry out as many actions as I can and that she will speak continuously and move hardly at all. On our way to the studio we agree that as the film progresses I will talk more and she will engage in more actions.

In the studio we tell our assembled audience of four that we are ready to perform for them. Sam tries to look amused by our takeover. Penny and I take up our positions, her standing and me sitting at the table. I move my head, my arms and my legs continuously in a rather intense, nervous way. Now and then I grunt in response to a question from Penny. Penny stands like a bollard with her arms folded. She treats me to an endless stream of words about not saying anything, about what she expects and about who said what to whom and what they expect. After a while Sam is laughing, it isn't derisive laughter he is enjoying himself. William and Ida show some amusement also, but Arthur is not amused. At the close of our session Penny and I have a better picture of Lydia and Winston and the others, though not filled with confidence, agree something has been established. I kiss Penny warmly as we leave and agree to meet tomorrow. I also kiss Ida and I remark on her anxious demeanour. Delving in her bag she hands me a magazine, suggesting I sit down somewhere quiet, before reading it.

I return in the car with Arthur, pleased that my foreboding about what today might bring was folly. I open the magazine and see that Adelia has given Berenice Buffett an interview. I can hear Arthur trying to gain my attention, but I don't reply to his questions. I say absolutely nothing. Adelia is describing me to the readers of the magazine. Actually, she is describing Winston, the married man with the insufferable guilt who ran from home to live on the street. The man I had talked about before lunch. My immediate concern is how I am going to explain this to Penny.

Talking

Still in the midst of sleep, I was vaguely aware that the birds were singing. I made a clever play with words and woke up laughing. I lay half in sleep enjoying the pleasure of it and didn't prompt myself to get up and write it down. Now, after all the usual commotion of getting the children to school, I can't remember what was said; only that the words were spoken by a sculptor. It will be lost to me forever. I am grateful at least that there is comedy in my dreams.

With such a mood upon me I would like to spend the day writing but my interview in *Blazes* comes out today and I have agreed to meet Patsy for lunch. God knows why I agreed to do the interview. I am naive about talking publicly, I respond too openly. It's Michael's fault. He said I should get some media attention if I wanted to be published. I was too distracted to write for weeks afterwards. I couldn't remember what I said and I knew that I said too much. Thank goodness Berenice sent me the draft copy. I edited out most of my references to Jack. I should never have talked about him in the first place, but no doubt it was the wine that loosened my tongue. It has been years since Jack and I were at loggerheads with each other. I thought I had exhausted my anger towards him.

I should go out and buy the magazine but I am too nervous. I had two very strange dreams recently. In the first Jack was visiting me for supper and I put the interview pages from the magazine in front of him and told him to eat them. He asked why he should do this and I told him that he should eat my words. This woke me. In the second dream I was in a large and very grand theatre. The cast were taking their bows and then the director appeared on stage and gestured for me to stand up. A spot light was directed at me and I stood to receive the applause. Then the spotlight moved to highlight the woman behind me. I turned to look at her. She was the subject of the applause not I. I sat down again, feeling shocked and horribly

stupid. This dream also woke me. Obviously my competitiveness with Jack continues and I still need to get back at him for leaving me.

I try again to remember the amusing words that woke me this morning, they were delightfully clever and I would like them in my story. I know that they are not going to return to me. I read through my story about the sculptor, in case it jogs my memory. It is called 'The Night Francis' Future Was Revealed To Him'.

Francis is a sculptor. What he loves most about sculpture is the process of subtraction. Addition, he says, has to do with painting and other art forms, but subtraction is the primary activity of his art and it is the sole domain of sculpture. This preoccupation with subtraction does not prevent Francis from clarifying his thoughts on paper. From pen and ink sketches or black and red chalk drawings he makes small models in wax or clay and these devices help him to solidify his ideas. He keeps these next to him while he chisels at his stones, but he rarely refers to them. It is the activity of subtracting stone from stone that defines him.

Another striking feature about Francis' way of sculpting is that he doesn't work around his figure while he sculpts; he tackles it from one side only. He has a vision of the whole, but he starts with what he regards as the front of the marble block and then peels the figure out of the prison of the stone. Imagine that you are gazing at a figure lying horizontally in the bath and you see it rise up slowly until it is above the surface, this is how Francis' figures emerge out of the marble. The most protruding parts emerge first, showing the figure in relief and only when it is fully out of the water can you see it in its three dimensional roundness.

Francis starts by drawing the outline of his figure on the face of the marble and then, using mason's strokes he takes up his punch and begins to define its structural forms. After this he takes the coarsest of his claw chisels and begins to give life to his forms. Finally, with ever-finer chisels, he repeatedly visits the surface until the

subtractive process is complete. In the end he uses abrasives to smooth away the marks of the chisel and then polishes the complete figure to make it shine.

If you look at his figures from a distance they appear to be complete, but if you move in closer you can see that some areas have not been touched since they were formed by the punch. In fact, if you attend to the sculptures closely you can see in various parts of the final figure examples of all the stages of Francis' chisel work. His family and friends always ask why he never finishes a sculpture, but Francis shrugs at this, giving the impression that he doesn't know the answer.

In the town where Francis lives he is regarded as an odd fellow. It was his twenty-fifth birthday last week, but he didn't invite his friends over to celebrate with him, he just wanted to carry on with his work. This evening he is at Nancy's birthday party. Nancy is his younger sister's best friend and he has known her all his life. Sometimes Francis is the life and soul of a party and sometimes he is not. He does not understand how this can be so and he has no idea what this evening will bring.

While visiting the bathroom he studies himself in the mirror and wiggles his large, dark eyebrows in a comical fashion. 'Just like Groucho Marx,' he says to himself. He is pretending to wave a cigar in front of his face when he notices a loofah sponge sitting on the side of the bath. It is shaped like a cigar. He takes this up and continues with his Groucho Marx impersonation. Once he is satisfied with his mimicry he takes the loofah down to the main reception room and stalks about, waving the loofah, just as Groucho waved his cigar. He soon has everyone's attention and he addresses the guests in a voice that is reminiscent of the comedian.

'This is either the beauty of the apposite or the opposite of beauty,' he says. 'It all depends what angle you're looking from.'

Everyone laughs and they attend to Francis as he lies on the floor. After a few moments Francis returns to his feet.

'Well from where I was lying it seemed a bit flat to me,' he says.

The guests laugh, some of them nervously. Nancy places her hand on Francis' shoulder and places a kiss on his cheek. She has just decided that she is in love with him. 'Francis will make a fine husband,' she says to herself.

I am pleased with my story and I regard it as being finished. Now I can't put off buying the magazine any longer. I walk down to the intersection and buy a copy from the newsstand. I open it at the page of the interview.

Berenice Buffet talks to Adelia Ancora:

Adelia Ancora was born in Venice. In her early twenties, she visited London where she met and fell in love with Jack Wilkinson. She came with him to New York, where she still lives. Adelia and Jack were recently divorced and their two children, Vincenzo and Antonietta, live with Adelia. Adelia says that she prefers the quiet life, away from the glamour of the film world and she spends most of her time with her children and her friends in New York. She writes stories whenever she can.

What is your earliest memory Adelia?

Playing consequences with my grandmother.

When were you happiest?

When my children were born. Nothing prepares you for this delight.

What do you dislike most in others?

I dislike ignorance most and the self-preoccupation that certain people indulge in.

What was your most embarrassing moment?

I once asked Sam Payne if he was in the movie business.

Tell us a secret.

All my secrets are fantasies. That's my secret.

What's the worst thing anybody has said to you?

Someone once told me that I would be attractive if I looked cheap and talked dirty.

You cultivate quite a sombre appearance, why is this?

I think that it makes me more attractive.

How have you kept scandal free?

I haven't and I'm very glad that most of my life is secret.

Do you dislike attention?

No, I love it. That's why I agreed to do the interview.

Do you have a favourite among Jack's many films?

Yes, I like the one about the musical, the one where the apartment gets bigger and more theatrical each time they write another song. I can't think of the title.

I think its The Girl Next Door isn't it?

Yes, that's it. Michael Sampson designed the sets. He is wonderful. He designed our apartment and I love it. Sometimes he takes Cenzo and Etta to see his sets while they are being constructed. I think Cenzo might like to be a set designer.

And Etta, what would she like to do?

Oh I don't know. Perhaps she will be an actor like her father.

You are a journalist. How do you manage work and family?

I have to manage it, so I just get on with it. I like having a job. I get to meet all sorts of people. I would go crazy if I was by myself too much. I need to be alone to write, but I enjoy my friends.

I understand that you are writing a novel.

No, I'm writing short stories. I couldn't write a novel. I like to have stories in my head; it's a way of saying hello to my self.

What are the stories about?

I suppose that they are about ordinary people and familiar situations. Love is pretty important. I am very taken by Alice Monro. She can invite you into a simple world and then hint at all the stuff that is bubbling away beneath the surface.

How do you find your stories?

They find me. I'm like a sculptor who spends each day chiselling away at a block of stone. I think of my stories as giant blocks of marble sitting in the back yard. I chisel away at them for months until the qualities I want rise to the surface.

Have you published anything?

No. Publishers and agents are averse to new work. The profits are too meagre for them to experiment much. I find this very disappointing.

Have you written about your marriage?

No and I wouldn't do it. It would make me angry.

You were married to Jack Wilkinson for twelve years.

Yes.

The break up was fairly acrimonious, have you made up since then.

Oh yes, life is too short to waste it arguing.

Do you see Jack often?

No. The children would like to see more of him, but he is never in one place long enough to plan anything.

I say, 'shit,' to myself, very loudly. Berenice has kept in these questions that I edited out. I quickly read through the next sequence of questions.

'Would you describe Jack as a friend?

So life was a roller coaster?

Did you seek some guidance for dealing with this?

But you were happy in the early days?'

Then I say, 'double shit,' even louder. This is the complete draft before I edited it. She hasn't changed one damn word. I read the next question. 'Why would anyone choose to become withdrawn rather than get mad?' And my answer is, 'Because Jack could only be secretly angry.' And I go on to tell her that unlike my own anger, Jack's anger bubbles away quietly beneath the surface. 'He is not angry about anything in particular, but he has a deep underlying current of discontent. This is probably because he doesn't know who he is.' Berenice asks if I think that actors tend to be remote because they spend so long playing other characters ... I can't read any more. Why in hell did I allow her to ask these questions and what in heavens name made me answer them?

I phone Berenice, tell her that she has printed the draft copy and ask why she didn't use my edit. Berenice claims that she sent the edited

copy to the design department. She tells me to keep calm while she finds out what happened. She promises to ring back. I head for the car. I must talk to Patsy. How am I going to keep calm? I know how Jack will react when he reads this. I decide to take Amsterdam Avenue as the park road is closed. As I hit 57th Street the traffic is at a standstill. I'm in a rage, shouting and gesturing wildly. As I pass the Russian Tea Room I check myself in case someone should see me, but by the time I get to Third Avenue I'm talking to myself in a crazy fashion. It always happens like this. I see myself as Billie Whitelaw's mouth. I see myself reading 'Not I' through the stage curtains.

Sudden flash ... very foolish really but ... what? ... the buzzing? ... yes ... all the time the buzzing ... so called ... in the ears ... though of course actually ... not in the ears at all ... in the skull ... dull roar in the skull ... and all the time this ray or beam ... like moonbeam ... but probably not ... certainly not ... now bright ... now shrouded ... but always the same spot ...

I force myself out of it, but I know that this piece of journalistic junk called an interview is going to haunt me forever. The phone rings. It's Berenice. There was a mix up. Some guy should have made the switch and she should have checked that he had, but neither thing happened. Berenice apologizes and suggests that we meet to discuss what to do. I tell her that I will ring back. I could just turn off the road now and die. I invent some words of apology for Cenzo and Etta. No, this is no good I need a drink. No, not that, that won't turn the pain off either. The buzzing in my head continues and I remind myself to breath. I take a right into 77th Street and park. I run to Patsy's apartment building and ring the bell. I hear the buzz, the buzz that allows me to push the door open. I don't wait for the elevator; I prefer to stay out in the open. I run up the stairs to the third floor.
'Patsy, oh Patsy, I feel terrible.'

I am on the floor. I can hear voices. They are voices of panic.

‘Can she move her limbs?’

‘I’ll call an ambulance.’

‘Get a pillow under her head and loosen her clothing.’

‘Make sure she keeps breathing.’

‘Delli. Delli can you hear me? You are going to be fine. We have called an ambulance. Do you have a pain anywhere? Does your chest hurt?’

‘Oh, Patsy, such a stupid thing has happened. Jack will never forgive me.’

‘Sure he will honey. What’s there to forgive? Don’t you worry.’

‘But wait ‘til you’ve read the interview.’

‘Just sit up a bit if you can. Are you OK?’

‘I think so. I would like a cup of tea?’

‘Of course, can you make it inside? There, easy now. I think that she is going to be fine, just a shock she had that’s all.’

‘The medics are on their way.’

‘Just tell them that she is fine now. You just sit here sweetheart and keep breathing. I’ll make some tea.’

‘Thanks. Where’s my magazine?’

‘It’s here. Is this your interview?’

‘They printed the unedited version and Jack will go mad. I talked about him.’

‘Come on I’m sure it’s not that bad. Jack will probably laugh it off as usual. It’s a very nice photo of you I must say. You look intelligent and European, like those French women in the fifties. What were they called, the expressionists or something.’

‘The existentialists,’ I correct her and she laughs.

‘The expressionists,’ Patsy says, making a grand gesture with her arms to illustrate them, ‘or the ...’ and she stands thinking about a suitable gesture to express them by. ‘The existentialists,’ she declares, and she quietly lets out a fart. I laugh and she laughs some more and soon we are in total hysterics. The doorbell rings. Patsy

answers it and two medics accompany her in. I can't stop laughing, I can't stop hearing Rosie's little fart that accompanied the existentialists. One of the medics asks if I am on drugs, but Patsy assures him that I am not. I stay serious long enough to explain why I think I collapsed on the floor and they check me over to see if I have broken anything. They say I'm fine, but I should call again if I have any further symptoms. The minute they are out of the door Patsy says that the tall one was an expressionist, and she waves her arms again, but the short one was definitely an existentialist. She verbally makes a little 'ffttuupp' noise to mimic the fart. We didn't stop laughing all day.

Availability

The moment George said it I felt warm, bemused and detached. He was aware that his news would cause a reaction in me, but he had no idea of its extremity. I became unconscious of the phone call and started swimming around in a different atmosphere. When George's voice disintegrated into an incoherent mumble I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference. All I could hear was the blood coursing through my veins. Then a part of me just left my body and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still in the same place, sitting at the table holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to his news by escaping from my body. The next thing I knew, I was back on the chair again, sitting very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their energy as they took in water through their roots and delivered it up the stem. I was surprised that the sound they made reminded me of a power station.

Of course, I had not actually defied the laws of gravity, but the experience was overwhelmingly confusing and I wondered if I had left my wits up there, suspended in air. I was certain about the veracity of these events, but I had no idea how it was possible. Not having done anything like this before, and not being inclined to believe others when they tell of such incidents, I was reluctant to trust my senses and wherever my wits had gone they were not coming back to me in a hurry.

It was certain that I had experienced a dislocation in the essential synchronicity of my time and space perceptions, for how else could I have seen myself at the table from the ceiling. As far as I knew there were no other explanations for these extraordinary minutes or seconds in my life. I tried telling myself that I had fainted, but this did not equate with the lucidity I felt while floating. My memory

told me that I carried out the action knowingly and I was fully sentient of everything around me. The only other alternative I could think of was that delirium had added some extra time to an event that lasted no longer than a split second. Some days I believed that I had not floated near the ceiling at all, only extended the time it took to jump up and down, on other days I imagined that I had simply invented a fiction about moving calmly off the floor and on other days I believed that I had definitely left my body and watched myself sitting at the table.

Eventually I came to terms with the fact that I had floated up to the ceiling. I talked to my friends about it as though it were just one of life's strange experiences, but I could not admit to the probable reason for its occurrence, not without jeopardising the quiet life I had achieved since moving back to London. I could not afford to re-ignite the public's desire for more erratic moments from my private world. My life in LA had become a mess, my career was in tatters and moving out of the limelight had already cost me dear. I was still plagued by the press who were hungry to publish any technicolour details they could find to support the view that my life was just one long wild party with an endless stream of new lovers.

But this little floating episode was just the start. It was followed by a series of unexpected coincidences that became increasingly consequential and almost impossible to keep private. To add to the drama Delli had just informed me that she and the children had decided to stay in London. They had been renting an apartment here temporarily and now they were going to make it a permanent arrangement. I was pleased about the decision. To have the children close by gave me some stability and it introduced a very important rhythm to my life, but now I could sense that I was going to disrupt all of this yet again.

You are probably guessing that the impetus for my extraordinary flying act was a woman and I can confirm that it was the actress, Elena Travis. Why she had such a powerful effect on me I do not know, but my magnetised relation to her increased as events

brought us more frequently into each other's orbit. I saw her first in a television series and the moment my eyes settled on her exquisite form I was stricken. Everyone commented on her beauty, but I doubt they delighted in the sensuality of her movements as I did. Each nerve in my body reacted to her bright voice, her open face and her dazzling eyes. I wanted to kiss her graceful neck and her swan-like shoulders. I wanted to lie next to her perfectly formed body and forget that the world existed.

In the television series Elena played Cathy Holmes, a secret agent sent to Beirut to search for information on another agent who went missing there. She successfully locates the group who have captured him and she sends her information to London. The problem for Cathy is that she has gathered too much information and her employers decide that she knows too much to return home. They become increasingly implicated in the agent's disappearance and to ease their paranoia they decide to have Cathy poisoned. I couldn't bear it that she died, albeit as an actress, and I realised that my passion for her was beyond the common attraction that an actress summons from her audience. I had lost myself to her completely. Shortly after this I picked up a film magazine and read the headlines. 'Elena Travis is the star in The Fact about Fiction.' I quickly turned to the interview page, gazed at the glamorous and provocative pictures of her and fell into a hypnotic trance. I was not under any illusion that this beautiful woman would find me attractive, but I still deceived myself into thinking that her generous smile was made only for me. I played with her clear, lovely eyes and imagined them staring lovingly into mine.

Then, not a week later, George, my agent, pointed her out to me. We were at an opening party for the first production of Plain Tales. I stared at her, elated and star struck. She was the epitome of beauty, completely charming and worthy of desire. I tried to compose myself so that I could meet her sensibly, but my gentle resolutions were nothing next to my over excited state. I had to drink a good few glasses of wine before I had the courage to ask George to

introduce us. I told her that I loved her TV series and asked about her new film. She said little, asked what I had planned and then discussed agents and contracts with George while I stood gawping. I was attempting to put my empty glass down on a nearby table without turning away from her and, misjudging the distance, the glass fell to the floor. To cover up my embarrassment I started berating the table for moving, telling it that it could not be invited to nice parties if it could not stand still. This created quite a stir and, sensing that my audience found it entertaining, I switched my attention to the waiter who was sweeping up the glass. I told him that he should audition the tables before he hired them and I asked him what guarantees he could give that they would behave properly in future. The poor man shrugged his shoulders. I couldn't leave it here so I showed him how he might audition the tables for a part at a reception party. Everyone was in stitches and to keep the momentum going I started to play the waiter who was trying to cope with errant tables that were intent on moving around the room. I realised that finishing this little pantomime was not going to be easy, but when another waiter approached with a tray of fresh glasses I used him as a ready made cue to finish the act. I helped myself to a glass of wine, lifted it up to the audience, thanked them for their attention and bowed extravagantly. George, incorrectly assuming that it was drink rather than love that was my muse here, took me by the arm and indicated that we should leave. As we passed Elena he gave her his card and she promised to contact him soon. She offered me her hand and I held it very gently before lifting it to my lips. George quickly took my arm and escorted me to the door. I bowed to Elena solemnly, but very nicely, and waved like an idiot as we left the room.

The next coincidental meeting happened a week later. I was having supper with the excellent performance artist and cook, Mickey Greenall, when a friend of his phoned to invite him to a party. We decided to go and we were happily drinking in the garden when Elena walked across the terrace and stood beside us. The sight of

her made me weak in the knees and her flirtatiousness manner fuelled my desire for her. Elena's wonderful smile attracted me ever closer and it was when she touched my arm that I first experienced a slight floating sensation. At the time I associated it with drink rather than Elena. I leaned in to her and whispered, 'I love you.' Elena, startled, pulled away, but she gave me a friendly slap on the shoulder and continued to laugh.

A few days later I was with George, in his office. He asked if I wanted to act in a West End play and I said no. I had never acted on the stage before and the thought of it terrified me. George said that it would be good for me and that it would be very good for my career. He handed me the play script, told me that the lead male character was a serious, challenging role and instructed me to study it carefully. I took it home and read it through without any great enthusiasm. It concerns a man and a woman who keep their devotion alive despite an extraordinary set of conditions that make their love impossible. The only thing that struck me was the structure. The first scene opens with a kiss and then time jumps back to their first meeting to describe the events that lead up to this kiss. Time then moves forwards to the final scene where they are in the same place where their first kiss occurred and they kiss again. I found it strange that the kiss was so crucial, when kissing is not a thing that works well on stage. It is too difficult to pull off night after night; repetition weakens it. Even in real life kissing is more dynamic at the start of a relationship. Only in the movies, where repetition is achieved in the edit suite, could such a thing work. Everyone avoids it in the theatre. It is too closed and exclusive. George phoned a few days later, saying that the producers were interested in my reaction to the play. I was surprised that they knew I was reading it and said that I wasn't convinced by the part. When George questioned me on this I admitted that I was too nervous to perform on stage. He asked if he should tell me the name of the female lead and I said that he should.

The moment George said it I felt warm, bemused and detached. He was aware that his news would cause a reaction in me, but he had no idea of its extremity. I became unconscious of the phone call and started swimming around in a different atmosphere. When George's voice disintegrated into an incoherent mumble I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference. All I could hear was the blood coursing through my veins. Then a part of me just left my body and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still in the same place, sitting at the table holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to his news by escaping from my body. The next thing I knew, I was back on the chair again, sitting very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their energy as they took in water through their roots and delivered it up the stem. I was surprised that the sound they made reminded me of a power station.

Then I could hear George asking if I was still on the line. I told him that I was and excused my absence with the lie that the line had gone dead.

'So, what do you think?' he asked.

'About what?' I asked.

'About performing with Elena Travis.'

I am not sure he could hear my reply, but he said that I would have to be out of my mind to say no. I couldn't tell him that I would be out of my mind whether I said yes or no, so I asked for more time. George talked about timing, rehearsals and the theatre while I tried to come to my senses. By the end of the conversation I had agreed to act in the play. I felt giddy with exhaustion and went to bed.

The following morning I crept around quietly and slowly. I picked up the script from the kitchen table, hugged it and gave it a kiss. I had some difficulty keeping my face straight. I rang George, but he was unavailable. I thought about every kiss I had seen performed. I had lunch and thought about kissing, I had tea and thought about

kissing and I had an aperitif and thought about kissing some more. The thought of kissing Elena paralysed me. There's a world of difference between acting in love and being in love.

Why do I always surrender so easily? Why is my 'availability' so easily won? Why do I risk my self-respect in the name of desire? How can I be filled with regret over my mistakes, then forget them completely? How can it make me ill and yet not dampen my enthusiasm for it? I've been living with this 'availability' for years. I've danced to all of love's tunes and improvised with every opportunity.

After a few days of this I sensed that my wits were returning. I phoned George, got Elena's number and rang her. I invited her to lunch, but she declined, claiming that she had to attend a funeral. I was delighted to have spoken to her and we agreed to meet later that week. Elena had bought a new car and she wanted to drive out to the country for lunch, so I was to be her passenger.

For the next few days I paced myself carefully, but on the morning of our lunch date my 'availability' was like a waterfall. This was to be expected. When I opened the door to Elena I practically fell into her arms. She wanted to look around and we sat for a while in the garden. I drank in every moment. I asked about the funeral and Elena said that the mourners were the nicest group of people she had been with for ages. Then she talked about not having a Will and claimed that she had no one to leave things to. I wanted to hug her. Here she was talking about death and making a Will and all I could do was sit thinking about how it would feel to kiss her.

As we were leaving, just as we had reached the hall, Elena said that she was nervous about kissing me. I practically fell over, but once I had recovered I told her that the prospect of kissing someone for the first time makes everybody nervous.

'Why don't you kiss me now,' she said.

I was more nervous then than at any time in my entire life. She leant against the wall and smiled. It was heavenly. As I moved towards her she lifted her hand and I locked it into mine, squeezing it. This

gesture was more like a kiss than any kiss I could remember. With a great surge of desire I pushed her hand against the wall and kissed her gently on the mouth. She took my other hand in hers and with both our hands locked together she pushed one and pulled the other. She was turning me round. I gave in to her movement and took up her position against the wall. She gave me a gentle kiss like the one I had given her. I repeated her turning action and kissed her again and then she repeated the whole move a second time.

Elena and I smiled at each other, squeezed our hands together and parted. We were both elated and somewhat relieved at having kissed each other so nicely. She claimed that she knew that I would be good at kissing and this left me speechless. I was probably grinning from ear to ear. Elena said that we should kiss like this in the play. Being in the car with her was like being transported to a magical land. We talked briefly about our kiss, congratulating ourselves on its success, but neither of us mentioned why we had kissed in the hall. Elena likened the kiss to a dance and we described the sequence of moves so that we would remember them when it came time for rehearsals. I told her that the formal qualities of the moves would help us to overcome the dangers of nightly repetition, but I wanted to say that I could kiss her daily for the rest of my life. Elena said that kissing every night was easier than dying every night. She loathed repeating Cathy Holmes' death in Beirut. 'No one should be made to feel isolated and wrongly punished every night,' she said. To cheer her I started to list all the examples of performance kissing I could think of and soon Elena was adding to the compilation. We agreed that tender fleeting kisses before a departure or kisses blown off the palm of the hand did not count. We hated brief kisses that followed a dramatically long build-up and those that attempted passionate reality and failed. We decided success did not depend on type as much as it did on delivery. We even had no objection to kisses occurring offstage, providing the lovers ran onto the stage holding hands wearing suitably inane grins. Our favourite was the kiss of a 'would be' lover who could not stand the strain of

prevarication any longer and delivered a passionate kiss to their shy loved one.

I told her how ecstatic I was when George informed me that she would be performing the female lead. Elena smiled self-consciously and mumbled something about my propensity for exaggeration. 'It's true' I insisted. 'The moment George said your name I felt warm, bemused and detached. He was aware that his news would cause a reaction in me, but he had no idea of its extremity. I became unconscious of the phone call and started swimming around in a different atmosphere. When George's voice disintegrated into an incoherent mumble I imagined it travelling through turbulent clouds packed with interference. All I could hear was the blood coursing through my veins. A part of me just left my body and floated up into the air, somewhere near the ceiling. I knew that my body was still in the same place, sitting at the table holding the phone, but there was enough of my conscious self suspended up there for me to believe that my sentient apparatus had responded to his news by escaping from my body. Next thing I knew, I was back on the chair again, sitting very still, full of wonderment. I could hear the plants growing. I could see and feel their energy as they took in water through their roots and delivered it up the stem. I was surprised that the sound they made reminded me of a power station.'

Review

When Jack moved back to London I decided to follow him. It didn't make sense living in the States when the entire family was in Europe. Etta was keen to be close to her father and having decided on a career in acting I thought it best that she study in London. Then, just as she was about to enrol at RADA she decided she wanted to live in Venice and help my parents run the restaurant. Offspring, they are born to drive you crazy. Cenzo was no better. His only ambition was to hang out in bars. I pestered him endlessly to go to university and when he eventually agreed he told me that he was going to Manchester to read 'Philosophy and English'. What in hell's name is the use of doing philosophy? And the English bit isn't even literature. I bet it was Jerzy and his cats in Hampton Bay who inspired him in this.

So, Etta went to Venice, Cenzo went to Manchester and I didn't have a family any more. I thought about returning to Venice myself, but not seriously enough to make it happen. I had managed to find work here in London, writing book reviews for a magazine, and I doubted that I could do this in Venice. As for being happy, I didn't know where I could do this and having a job didn't particularly help in this matter. I had a boy friend, or lover, or whatever you call it, but Paul was more of a hindrance than a help. If he wasn't worshipping me he was telling me what I should do. He imagined that he was my guardian and he insisted on advising me over every little thing. When I told him that our relationship was over, he declared his undying love for me. I had no idea why should he do this and I thought that he probably needed his head examining. It is possible, of course, that Paul loved something in me that I couldn't see, but I couldn't get away from the feeling that he was inadequate and the closer he got the more rebellious and unreasonable I became. I did feel some remorse about rejecting him, but it was impossible to ignore my feelings. Even feelings that cloud

issues like a mist clouds a landscape must be followed. Mostly I sat around berating myself for not writing. I didn't have enough buoyancy in me to sustain even the shortest story and the sum total of my output was the two book reviews I wrote each week. The change happened one Friday, when I was with Thompson, my literary editor. Thompson was always too busy to pay me much attention and after his cursory 'good morning' I went to the large table where the books for review were placed. There were two piles, labelled REVIEW and REJECT. I browsed the one marked REVIEW and found *The Moons of Jupiter* by Alice Munro. I held it lovingly. Then, in an absent-minded manner, I started rifling through the books in the REJECT pile. There was a name there that I knew, Rosie Walker. I had seen her, some twenty years ago when she was performing in the Red Bar on 2nd Avenue. Rosie was from London and Jack knew her from his early days in performance art. I was very stupid with her that evening. I can hardly bear to admit that I had asked her what the performance was about. Her brief reply never left me. She said that she was only interested in talking about structure. That was all we ever said to each other. It's a long time to carry remorse for a casual and inappropriate question. Her book was called *Dreaming Pal Joey* describing the six months it took Richard Rogers and Lorenz Hart to write the musical. It seemed like an unlikely subject for Rosie and I couldn't resist taking it. I placed it in my bag, returned to the REVIEW pile and picked up *Chronicles* by Bob Dylan. I waved my two books at Thompson and he nodded at me as I made for the door. That evening I sat with Rosie's novel. The tale is told by Lorenz Hart and Rosie uses a diary format to relate the events. I found little evidence of her stated preoccupation with structure and this was rather perplexing.

On Saturday I read *The Moons of Jupiter*. One should never read Alice Munro so quickly, but even after the briefest of scans I could feel the extraordinary place she invites me to inhabit. On Sunday I wrote my review and on Monday I went to the website of Rosie's

publisher and got their phone number. The woman laughed when I told her that I would like to contact Rosie's agent, but once she learned my intention she gave me Rosie's email address. I sent my communication immediately, explaining that I was Jack Wilkinson's ex-wife, that we once met in New York and I was interested in writing a review of *Dreaming Pal Joey*. Within minutes I had Rosie's reply. She included her mobile number and I phoned her. Her laugh was not unlike the woman at the publishers who I had spoken to earlier. We agreed to meet that evening at the Half Moon Tavern on the corner of Drury Lane and Great Queen Street. I spent the day reading Rosie's novel. Once I got into the rhythm of it I enjoyed it, but I was a little perplexed by Larry Hart's character. Larry narrates the tale and Rosie had made him into a rather formal, anxious character. I found his voice difficult to equate with the voice of Rosie the performer. Of course I didn't have any real idea about who Rosie is, but having carried her with me all these years I felt something about her. I was standing at the bar, scrutinizing every female for signs that they might be Rosie. I had become rather nervous, but I recognised her the moment she walked in. I didn't have to ask if she was Rosie and she didn't ask if I was Adelia. I ordered two glasses of wine and Rosie asked about Jack. She knew that he was back in London. I told her that he was a bit lost and Rosie she said that she was also a bit lost. 'I prefer it this way,' she said and I liked her for saying so.

Rosie asked how I had come across the novel. I explained about my job for the magazine without mentioning that I had found her book on the REJECT pile. She was still surprised that I wanted to review it. 'Most of my friends find it unreadable,' she said. I told her that my review might not be accepted, but she wasn't put out by this. She suggested we find a quiet corner. Once we settled I admitted to asking her a stupid question in New York. Rosie laughed.

'I have no memory of it.'

'Is it still true?' I asked. 'Are you still only interested in talking about structure?'

‘Yes, I can’t think in any other way.’

‘But it’s not easy to read the structure in Pal Joey.’

‘No, you’re not the first to say so.’ She looked uncomfortable then.

‘I gave the structure a subsidiary role. I wanted the reader to feel comfortable, to feel that they were on familiar territory. I didn’t want to write a radical novel and I had this dumb idea that it might be popular, you know, get published and all that. I’m always having stupid ideas. I tried to sell it to agents as literary biography and then I tried historical romance; I even thought of changing my name, not that anyone knows about Rosie Walker.’ She laughed.

‘But someone published it.’

‘Yes, I did and the best thing about doing this is that I can now describe it just as I wish. Structural description is much stronger than a figurative one.’

‘So how do you describe it?’

‘As a continual swirl of collaged and interlocking components.’

‘Are you unhappy about the way it has been received?’

‘Not now. I was for a week or so, but why worry? I could rewrite it to make the structure more visible if I wanted to. Editing structure is still my greatest pleasure.’

‘Give me an example of structure in the book?’

‘The progress of the relationships that Larry and Richard engage in is structural. Richard’s romance grows into something from nowhere and Larry’s starts in full swing and ends with nothing. Their loves are like two cones placed head to tail; one develops additively and the other subtractively. It’s an obvious linear construct.’

‘Most structures for novels are linear, aren’t they?’

‘No, most of the events in Pal Joey go round in circles. We accompany these two guys as they make their Musical and this kind of activity doesn’t travel in a straight line. It might start with uncertainty and end with the production, but generally composers go over and over the same territory time and again. This is how I describe their creative journey, but I describe their physical

movements very differently. Richard travels great distances in musical terms without travelling anywhere, while Larry writes at the place of arrival and never stops travelling the city. Even in the end, when Larry's love is dead, he begins his new life with a journey.'

'Why did you make Larry the narrator?'

'I'm not sure. He's a strange character. I guess because he is as bewitched, bothered and bewildered as I am. Richard is confident, he is a genius and I have no idea how to write with this kind of voice. I like Larry. He is weak and odd, but he has a good heart. I am fond of good hearts. We don't know much about Larry in real life, but his generosity towards Richard is the reason for their success. When Larry accepts Richard as his teacher, when he allows him to initiate everything, he is giving Richard's genius a chance to flourish and he does this because he loves him. Other partners would be competitive. Song writing in pairs is nourished by generosity and trust. It is a very particular condition. It acts beautifully as a counter movement to the repetition of rejections that populates the novel. I love playing with oppositions.'

'Are there other oppositions?'

'Oh, I don't know. Invitation and rejection is the most important one. There is confusion versus understanding, I suppose, and generosity versus greed. It's almost impossible to write anything without touching on birth and death, creation and destruction or comedy versus tragedy isn't it? They're always present. This is why I think of structure as going round and round. Eventually everything is included and in this instance it all ends up in the musical.'

'How carefully did you plan it?'

'Not at all, I just allowed the writing to write itself and then listened to it. I love words. I see them as tiny components that allow an endless opportunity for play. It's called editing, but in truth it is weaving, weaving a great number of things together to make a cloak. You have to listen to it, you can't preconceive it.'

'Do you prefer writing to performing?'

‘I love both. I love listening to things as they develop. It’s like making music. The sound and rhythm of a text is as important as its meaning. Joyce imagined that he had written a page of music when he had finished a page of writing, not that I’m in his orbit, but I like it that he imagined this.’

‘Luciano Berio used Joyce in his music. Kathy Berberian read Joyce and Berio converted her sounds into new sounds with different intensities and rhythms.’

‘I like Berio. He had a preference for instruction over notation?’

‘Do you dislike notation?’

‘Only when it is used too early and given too much emphasis. If I told you that chapter one engages characters A, B and C who act like this, this and this and chapter two engages characters E, F and G, who act like that, that and that, the work becomes more about notation and less about listening to the sound and the rhythm.’

‘So your characters are structurally configured, but you don’t notate their roles?’

‘I don’t need to, they are components or figures of singularity and repetition; they don’t change. I particularly like Bud’s constancy. He is his usual Buddy self from start to finish, offering the same anarchic and oppositional voice throughout. For me Bud is truth, he is art, unshakable and always looking to inhabit the place where definitions are too few to make any sense.’

‘How strange, I never thought of them as static.’

‘They are. Its complex enough making all events in their lives end up in the Musical without adding character development into the equation. The diary-like format helped consolidate the repetition.’

‘But is any of this readable? I didn’t pick up on this’

‘Well I don’t mind what people read or pick up on. For me, structure is the place that I look from because I like knowing the shape of things. I always appreciate a book if I can draw its shape. I love knowing what kind of mark a novel makes.’

‘How would you draw Dreaming Pal Joey?’

‘I would draw a big circle and without taking my pen off the page I would go round and round making ever decreasing circles until I got to the middle. I’d escape from the circle a few times with a few squiggles before returning to it again.’

‘How strange, I always like stories that can’t be drawn.’

‘Good for you. If you know what you want, nothing else matters.’

‘Let’s talk about other aspects of the novel. Love and beauty are important aren’t they? How would you draw these?’

‘Love and beauty? They are beyond drawing. I invented the gardens in the novel to display the kind of beauty we can know, but apart from this, beauty is indefinable. When Larry’s struck by Bernard’s beauty he’s overwhelmed and threatened by it, but the beauty he finds in the gardens gives him pleasure and reassurance. There’s nothing we can add to the canon on love and beauty is there? We just move the same old pieces around in a different order.’

‘So it’s just another story about desire and rejection then?’

‘Yep, the same old tale repeated again. All the earlier tales of love and the endless stream of love songs I quote from say it all. I don’t have a driving ambition to give expression to my thoughts on love. I hate the term expression anyway. We can’t help expressing ourselves can we? If you squeeze a lemon some juice comes out. It’s like that. That’s why I like structures and finding new ways of saying the same old things. That’s the art of rhetoric isn’t it? No answers, just another walk around the same old territory from another vantage point.’

‘So how would you describe the novel’s vantage point?’

‘Oh I don’t know, it’s just everywhere. A few years ago I wrote a series of stories about a performer who is always described when his personal life and his performance life collide. The stories were snap shots taken throughout his lifetime. I like this place half way between narrative space and real space, so I repeated it in Dreaming Pal Joey only here I tried to sustain it for the length of a novel. It takes Richard and Larry six months to put their Musical together,

six months of inhabiting this place of collisions. Sustaining the unity of time and place was difficult.’

‘But surely readers take the conditions for granted; they are unlikely to read this place of collisions as something separate. They will think of it as the place that the characters naturally inhabit.’

‘Who knows, reading is a complex affair. It’s certain that those things we connect with and those that we imagine are reality continually overlap. Performance Art discovered the kind of invitation I am referring to. They didn’t invite us to read character in terms of plot development, they asked us to witness the work that a performer is engaged in. If we forget that Larry’s lover, Bernard, is a character, a personality, then we can begin to consider his musical or structural role. He is Larry’s muse, but he is first and foremost a connection that eludes Larry, one he is continually driven to win as his prize. Larry is the spirit of pushing forward with difficulty; he wills his creativity into being. Bernard is the spirit of rejection. He is the elusive one who continually pushes Larry away, throwing him back on himself. You can see the dance of this, actions causing reactions, desires begetting rejections. Once I saw Bernard like this, as a mechanism for opposition, it was easy to write him. I just had to keep putting fuel on Larry’s fire of desire and the engine of their confrontations chugged along automatically.’

‘Without knowing this we could never read so much into it, could we?’

‘No. It’s all folly. We only think this way for ourselves. I have to do it; it keeps me alive. I hate not knowing what I’m up to. As for the rest I couldn’t give a damn. I’ll now go back to my old way of working. It’s much easier. I need very little and all this noise around publishing and the endless journalism and the ambition for ideas and everyone expecting books to be about something, it can all happen without me.’

Rosie empties her glass and points to mine. I nod my head and she goes to the bar. I look around. I have been so immersed in Rosie’s

world I hardly know where I am. I take a large gulp from my glass and ask about her ambition to be published.

‘Getting all this kafuffle out of the way is the most important thing. Finding enough freedom and confidence to play and say no more than we should is my kind of ambition. If I want I can collage views together like a cubist and not have to justify it to anyone. The most significant facts are always at the edges, so it’s best to make your home where you can avoid the activity at the centre. I don’t mind being a wounded dancer, I can still sing as I cross the battlefield.’

‘Rosie, I think you play consequences all by yourself.’

‘I do. Combining unlikely activities and making connections where others can’t find them, is consequences. Playing with chance and celebrating the tiny flickers of connection that we tumble over, is consequences. That’s how we tune our lightening glance and turn the ordinary events of the world into marvellous accidents.’

‘I wish I could do this.’

‘So do it. You just have to develop a quick eye to make the connections. My friend Julian put it something like this. “In every inconsequential act opportunities go begging. It is as though bullets cannot travel far or fast enough to prevent them from being plucked from the air by hungry birds.” Good isn’t it? I’m sure that you know what’s flying around and you’re definitely a hungry bird, so exchange your lofty ambitions for playfulness, stay alert for meaning and invite your readers to become an active participant, that’s the generous thing to do. That’s what I think anyway.’

And this is exactly what Rosie Walker thinks. I spend enough time with her these days to know her mind. Rosie hasn’t written another novel, but she writes stories faster than anyone I know and I have started to do the same. She teaches me how to get myself out of the way and allow the writing to write itself. I never imagined that I would find so much writing waiting to be written.

Invitation

Having invited Helen to dinner to celebrate the completion of my portrait, I sat in her painting studio, waiting while she changed out of her work clothes. I gazed at my portrait, wondered what kind of invitation it offered and fell to thinking. I had seen my portrait grow over the past ten months as both it and I went through changes. It's a complex painting, no quick snapshot, but I wasn't certain that I liked the singular view that it presented of me. What defined me most at that time was more exploded than singular. I'd lost my confidence, been consumed by anger and jealousy and was left in a melancholy state of bewilderment and remorse.

These feelings had nothing to do with Helen. We got along very nicely once we had played out our initial need to jostle one another. I arrived at our first meeting with the request that she allow Gina to appear in my portrait and she categorically refused. I told her that Gina was the love of my life and Helen insisted that she had no intention of attempting the depiction of love. I was put out, but Helen was patient with me. She told me that painting can gather up any number of things, but none of them have anything to do with intension, only with feeling. I had some sympathy for her view and by way of admitting my naivety I told her that I had wanted her to paint Gina and I as the couple in Vermeer's *The Music Lesson*. I could never have guessed the level of outrage she was to express upon hearing this. I thought at first that she had misunderstood, that she had imagined I was asking her to paint in the style of Vermeer, but once we had cleared this up I realised that her anger was directed at my presumption that she would paint a scene.

'I don't do scenes,' she insisted, 'I paint portraits. I am concerned with the person gazing from the painting not with what passes as emotional connection in movies.'

I felt chastised and a little raw, but I decided that I must show a modicum of good grace about my obvious foolishness. I confirmed

that I would accept her primary role in this enterprise and not interfere with her way of working, but I needed assurance that some form of communication would play a role here.

‘Will dialogue form any part of our relationship?’ I asked.

‘There is always potential,’ Helen told me. ‘An artist’s studio is one of those rare places where strangers can speak together with privileged trust.’

I considered her response carefully, it had taken me by surprise.

‘Attraction is generally the impetus for sharing intimacies,’ I told her.

‘Historically the artist and the model shared intimacies of great intensity, but you and I are not likely to share this kind of relationship. Do you think that attraction ceases to exist because we have come together on a professional basis?’

‘No,’ I fumbled, ‘but being professional is hardly the most exciting pretext for stimulating conversation is it?’

‘Well,’ she replied curtly, ‘given that it was I who invited you to have your portrait painted I will take full responsibility for this.’

Helen told me that my portrait wasn’t just another commission for her; it was something she had orchestrated. When the Garrick gave her the Milne prize, the President offered to commission any portrait that she chose and I was her choice. I felt deeply embarrassed and from then on we got on famously. We settled into a relaxed sitter/painter chat routine and Helen even returned to the provocative subject of Vermeer. She asked me to describe *The Music Lesson* to her. I asked if she knew the painting and she did of course, but she wanted to hear my words for it. I started by describing the placement of the two characters.

In *The Music Lesson* Vermeer depicts a music teacher gazing at his student. The young woman is standing at the virginals with her back to us. She is gazing up at a mirror directly in front of her, but her reflected gaze is not directed at the viewer, as it should be, but as a furtive glance in the direction of her tutor. Vermeer shifts the reality to show us that the young woman is aware of her tutor’s gaze.

‘I love it,’ I told Helen. ‘He invites us to view the woman’s inner preoccupations so nicely. It is this glance that invites me into the painting. I can spend hours moving backwards and forwards between the man and the woman and I always imagine that I am moving between the advances and retreats of their relationship.’ ‘How does Vermeer succeed at this?’ She asked.

‘I have no idea. The space that separates the tutor from his pupil is highly charged and yet it is extremely calm. It speaks of the tender intimacy that the couple share. I wanted something of this in my portrait ... mainly because I wanted some of it in my life I suppose. I wanted this delicate attraction and formal distance that exists between the couple. I wanted to be seen gazing at Gina who I feel separate from but deeply connected to. I think that there is something about Vermeer’s use of placement and distance that enables him to capture intimacy with such charm.’

‘What is the distance between them?’

‘Well it’s odd. When I think of the painting, I imagine that the tutor is gazing at his pupil from the other side of the room, but in reality he is standing very close to her, close enough to place his hand on the virginals. The distance between them is small in reality and big in the imagination. This speaks entirely of the pleasures and pain of love. I have spent my whole life in this position; being so close and yet so far away.’

‘Did you take Gina to Buckingham Palace to see the Vermeer?’

‘Yes, I had a strange experience that day. Gina and I stood gazing into the painting’s little self-contained world for a while and then she moved away, leaving me to gaze at it alone. Hanging next to the painting on the wall of the Gallery is a mirror and from where I was standing I could see Gina reflected in it. I gazed at her without her knowing. I repeatedly switched my gaze between the mirror and the Vermeer, taking a glimpse of Gina in the mirror looking at another painting and then looking back at *The Music Lesson*, admiring the couple so beautifully connected by the mirror in their world. It was while I was enjoying this sequence of gazes that I realised how great

the distance between Gina and I was and how much I wanted to increase the intimacy between us.'

'That's very moving. Thank you. I know what you mean about distance and the desire for proximity. When you are close to someone it's always their uniqueness that's surprising. Their difference and separation from you are always greater than you could have imagined. Even when you know them well, their independence is always a thing to be considered. I enjoy being in my own world. Generally I seek distance rather than intimacy. Being evasive and withdrawn is a luxury and it makes others want to intervene. Perhaps this is what inspired Vermeer. He obviously loved the intangible space between these two lovers and understood the reality of it.'

'Yes, I think he wanted to intervene. Maybe we all do. Maybe the invitation is always greater than the event. What is the invitation between us? I have been gazing at you while you paint, do you think that the painting will reveal this?'

'Probably, but it will not be specific.'

'Perhaps we should nurture it, help it along a little.'

'Oh you, you are such a romantic and you are still angling for me to capture love or something. Situations change, you can't keep them frozen and besides I have enough on my plate dealing with the paint.'

'Yes, you are the active producer while I am the passive subject.'

'Not quite. You have responsibilities too. You will feel them when your portrait is hung. I have painted many portraits, but this is the only one of you.'

'Oh thanks. You like to look at things clearly, don't you?'

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

'Well, your words are clear.'

‘Thank you, but my ambition is to record things optically. Nothing can be trusted to reveal more than half-concealed contradictions and enigmatic gestures.’

‘But you are brave enough to try.’

‘Yes, for a painter, every brush stroke is a risky business. At any point you can fail abysmally and you need to know how to recover quickly. The surface of a canvas never stays the same. Sometimes we surprise ourselves delightfully and sometimes we produce startling intrusions and horrid deformities. The hazards are many and portraiture has more problems than most. It demands some form of naturalism and with this you have to be prepared for failure. Thoughts about being in control are impossible to retain.’

‘But if it’s a game it has some connection with artifice and you must have some skills or tactics up your sleeve.’

‘Not really, painting the way I play it cannot put up with so much planning. Everything happens too fast. Each time my brush touches the canvas I am engaged in a gesture of description. Nothing I do can rely on thoughts, or cause and effect. All decision-making is mechanical. You might have tactics for acting, but they could not resemble the tactics of a painter.’

‘Surely the brush strokes play cause and effect.’

‘Not as such; not on the basis of thinking about them at least. Later, when I look at the work from a distance, I study it and then I might think about conceptual continuity. Then I desire it. It’s not that I wish to be free of it, it’s just that there is not a lot that can hold things together for a painter like me.’

As we talked I often hoped that my portrait would gather up some of these conversations and I also prayed that my turmoil over Gina would remain invisible. I never told Helen about the discord that existed between Gina and me or that I was madly driven to win her love. Even when I knew that winning Gina’s love was impossible I was still driven to try and make it happen. How can you tell a woman about the flirtatious beauty and sensuality of another woman? Who would want to admit that the more your loved one

pushed you away the more filled you were with desire with her? This is living between torment and bliss. No one admits to this.

On the day Gina and I went to the Palace we had argued. I had cajoled her into accompanying me and while she had agreed to come she was not pleased about my insistence. She claimed that I was trying to possess her and a furious argument ensued. After this things got worse. Gina frequently used her freedom as a weapon against me and as my hurt increased so my attacks upon her became more vehement. I claimed that her demand for independence was a screen to hide her need for male attention and she claimed that I was paranoid. I was convinced that I wasn't the only lap dog waiting longingly for her return and imagined that I had witnessed a good number of emotionally charged liaisons between her and other men, so I stuck to my view. 'Once these men are in her web they too will be captive,' I told myself. 'They too will have to learn that she has no intention of fulfilling her invitation.' I added to my vitriol on a daily basis until the heat died down and then I knew that my view of her was wrong. Too late, our loving had ceased. This is my remorse. If she invited me to be with her now I would be there within minutes. This will never change.

These were my thoughts as I sat waiting for Helen. She returned in an elegant dress and gave me a bottle of champagne to open. 'I've invited my friend Julia to join us,' she declared. For some reason the very name Julia triggered something in me. My first thought was Julia and I were going to be romantically attached. It was a kind of premonition. When Julia entered the studio moments later, I felt great excitement. There was something familiar about her, reminding me of a Julia I'd known in my youth. Her smiling open manner fuelled my belief in my romantic premonition. Does attraction follow common attributes; or keep within similar aesthetic conditions? I've no way of telling and I certainly have no idea how I could have expected the attraction I felt for Julia before I met her. Julia studied my portrait and Helen asked her if she liked it.

‘Oh yes,’ she replied. ‘He doesn’t appear as a movie star, he is much more. I feel that I am seeing Jack for the first time. As usual you have stripped away your subject’s material world and located his soul. It’s very theatrical and the warm colours are quite shocking. Your portraits always speak of memory and history. Was he an interesting subject?’

‘Yes. Jack was in a different mood at each sitting and I enjoyed trying to discover him. His identity is still a mystery, but an ever-changing personality makes for a rich subject.’

‘So I didn’t need to wear an exotic costume then?’

‘No, I think you were fine as you were,’ Julia says. ‘We need to focus on your gaze. I like the direct way that you look us in the eye. It’s not like looking at a painting; it’s like meeting you. I have no idea what to say to you and I am slightly fearful about what you will say to me, but you make a good subject. There is dignity in your pose. I love that and I like the clasped hands and the way your head turns. You are turning patiently towards us and revealing your pain.’

‘My God, Julia, don’t overdo it,’ Helen told her.

‘But it’s true. There is tragic endurance here. It runs deep, but there is also pride, or something other that shines beneath the suffering. You make him live, Helen, not as an actor but as a man with dignity. Everyone should be painted with the intensity you give your subjects.’

These were extraordinary comments for me to hear and I considered them carefully as we made our way to the restaurant. I felt more attached to Julia as the meal progressed and I felt moved to talk freely about acting and how I developed my characters. I imagined that it was Julia who inspired these thoughts to flow. Never before have I spoken so eloquently about my concern for detail.

‘I think long and hard about short sentences and small gestures,’ I told them, ‘for these things help me find a character’s personality. I imagine that they hold a secret about the character I am looking for. In some manner details can initiate profound thoughts in a way that ‘big ideas’ never can. I try to ensure that the gestures I make and the

way I inhabit a space are very precise, but at the same time I want my performance to appear as effortless. I want to appear relaxed so that my audience suspects that I am slightly naïve and not over concerned about what I am doing. If they feel a little edgy about my lack of drama then I imagine they are building some sort of anticipation for it.

‘Of course, it is possible that I am under some sort of illusion here, but even if my artifice remains unrecognised I still want to pare everything down to its essential components as though I were offering my efficiency of means as a feast.’

‘So you invite your audience to see your performance as detached, so that you can surprise them in an unexpected and dramatic fashion?’ Julia asked.

‘Yes, this tactic of appearing not to care when you care deeply is often employed by lovers to increase the tension. One can never be sure of its success. There are no rules to the game, only an inclination and a loose strategy to play with.’

‘So you too rely on what a thing looks like?’ Helen remarked.

‘I suppose so. I like acting best when it looks like an absence of acting. If you are watching someone carry out an everyday action, like washing the dishes, when you know that the deepest drama is unfolding before you, then tension begins to play. The best actors often obscure or deny the potential for dramatic occasions to avoid being over theatrical. When they are supposed to get angry they keep the audience waiting for a sign of it and this standoff between the opposites initiates a kind of void, a vacuum that offers a new potential. They may even fill this void by employing gestures of a completely different nature to those associated with anger. This is where the detail comes in. When the anger is observed it is seen in a hand movement or a head turn that is directly pertinent to the character and the dramatic occasion. Gesture is everything and dramatic or angry scenes are nothing. The way I place a cup to dry or turn on the tap could be crucial for carrying the meaning, but only if the action is charged and it appears to be a product of the

moment. It's the improvised gesture that takes responsibility for dramatic development.'

'All this could of course be a fiction,' Helen put in.

'It's true and you also have to be crazy to add uncertainty and contradiction to an already complicated set of conditions, but we all employ fictions to keep ourselves alive, so this is mine. It's a very functional fiction. It gives me independence and helps me avoid the tyranny of repeating what I already know.'

'Quite right,' Julia replied. 'Stay with what happens in the back of your mind. Tell us more about your improvisation.'

'I'm not sure that I know any more. I know that acting mechanically and not conceptually is very important and that timing is crucial. It's wonderful if the effect of an action on the audience is like an explosion in the taste buds. They often remember moments of pure description with more accuracy and pleasure than they do the larger components of narrative.'

'Lovely,' Julia cried. 'We love being treated to artifice and it must feel great being in charge of the reality. Oscar Wilde was right, nature does follow art.' She smiled beautifully and said that being different is the most attractive thing.

What an evening we had and the following morning I could not get Julia out of my head. She had been present in my dreams. She rang me just before lunch to invite me to a production of Purcell's Dido and Aeneas. I have never heard anything so beautiful. Today I invited her to the cinema to see Cocteau's Orphée.

Flying

When Etta moved to Venice she became the centre of the family and I became the outsider visiting my relatives. I seemed to have missed out on this stage of my development and oddly enough I now feel like the young rebel. The family occasions that I attended in Venice were first the marriage, then the deaths and now the births. Etta got married to Massimo who was the chef at the restaurant on the Calle Stella. Shortly after this my father, without warning, died in his sleep. I had not been back in London more than a month and my mother followed my father in exactly the same manner. It was sad, but I was greatly impressed by the considerable grace with which they both left this world. The restaurant was left to Etta and Massimo and they take considerable pride in it. My visits since then have been prompted by the births of my grandchildren and my last visit was on account of grandchild number three.

I find it difficult to stay in Venice for very long, I am too restless and I need my routines, but it pleases me greatly to see Etta successful in everything. There is far more charm to her life than the itinerant and rather explosive family set up we all endured. As for Cenzo, the jury is still out. The last thing I did before leaving to catch my plane was to email him. I insisted that he come to Venice to be with the family and I added, for good measure, that it was time he returned permanently to Europe. I had no real hopes that he would do this, but I never stop trying to influence him.

After his first year at university, Cenzo changed courses and spent the remainder of his time studying the philosophy of religion. When I asked him why he wanted to take such a retrogressive leap back he told me that I wouldn't understand. Then, having completed his studies, he announced his intention of travelling overland to Tibet to visit monasteries and shrines. I told him that I was past caring about what he did and he told me that I was having a Delli drama over the

Dalai Lama. Jack, as ever, gave Cenzo his support and the money he needed for the trip.

I had been in Venice two weeks when I received an email from Cenzo.

Dear Mother,

I am in Kathmandu and I am coming to see you and Etta in Venice. I hope to be there by the end of the week. Please wait for me. I have written two short stories, which I attach. Also attached is an eighteenth century manuscript that I helped to translate. I hope you like them.

With love always,

Cenzo.

Here is Cenzo's first story.

Martin was far from home, travelling through Iran. For the past week he had been living in the beautiful city of Yazd, which is known to Iranians as The Pearl of the Desert. He loved this city and each day he visited the Jameh Mosque and the precious Korans and handwritten books in the Vaziri Library. One evening, while he was drinking coffee outside a café, a young boy, called Amir, came to him and asked in English if he had come to visit the shrine of Imam Taft. Martin told Amir that he did not know of it and Amir promised to take him there. They agreed to meet at the café the following day. The next morning, true to his word, the kindly Amir took Martin by the hand and led him to the shrine room of the saint. Once inside, Amir left Martin to contemplate its beauty. He had been sitting there alone for some time when he found himself sobbing uncontrollably. They were not tears of joy or pain, but tears of connection. He could only weep in the presence of the unutterable goodness he found there.

He knew the reputation of these shrines raised to the saints of the Sufi tradition and he had read reports about pilgrims weeping

spontaneously when visiting them. Martin never imagined that such a place could really exist. He was surprised that religion played no part in his experience. It was a connection he had made with overwhelming benevolence and beauty, a presence so shocking that he felt increasingly reduced until he was no more than a particle of dust. His beneficent tears washed and revived him.

This is Cenzo's second story.

James left his fellow travellers in the south of Tibet to visit 'The Monastery Where Water Falls'. It took him weeks to find it. There was a monk there called Jampa who spoke a little English, and it was Jampa who showed James to his small cell and told him that supper was at six o'clock. Just before this appointed time, James joined a long queue of monks waiting to enter the refectory. As he moved closer to the large double doors he realised that the monks were entering the room one by one. It was not the refectory, but a small antechamber that they crossed to wash their hands. There was a large stone basin on the far wall. After completing their lavabo the monks passed through another pair of doors into the refectory and the next monk crossed the antechamber to wash their hands. As James was approaching the basin he noticed that there was a tiny window on the wall above it. He placed his hands under the continuous flow of water that issued from the pipe and his gaze passed through the window to a waterfall. Outside the waters cascaded with a mighty force. Inside the waters washed his hands. James imagined that the waters were entering through the top of his head and flowing through his whole body. He was cleansed both outside and in. After the meal James asked Jampa if the lavabo ritual had a name and Tampa translated it as Benediction. James asked if he could go and visit the waterfall, but Tampa told him that this tiny view above the basin, glimpsed once a day as the monks washed their hands, was the only place that the waterfall could be seen.

I cried when I read Cenzo's beautiful stories and I read them a few times before opening the second attachment on the email. It was an entreaty to Builders by Lama Rimpoche and dated 1780.

Every builder must prepare carefully and place himself in readiness to begin. If your soul suffers from a deficiency of material imagination then it is because your world is strewn with unrelated things, immobile forms and inert solids. First you must learn how to connect the objects of your trade with your nature.

As a builder you must follow nature's manner of operation and know that imagination is pre-eminently in things out there, not inside us. Anything can be a vessel for our imagination, a wall, a door or a window. When the materiality of a thing is ignored then imaginative hollowness and insubstantiality occurs.

Matter is not just a filling for harmonious and empty forms. Places are not just geographical locations. When they are filled with imaginative resonance they become vessels for soul and they never lack for beauty. If you want to create places with their own logos, places that evoke a pulse in common with nature, then you must listen to the things of the world as they tell their stories.

You must know that achieving this position takes you on a path that is fraught with danger. You must regard all problems as your ally and learn how buildings speak to you in particular. This action implies the existence of both a speaker and a listener.

Trust chaos. Start with what is fishy. Enjoy the provocative and what is risky. Welcome the unknown waiting to be discovered and regard yourself as a target for marvellous accidents. Chance occurrences have the power to break the connection with those things that we know too well and cause drowsiness in us.

All structure is affirmed in the place where continuity is ruptured. This is the threshold of new recognitions. Only you can determine that associations take place in the place where reassembly occurs.

Trust mistakes to guide you. If you can establish a process where breaks are inevitable and your mistakes occur on the surface of perception then accept this. It is the direct method and it is a very powerful path.

The indirect method may retreat from the arena of recognition altogether, but its effects last longer and they have a closer affinity with the heart. This method is more difficult and while there is more honour if you succeed well there is more dishonour if you fail and the chances of this are great.

For the indirect method you must proceed without preconceptions, without any desire for recognition or understanding and trust only in your spirit. Those who are adept in this can produce buildings that are joined to the heart of things; they will produce places which live in a state of fusion between object otherness and our shared sense of meaning. This is the place where everything is interchangeable and where poetic identifications flow.

So this is how children surprise you. Cenzo's words brought me great happiness and I sent a copy of his stories to Rosie. Rosie wrote back.

Dearest Delli

Reading Cenzo's story about the Sufi's shrine brought tears to my eyes and the little pearls continued to fall as I read of the liquid connections of the Tibetan waterfall. I longed for a photo to clarify the double excellence of the water falling. After the stories I felt as cleansed and revived as Cenzo's young men did. Letter by letter I was washed and I feel so proud of him. Send him a thousand reiterated mercis, bravos and encorencore calls from the banks of the river Thames.

Will he follow you and become a writer do you think?

Love Rosie.

Cenzo was not in Venice by the end of the week and I stayed on, but the longer I remained the more edgy I became. I was missing the rhythm of my writing days in London. I enjoyed the time with my grandchildren, but it didn't please me that Etta's children would always have a greater intimacy with their Italian Nonna. To ward off my discomfort I started to write. I wrote a short story inspired by the large paintings of Tintoretto. The idea occurred to me when I was gazing at *The Miracle of the Slave* in the Academia. In this painting many of the figures are flying across the canvas and I wrote about the difficulties Tintoretto encountered when he was trying to arrange and support his models in the studio.

Shortly after this I had a phone call from Etta. She informed me that a man called Stefano had been to the restaurant asking about me. I knew immediately that this was my Stefano, my childhood boyfriend; Stefano, the boy who I loved for his sparkling inspiration in the game of consequences, the boy I married in the marsh land of Torcello when I was twelve. I repeated his name over and over and I felt him near me. I flitted about like a bird building a nest. Stefano was returning to the restaurant that evening at eight and he had invited me to join him for supper. I tried to imagine how Stefano would be and what he had done with his life since moving to Brindisi.

At eight o'clock, having dressed elegantly, I arrived at the restaurant. I knew Stefano immediately and we called each other's names with great affection. Stefano held out both his hands and taking mine he kissed them repeatedly. We hugged, kissed each other on the cheeks four, maybe five times and then we hugged again. I had tears in my eyes and Stefano took out his handkerchief to wipe them. Etta came to ask what we should like to drink and I introduced Stefano to her as my first love.

We sat at a table near the window, gazing intently at each other. Our memories came to us so fast we hardly took a sip from our drinks. It was as though we had to get through everything before we parted again. We ate without particular attention to the food and by the

time the restaurant was closing we were still finding new subjects to throw light upon the forty-five years of our separation. I learned that he was retired and lived near Brindisi where he had worked as an importer of luxury goods. He had married, but his wife died when they were still young. Recently he has spent time travelling and is about to return to the Puglia countryside where he owns land. It is his intention to build a house there.

Stefano and I met again for supper the next evening and we still talked endlessly without exhausting our news. Our intimacy was the kind that is reserved for old friends, but I began to consider whether I still loved him. His manner and his smile had the same sparkle of his youth. It was what I called inspiration in those days, but now I wondered if it should properly be called love.

The next evening Enzo arrived and his welcome celebrations preoccupied the entire family for the next few days. I mentioned how well his stories were received by everyone and asked if he had considered developing this talent. Enzo told me the he was now filled with the ambition to study architecture. He wanted to put into practice everything he had learned on his travels. He had already emailed his father to inform him of this and Jack had agreed to support him. I shook my head to express my doubt and Enzo promised that one day he would build me a beautiful house.

I phoned Stefano a few times and arranged to meet him before my return to London. I spent my last evening in Venice with him. I imagined that my departure from him would be a difficult affair, but it was a tender leave-taking. We exchanged email addresses and I promised to visit him soon in Puglia. As I was flying home I had no idea why I was moving away from him. It made absolutely no sense.

On the first morning of our return to London Enzo went off to stay with his father. I busied myself with my boring business post and then I checked my emails. There was a message from Stefano.

Dear Adelia,

How soon could you catch the morning flight from there? I'm watching the evening fire burn away my tears. It's not the way you held me as the sun went down. It's not the way you called my name that left me stranded on the ground. It's not the way our hearts spoke at the evening's end; these tears are my fears that you will fly away again. Maybe you are thinking that you thought you knew me well, but no one ever knows the heart of anyone else. I feel like some lonely drinker in a late night grand hotel, because living alone is all I've ever done well. If you will and if you can, please come today, please come before my foolish heart goes astray.

With all my love,
Stefano.

I had no idea how I felt about this email other than I wanted to be with Stefano there and then. I phoned Rosie and explained my need of her advice and she agreed to meet me for supper. I replied to Stefano.

Dear Stefano,

I have spent the last two hours sitting in the garden wondering what I could reply to you, wondering what you mean by flying away. I watched the blackbirds flying backwards and forwards, pecking at the seeds at lightening speed. You don't fear my flying away and coming back again do you? You fear that I will not return.

Sometimes the blackbirds were so close I could see the scarlet on their wings. Any little noise or movement I made disturbed them and they flew quickly to their nest. Is this what you mean? Do you fear that you have disturbed me? Every time the blackbirds visited the seed table and took off again I imagined that they were carrying my love to you. They fly so fast. It is impossible to count the beats of their wings, but with every beat I willed them to carry my love to you.

Adelia.

Before I left to see Rosie I had another email from Stefano.

Dear Adelia,
Blackbird singing in the dead of night;
Take these broken wings and learn to fly,
All my life,
I was only waiting for this moment to arise.
All my love,
Stefano.

I told Rosie everything that had happened, everything that I knew about Stefano, and then showed her his emails and my first reply. 'Well, that's love for you then,' she said and she stretched out her hands to take mine. As we hugged I wept for joy. The next day I booked my flight to Brindisi for the following day.

Dear Stefano,
I arrive tomorrow, ten thirty.
Pack up all my care and woe,
Here I go, singing low,
Bye, bye, blackbird.
Where somebody waits for me,
Sugar's sweet, so is he,
Bye, bye, blackbird.
All my love,
Adelia.

Arriving

‘Take it easy.’

This comes from the parrot on the other side of the bar. I am sitting in a quiet corner feeling old and I have a nagging sense that there is something I should have remembered. It’s Adelia, I am waiting for Adelia. The marks on the wall remind me of plans of an old city. I would like to be somewhere like this, somewhere old and hot with little alleyways and beautiful courtyards.

I have not seen Adelia for months, but I think that I spoke to her on the telephone last week. Now I remember. Adelia and I are going to the theatre to see a play by Cenzo. That’s odd though, Cenzo is an architect, he doesn’t write plays. Adelia will be excited about it. She loves any kind of social occasion. Not me, not these days, too much activity makes me exhausted. I am a nervous soul, or perhaps fidgety would better describe me. I know that Adelia will be late. She is always late. I am always early. I gaze at the plans on the wall and wonder what city this is.

Adelia swirls into the bar under a huge hat and coat. She looks younger. She shows off her new boots and I tell her how nice they look. She is about to sit down but I insist that we leave immediately. I am irritable about being late. I have not always been like this, but being out of step with myself makes me grumpy. I have lost the underlying rhythm of things and my mind wanders, I know it does. Outside it is bitterly cold and it is snowing heavily. Adelia and I step slowly along the slippery pavement. Adelia can’t resist looking at her new boots. I am nervous about seeing Cenzo’s play. I can’t imagine what he has written. I want to ask Adelia about it, but I am too preoccupied with walking over the snow.

The theatre foyer is crowded and I am greatly relieved that we are not late. The auditorium is a very different place to the one I imagined. Apart from the white wall at the rear of the stage everything else is black. There is very little on the stage to indicate

that it's a place of performance. On either side there are two large white screens. To the left there is a tall grey box with a swing hanging inside it. To the right of this, on the rear white wall, is a long thin photograph, the same shape as the box. The image, which is life-size, depicts a dark stairway leading up to an open door, through which daylight enters. Above the photograph is a white balcony that extends across the whole rear wall.

The auditorium lights go out. A dim light shines above the stage. The sound of a woman's footsteps fills the auditorium; a repetitive **CLICK, CLICK, CLICK** of high heels on a hard surface. The stage lights up and two men in leather motorcycle outfits climb up through the floor. One of them has a limp. He is carrying a roll of paper and a small bucket with a brush in it. The other has a patch over one eye and he is carrying a ladder. He places the ladder against the wall next to the photograph and climbs up. The limping one unrolls his paper on the floor and brushes it with glue. The woman's footsteps can still be heard. Mr. Limp hands the paper to Mr. Patch on the ladder, who pastes it on top of the original photograph. The image is a repeat of the first, but this one shows a woman in a black dress walking away from us through the doorway at the top of the stairs. The motorcyclists stand and admire their work.

'Are we expecting anyone?'

'Yes, he's late.'

'What's his name?'

'Orphée.'

'We should tell Mr. Cocteau to expect him.'

The motorcyclists return below stage with their props and the sound of footsteps ceases. A woman enters wearing a black dress identical to the one in the photograph. It is Gina. I don't know how this is possible. Gina was the love of my life. I try to think about this calmly. I am certain that Gina was real because I wanted her in my portrait. No. Maybe Gina was the young woman in the Vermeer

painting or just the reflection in the mirror. I can't remember. What happened to Gina? I waited years for her to call me.

A man enters. He is wearing a dark overcoat and a wide-brimmed hat. He looks about him without acknowledging the woman. The hat and the coat are mine. He looks out into the auditorium and I recognise him. It is Cenzo. Cenzo is in his own play wearing my clothes. I turn to Adelia to verify this, but she is not sitting next to me, someone else is. I ask the woman if she has seen Adelia, but she puts her finger to her lips and makes a loud shushing sound.

'It is too hot here,' Cenzo says, 'I can almost hear the sound of my blood boiling.'

'It is not hot, only quiet,' Gina tells him. 'I can hear every footstep in the street.'

Gina walks offstage and Cenzo throws his coat onto the floor. He enters the grey box and sits on the swing.

The motorcyclist with the eye patch arrives through the stage carrying his ladder, followed by the limping one with another roll of paper. They staple this to the wall next to the first one. This photograph is the same size as the first and it depicts a large stone staircase in a courtyard. The motorcyclists return below stage.

Two women, dressed in canteen outfits, appear on the right of the balcony. They are moving without moving their legs. They are on a slow travelator that moves them along the balcony. Cenzo leaves the swing and gazes at the courtyard staircase. One of the women says to the other.

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

'He will remember that tryin' to remember is not rememberin', ' the other replies.

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

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

The motorcyclists return, peel off the image of the woman that was added to the first photograph and, leaving the poster on the floor, they disappear below stage. Cenzo returns to the swing and the women on the balcony continue with their chatter.

‘Does he remember that rememberin’ has to be tried?’

‘He’s tryin’. He’s tryin’ to remember what others remember.’

‘It’s his remembering that she’s tryin’ to have him remember.’

‘There’s tryin’ an’ tryin’. He should remember to try by tryin’ less.’

Gina returns. She is remarkably beautiful. She picks up Cenzo’s coat, searches the pockets and hangs it on a hook on the side of the box. She tells Cenzo to stop swinging and asks if he remembers the two motorcyclists. He says that he does and exits, still complaining about the heat.

‘Do you think that he recognizes me?’ Gina asks the balcony women.

‘I doubt that he remembers,’ one of them replies.

‘Why do you want him to remember?’ the other asks.

This question is delivered just as their travelator takes them off to stage left. Gina huffs at losing the opportunity to reply to them.

The motorcyclists return and add new images to the two photographs. The woman is again depicted at the top of the basement and courtyard stairs, but this time her head is turned back towards the audience as she proceeds through the doors. Mr. Patch tells Mr. Limp that he should forewarn Mr. Cocteau the new arrival looks too tired to complete his journey. They return below stage.

Gina leaves the stage. The sound of her footsteps fills the auditorium. Suddenly she appears on a film that is projected on the right-hand screen. She is walking quickly along narrow streets in bright sunlight. She is walking in the city that I saw on the wall of the bar. Now the left-hand screen lights up. It shows a series of black and white images in quick succession. They are of Adelia and me walking to the theatre in the snow. How can this be? I look around the auditorium for Adelia, but I cannot see her. A completely different woman is now sitting next to me. I do not ask her where Adelia is. Both screens go blank. My fidgetiness returns. The sound of the woman’s shoes continues to fill the auditorium, clicking on hard paving and echoing through the streets of the city.

The motorcyclists return and fix a third photograph to the wall, next to the previous two, showing a very grand staircase leading to an impressive pair of glazed doors. Light pours in through the doors. The motorcyclists return below stage.

Cenzo enters with a large bag, searching it on the floor, mumbling about the heat. Gina enters and the sound of her footsteps ceases. She tells Cenzo he'll get used to the heat and asks if he's noticed how quiet and empty it is but he doesn't reply. Gina takes his hat off and hangs it on the side of the grey box. Cenzo gazes at the photographs and the balcony women appear again on their travelator.

'She appears for him to look at her, but he don't look.'

'He looked at her lookin' at him, so he appeared to look at her.'

'How does he appear if he appears not to look when he looks?'

The motorcyclists arrive; peel off the images of the woman on the photographs and leave the paper scattered on the stage floor.

'When she appears he doesn't look at her.'

'He looks like he's lookin' for her to appear.'

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

Cenzo kicks over the discarded posters that litter the floor and then returns to the swing. Gina returns, tells him to stop swinging and asks if he remembers hearing a loud bang. Cenzo says that he heard it and leaves the stage with more complaints about the heat. Gina asks the balcony women how she can help him but they have already moved off the left hand side of the balcony.

The motorcyclists enter, pasting new images of Gina onto the basement, courtyard and grand staircases. This time she's standing with her back against the doorframes, her head turned towards the audience and her hand outstretched, inviting us to follow her. The motorcyclists complain Mr. Cocteau does not pay them any overtime for these men who take such a long time to come to their senses.

Gina leaves the stage and the sound of her footsteps rings out again. The film of her walking along narrow streets in bright sunlight fills

the right-hand screen. The left-hand screen again shows images of Adelia and me in the snow. As we are approaching the theatre, Adelia kicks the snow off her new boots. Suddenly, both screens go blank and the stage is in darkness.

The lights go up as the motorcyclists return to fix a fourth photograph to the wall. This one depicts a small circular staircase leading to a circular balcony. The bright blue sky can be seen through the lantern light. The motorcyclists return below stage. Cenzo and Gina enter together. The sound of Gina's footsteps ceases. Cenzo searches through his bag, still complaining about the heat. Gina asks if the silence appears strange to him, but he doesn't answer. She leaves the stage and Cenzo takes off his jacket, searches through the pockets, finding nothing and throws the jacket to the floor. He gazes at the photographs and the balcony women return.

'He don't get it. He never got what he got by seein' to it.'

'What's he see? Will he get to see her? Is gettin' her what he gets?'

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

The motorcyclists enter. They peel off the images of Gina on the photographs and drop them casually on the floor.

'He can't see what he gets. He's got to see her and get on.'

'It will get to him if he don't get it. Why don't he see that he's got to see it?'

'Can he see he's been got? He must get on. He'll see what he gets.'

Cenzo steps with difficulty over the sticky, discarded posters that now litter the stage. Gina follows him, picks up his jacket and checks each of the pockets before placing it on the side of the box. Cenzo searches his trouser pockets and Gina asks if he remembers hearing people shouting. He says that he does and leaves the stage. Gina asks the balcony women if he will follow her but their travelator has already moved them off the left hand side of the balcony.

The motorcyclists paste new images of Gina onto the staircase photographs and leave again. The images show Gina walking quickly away from us. The real Gina walks quickly offstage and the sound of her footsteps ring out as the film on the right-hand screen shows her walking along narrow streets in bright sunlight. The black-and-white images of Adelia and me walking along in the freezing snow appear again on the left-hand screen. My name, J A C K, in large capital letters, fills the screen. I look about in case anyone should recognise me. I return my gaze to the stage and see myself walking onto the stage where Cenzo should be. I tell Gina that I am now in step with myself and express my pleasure that the heat has diminished. Gina takes my hand and escorts me over the mass of paper covering the floor. We gaze at the new photographs and Gina tells me that I must follow her in these pictures.

‘She feels that he counts. He counts on her feelin’ it.’

‘He can be counted on, but he don’t feel that he counts. That’s what counts.’

‘If he’s feelin’ discounted she should count it out for him.’

Gina asks if I remember seeing the taxi as I crossed the road. I tell her I did. I ask if I’ve been walking in the heat since then. Gina nods her head. She says the motorcyclists caused the taxi to veer towards me. I ask if she was on the street when it happened and she confirms that she was. I try to speak again, but Gina places her hand over my mouth. She tells me that we should get to the other side of the city before nightfall. We walk past all the images of her in the doorways on the various stairways. The sound of her quick footsteps fills the auditorium. It is the sound of small light heels resonating through hot narrow streets. I can hear the balcony ladies.

‘He’ll not count if he’s not countin’. Can you feel him countin’?’

‘Yes, she’s countin’ on him countin’. He should count on her if he can’t count.’ ‘That’s what counts here. Count on it. He’s countin’.’

I follow Gina and hear my name being called.

‘Jack, Jack, come on Jack.’

Gina repeatedly turns her head to see if I am following her. I walk as fast as I can.

‘Jack, you must wake up.’

The sound of a man’s footsteps now accompanies the sound of Gina’s footsteps.

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

I look up at the woman.

‘Oh Adelia, did I fall asleep and miss the play?’

‘I think you’re dreaming,’ she tells me.

‘Then you must let me finish my dream,’ I tell her. ‘Wait for me, Gina,’ I call out, ‘I am counting.’

‘I am not Adelia and I am not Gina,’ the woman informs me.

I open my eyes and look around. I am still in the bar. I close my eyes again.

‘I felt more awake in the other place,’ I tell the woman. ‘I knew that Gina would come for me one day. Gina, I can’t see you. I’m coming, I’m counting, please wait.’

‘Jack. Come on Jack, you must wake up.’

I open my eyes again. I recognise the nurse now. She is crouching before me, patting my hand.

‘Are you waking up now, Jack? We must get you back. You have been sleeping in here for far too long.’

I keep my eyes closed and try to re-enter my dream. I don’t want to lose Gina again, but it’s no good, everything in the city is fading.

‘I’m glad you didn’t come sooner,’ I tell the nurse.

‘And why is that?’ she asks.

‘Because then I wouldn’t have had my dream.’

‘Home is the place for dreaming, Jack, not public bars.’

‘I have always preferred dreaming in public,’ I tell her.

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

‘He was havin’ a good ol’ snooze there.’

‘Yes,’ the woman next to her says, ‘only olduns and younguns sleep like that.’

‘He’s a dreamer, that’s for sure,’ the nurse laughs. ‘Come on, Jack, we must get you back. We are going to watch the DVD that Adelia sent. Did you forget about it?’

‘Are we going to the theatre or not?’

‘Who?’

‘Adelia and me.’

‘No, Jack, Adelia has sent you a DVD of the house that Cenzo has built in Italy. You forgot that you were going to watch it didn’t you?’

‘No, I was waiting for Adelia. We always meet in a bar before going to the theatre. Can I return to the theatre before going home?’

‘No, Jack there isn’t a theatre, or at least I don’t know what theatre you are referring to. We are going home.’

She and a male nurse ease me into a wheelchair. She puts a blanket over my legs.

‘I can’t be doing with blankets in this heat,’ I tell her.

‘Don’t be silly, Jack, its freezing outside. You will catch your death without it.’

The male nurse pushes me in the wheelchair.

‘Take it easy,’ shouts the parrot as we pass by.

‘Do you want to join me for a spot of Para Gliding?’ I ask him.

The nurses laugh. Outside it is bitterly cold but it has stopped snowing. My nurse tucks my scarf in. It is not far to the home, just across the road. I fall asleep again before I get to the gate.

This time no one will wake me.

Changes

This is my diary entry for Saturday 21st March 2020.

It is late and I can't sleep so I must write out those things that persistently fill my head. Jack died today. Death is becoming a familiar presence these days. It's a strange business, but I try not to fear it for myself. I would like to believe that I will become a child again. It must be possible to go to death knowingly, welcome it even, in the knowledge that this will make a difference to the journey. I presume that it is a journey. I feel certain that I will die here; that I will be buried among these olive groves, but I suspect that my spirit will return to London. I want to bid farewell to my garden before finally departing. I imagine my spirit catching hold of a blackbird's wing and flying off to heaven, where it joins my infant spring.

When Cenzo announced Jack's death in the dining hall, he instructed everyone to make as much noise as possible. We took pots and pans from the kitchen and our whoops and bangs were enough to wake the dead. I could imagine Jack laughing. I will never forget this. I do not know why Jack and I could never connect properly after our separation, but as his condition worsened I felt closer to him. I did impress upon him how important he was and I helped him to feel confident that he had contributed nicely to the world.

I am sobbing as I write this. Such strange timing that Jack should die just as we were watching one of his films. We were christening our dining hall and Jack was supposed to be with us, but arranging his visit proved to be too difficult. His behaviour had become very erratic of late. Cenzo made a DVD of our house and sent it to Jack. I hope that he saw it before he flew away. I often wondered what it must be like to become confused. Jack's mind couldn't keep still or pay attention to what was going on around it. I hope he was happy.

His nurse said that he was, but maybe she was just trying to comfort me.

A Nanci Griffiths song came to me as I sat alone in Grandpa's old house. I sang it to myself, but I doubt that I got the words right.

Once you were the sun, turning in the sky.
You were the moon above me on a moonless night.
You were the stars in heaven and you really did burn bright.
And in my deepest ocean you had been my light.

You did not always shine as you went, barefoot over stone,
And we were not long together, before we walked alone,
We knew that love was not easy, but that love was always right,
And when the dark clouds gathered, you had been my light.

I must try to sleep now, I'm exhausted. In the morning I will phone Rosie and make arrangements to go to London. I'll sit in the garden and watch the blackbirds. I will spend some time in my writing room and I'll be with Rosie and talk about what's passed. I sit reading these words written nearly ten years ago, wondering why I am visiting them now. It was a day of strange events and that night I didn't sleep. I could only lie in bed half dreaming and trying to conjure thoughts of spring. The family had been celebrating the completion of the dining hall that Cenzo had designed for us. It is a great hall, big enough for the whole family to have dinner together. We now number forty-three. The dining hall replaced three old sheds that sat next to the kitchen and it is the most important place we've built. The entrance lobby, to the east of the hall, is itself bigger than most dining rooms and the two washrooms that sit either side of it both look into a small private courtyard. In the middle of both is a small cherry tree. They are completely beautiful. The north wall of the dining hall is covered with books and there's a secret staircase at one end that leads to a reading room above the entrance hall. The kitchen's on the south wall and on the west wall

there are large windows and doors facing the sea. It's a truly moving place.

The evening Jack died I was celebrating with all my family around me. In those days I felt more settled than I had done for ages, but on that particular evening a series of incidents occurred that burst in upon me like surprises. The first of these happened while I was finishing up in the kitchen. Stefano, Etta and I had been working in the kitchen for days. Without warning, I felt compelled to reorganise the final chapter of my book so that it took the form of a circle. Instead of responding to my tiredness and taking a nap I returned to my writing room to capture my circling structures before they left me. This is what happens when you have books in your head. I love these little gifts that arrive out of nowhere. Without the need for them they would simply pass by, uncared for and unused. Having finished my revisions, I took a bath and changed into my new dress. I was sitting in the bedroom, putting on make up at my table by the window, when a little bird appeared on the windowsill. I watched as it preened itself and then suddenly it stopped, looked at me and tapped its beak on the windowpane. I stared at the bird fixedly and as I did so a persistent ringing filled my ears. I had the feeling that something important was happening. When the bird flew away the ringing in my ears stopped. I tried to convince myself that it was my tiredness that was directing my feelings, but the image of the bird stayed with me. Even after I had greeted my family in the dining hall I felt its presence. Even as I watched the happy children running around at great speed and felt such enjoyment from the sound of the adults talking at the top of their voices, I was still wondering what message this bird had come to give me. Then, as I was playing with my grandson, Julio, a great emotion came over me and tears filled my eyes. I went to the washroom to calm myself, but Stefano was still aware that something had upset me. Once we were seated at the table he asked if anything was wrong, but I just smiled and told him that I was very happy.

I take out the evening's menu that I'd placed in my diary. We started with tasters of small veal sausages, artichokes and fresh fava beans, and followed this with spiced baby shrimp. For antipasti we had a choice of Prosciutto with sun-dried tomatoes or a chard and ricotta tart. The pasta course was stuffed lasagne and for the main course we had Etta's famous dish of lamb cooked with eggplant, red pepper, and black olives. Stefano and I then served a kiwi custard tart and we followed this with Cassata. We had arranged for the dinner to be served by everyone in turn, so that we could all enjoy the meal. As soon as the first servers cleared away the plates the next servers took over the delivery of the second course and so on throughout the meal.

When we'd finished we all helped clear the table and wash the dishes, apart from the mothers, who set to the task of settling their children in bed. We had decided to watch one of Jack's early movies, a film called *Captive*. Enzo has a collection of Jack's films and he designed a shelf in the wall of the reading room for the projector to direct its images on a screen that pulls down in front of the windows. By the time I left the kitchen and returned to the dining hall the projection screen was already showing the title shot of the film. I felt very emotional and the ringing in my ears started again.

The film begins with a scene in New York City. A man jumps out of a shop doorway, drags a woman into an adjoining alley and tries to pull her into a doorway. When we saw Jack walking down the street all the family cheered. Jack sees the woman struggling against the man and he runs down the alley to fight off her attacker. We all cheered again at his heroic effort.

Are you all right?

Yes, thanks. You were quick off the mark.

Not really, I happened to notice you.

Well you could have walked on.

I couldn't, I was built with reflexes.

Where you from?

London.

Sorry about your jacket.

Oh that's OK. I'm sorry about your blouse.

But at least I'm all in one piece.

Did you know the guy who attacked you?

No, he just jumped out at me.

Do you want to call the cops?

No, it aint worth it.

Will you be all right now?

Sure, but can I buy you a coffee or something? I owe you a drink.

No it's fine.

Come on, I want to thank you.

All right. You can buy me a drink. I'm Toby, by the way.

I'm Christine. You were quite an opponent for that guy.

I don't recall what I did exactly.

Well he ran off fast enough.

Let's go in here. What can I get you?

No I'm buying. What are you having?

A bud, thanks.

You want a bourbon with it?

OK, why not.

It's strange drinking with a stranger.

Yes, I have no idea where I am.

It was then that my mobile rang. I went out to the lobby to answer it and the English voice asked if I was Adelia Ancora. I said that I was.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, but I have some sad news to tell.' I waited. 'Jack Wilkinson died this afternoon.' The ringing in my ears returned. 'He died very peacefully, while he was being pushed along in the wheelchair. It came completely out of the blue. He was very jolly only minutes before. He had asked a parrot if it wanted to

join him in some Para Gliding and this made us laugh. The next thing we knew, Jack was no longer of this world.'

I asked her what we should do and she asked me to ring her tomorrow.

'It is better to give yourself some time before making plans. I will find out what arrangements need to be made. Ring me in the afternoon. I am so sorry. Please give my condolences to your family. We all loved Jack very much.'

I thanked the woman, closed the phone and walked out into the olive groves. I could not stop the film and tell everyone there and then about Jack and I knew how deeply the news would affect Cenzo. He had become very close to his father in recent years and he lived in Jack's house while he was studying architecture. When Stefano and I were in London, Stefano would often join Jack and Cenzo for the evening, especially if beer and football were on the menu. It pleased me that Stefano got on so well with Jack. My sobbing returns as I remember this. It is the break in repetition that hurts. For Jack to die, just as we were celebrating him, was such strange timing.

I want to ring Rosie now, to be with her in London and sit in my writing room.

When I first came to Puglia I fell in love with this land of olive groves and vineyards. I was captivated by the life here, but it was difficult trying to settle in both London and Puglia. I had also to learn about Stefano. My goodness, but wasn't he full of surprises. When I first arrived here the only fact I knew about him was that he had been recently appointed by a wealthy landowner to manage a large estate, a plantation of olive trees and vineyards to the west of Lecce. He told me that with this job he had the rights to some land and he wanted to build a house. I had no idea why he didn't have a house already, but the house we now live in is the house he wanted to build.

It took me a little while to get to know the three generations of workers who lived here and I soon began to feel close to them. There were families of Sorentinos in great number, a good many Pagninos and then to my great surprise a few families with my own surname, Ancora. I had been living here for months before I discovered that all of them were related to each other and, more surprising still, that they were all descendants of my grandfather's family. Then I was truly at sea and I went to Stefano for an explanation.

Stefano was very nervous as he struggled to explain his connection with my family and soon I understood why. I was the owner of the plantation, the landowner who all these families worked for, he told me. He'd bought the plantation in my name years before we met up again in Venice. I could only imagine that I was dreaming and I fell silent with the shock of his news. Stefano studied me nervously. 'The days we spent together meant everything to me,' he said. 'I was always desolate without you. I cannot separate myself from the contentment of those days.'

'But we cannot go back,' I told him.

'That's true, but in those days we travelled so far from the loveless world we can never go back to that place either. Everything changes, but love remains. No one comes back from the land of love.'

I couldn't believe the beauty of his words, but I still needed many hours of careful explanation before I could begin to accept my new position. It was difficult eradicating the suspicion that Stefano had tried to capture me and I railed at him for doing so, but his reasons were not that simple. Stefano had led a very dangerous life and there came a time when he could not own anything, for fear that it would be confiscated. Stefano was, for want of a better word, a smuggler and he suspected that sooner or later he would be caught and all his assets frozen by the state. As it was, he handed himself in once he had secured his future. His solution was to seek out my old family and purchase this estate where many of them worked. He

made Emilio, my cousin, the manager and told him that a cousin, who did not wish to be named, owned the estate. All the profits were placed in a bank account held secretly in my name and the family worked and waited for Stefano to return.

Poor Stefano, prison must have been foul, but he claims that he felt more freedom there than in his previous life. He was freed eight years later and the day he was released he came to look for me in Venice. That's when I met him. Sometimes the captive in me hated his wiliness and at other times I was overtaken by the depth and consistency of his love for me. He never coerced me into staying and I accepted that he truly wanted me here with him, with my family, with his adopted family.

So this is how I came to be living in Puglia when I learned of Jack's death.

After I received the phone call I took a melancholy walk through the groves until I reached the house where my grandfather was born. I came here first when I heard from Stefano that I owned the land. I cried for myself and for my grandfather. I couldn't bear to think about how difficult it must have been for a family of nine to live in such a tiny place, but on this evening my tears were for Jack. I sat there and sang to myself until Etta interrupted me to ask why I had left the party. I told her that her father had died and once the words had penetrated her world she broke down, letting out great sobs as she spoke to me. I held her to me for some considerable time, hoping that my words of consolation would comfort her.

After a while I realised that the film must have finished, so Etta and I returned to the dining hall. I saw Stefano first. He was standing outside, anxious about my absence. I gave him the news about Jack and he held me close to him. I then asked him to send Cenzo to me. Cenzo was by my side in seconds.

'I knew it,' he said, 'I knew it as soon as Stefano asked me to come to you. Did he just pop off as he said he would?'

'Yes. He was making jokes with a parrot about Para Gliding.'

'Good old Pa. Come on, we must help him on his way.'

Cenzo returned to the dining hall and announced Jack's death. Then he instructed the entire assembly to make as much noise as possible. 'Like this,' he said and he ran to the kitchen, returned with a pan and a large steel spoon and proceeded to bang it and holler at the top of his voice. We all copied his sounds and actions and no description of mine could do justice to the din we made. I imagined Jack laughing at this and the thought of it still comforts me.

I return to my diary again and read.

Death is becoming a familiar presence these days. It's a strange business, but I try not to fear it for myself. I would like to believe that I will become a child again. It must be possible to go to death knowingly, welcome it even, in the knowledge that this will make a difference to the journey. I presume that it is a journey. I feel certain that I will die here; that I will be buried among these olive groves, but I suspect that my spirit will return to London.

I want to bid farewell to my garden now before I finally depart. I know that my spirit is on its way because I am there now. I am catching hold of a blackbird's wing. It is flying me back to my infant spring.

Credits

I am aware that the title Loving was used by Henry Green for one of his excellent novels and I trust that my use of it is taken as a sign of my appreciation of his work.

PURSUIT, PARTNERS, HOME, PREPARATION, AVAILABILITY, INVITATION and ARRIVING were originally published in Dreaming In Public, published by Futures Publications, 2004.

FALLING was originally published as RETURNING. The stories reproduced here have been shortened and edited.

HOME is a record of my performance, Back, The Ninth Method. It was performed at The Acme Gallery, London in 1981, The Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, London in 1981, Just Above Midtown/Downtown, New York in 1982 and the Zero One Gallery, London in 1983. It was inspired by the work of The Theatre of Mistakes and by George Lawson's dances to Beethoven.

ARRIVING is from The Book of the Play, part of a work called The Installation Of The Play, published in 2002 by gf2 Gallery, London.

The quote from George Elliot's Middlemarch was taken from Zadie Smith's article, The Book Of Revelations, the Guardian, 24.05.2008

PURSUIT

The Apollo and Daphne story comes from Bullfinch's Mythology, The Age Of Fable, www.Bartleby.com.

Information for the singing lesson comes from The Singers Manual Of English Diction by Madeleine Marshall. Schirmer Books; 1953.

PARTNERS

Performance instructions from The Elements Of Performance Art by The Theatre of Mistakes.

CONNECTIONS

The information on Luciano Berio came from Allen B. Ruch's text on www.themodernword.com. For the most part I have used what Berio has written about his own work, but I have interspersed this with references from Allen B. Ruch's text and from an article by Timothy Murphy called Music After Joyce: The Post Serial Avant-Garde.

The text of Sinfonia is not the published libretto, but the words I could hear while listening to the recording. I have edited this libretto to suit my own sense of the sound it makes.

FALLING

The children's stories are records of exchanges that my daughter, Cordelia, shared with her friends Maddy, Isobel and Jenny when they were five.

PREPARATION

It might as well be spring. Richard Rogers & Oscar Hammerstein II.

I wish I were in love again. Richard Rogers & Lorenz Hart.
Bewitched, bothered and bewildered. Richard Rogers & Lorenz Hart.

I won't dance. Jerome Kern, Dorothy Fields & Jimmy McHugh.
S'wonderful. George & Ira Gershwin.

BEWILDERMENT

The captive story is based upon my memory of reading Brian Keenan's book, *An Evil Cradling*, published Hutchinson 1992, ISBN 0091752086.

The poems are by Jalal Uddin Rumi who was born in Khorassan in 1207. The *Ode and You And I Have Spoken All These Words* were translated by Coleman Barks and John Moyne. That *Journeys Are Good* was translated by Robert Bly. They were published by *Sphinx 2, A Journal For Archetypal Psychology And The Arts*. Edited by Robert Bly, London, 1994. (I have made a few changes to the originals)

TALKING

The sculptor's story was inspired by *Sculpture, Processes And Principles* by Rudolf Wittkower, published by Penguin Books Ltd, 1991. ISBN 0140137017.

Not I by Samuel Beckett, published by Faber and Faber, 1978, ISBN 0 571 10400 2

INVITATION

Jack's theory of non-acting was inspired by the book *Johannes Vermeer* by Lawrence Gowing, published by Giles de la Mare Publishers Limited, 1997, ISBN 1900357097.

Julia's words about Jack's portrait were inspired by Robert Hughes's article, *Connoisseur Of The Ordinary*, *The Guardian*, 11.02.2006.

FLYING

The Shrine of the Sufi Saint was inspired by a reference in *Mirrors Of The Unseen, Journeys In Iran*, by Jason Elliot, Picador, 2007. ISBN 978 0 330 48657 6.

The Lama's entreaty quotes from *Water And Dreams*, an essay by Gaston Bachelard, published by Dallas Inst. Humanities & Culture; 1994, ISBN 0911005250 and *The Soul Of The Bridge* by Peter Bishop, published by Sphinx 1, A Journal For Archetypal Psychology And The Arts, edited by Noel Cobb. London; 1988.

Bye, Bye Blackbird was composed by Ray Henderson, with lyrics by Mort Dixon.

The letter from Stefano is an adaptation of the song *Late Night Grande Hotel* by Nanci Griffiths.

CHANGES

The lyrics for *Never Be The Sun* were written by Donagh Long.