

# **ODDS AND CLOCKS**

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## CRITICAL ANALYSIS

### 1. An extended synopsis of the play

*Odds and Clocks* opens in a non-space with three parallel monologues. In these fragmented, puzzled stories, Annabel, Beatrice and Charlie reveal their inner wishes and fears. There is a feeling of hopelessness in these stories, either obvious or implicit: Annabel chatters in an ecstatic tone about a real or imagined romantic dinner. Beatrice's alarmingly obscure phrases project her anxiety that her time is up. Charlie exposes a long list of complaints against his real or imaginary flatmates, only to admit, finally, his agony about how to exist in the world.

This psychological space, where characters are unaware of each other, suddenly switches to something different: a dark space, totally bare except for a candle, the flame of which slightly softens the darkness. As the characters try to figure out what this space is, more questions surface, highlighting the strangeness of their situation. They don't know what has happened to them or how they found themselves in there. They don't recognize each other and worse, they don't seem to remember who they are.

This world is compressed with temporal and spatial confusion. Not only does the flow of time baffle the characters, since they experience it in a disrupted, tangled

way, but also they find it extremely difficult to make out where they are, as there is not a sustained impression of a physical setting. In fact, every attempt the characters make to positively identify the space they are in proves futile, since all their interpretations of physical reality are quickly revealed to be illusory. The absence of such certainty - even false certainty - is what defines the characters' predicament. As subjects of a non-worldly situation, Annabel, Beatrice and Charlie must try to construct some narrative, to invent some meaningful story to make the absurdity of their situation tolerable.

The problem of the absence of an essential self, which the characters have to confront, inevitably means also a breakdown in the Other: a lack of any logic or truth external to the characters, an extreme kind of anomie. This world, as a representation of chaos, is terrifying. At the same time, however, it represents a unique opportunity for the characters to reinvent themselves and fabricate narratives that will help her realize their own ambitions. Indeed, the construction of a story that will dominate the others seems to be the key to achieving a better place on the chessboard and claiming what one thinks one deserves.

This opportunity is something that all the characters become conscious of quite early in the play, Charlie especially. After his first feeble attempts to explain their bizarre situation, Charlie manages to refine his craft and makes a solid reality come to life in the appearance of an abandoned train carriage in the middle of fields. He also turns his newly developed skills against Beatrice, tricking her into participating in his little

theatrical performance. This ends with Beatrice's humiliation, showing that she is not the established professional she thinks she is, but is, in fact, a nobody.

Charlie's time in power, however, is short lived. For, surprisingly, it is the usually compliant Annabel who first completes the puzzle. She makes full use of manipulation techniques in order to achieve what she desires: to chain Charlie to her. She does that through the telling of an unusual kidnapping story, which is then forced upon the others as the true account of what happened.

A new reality is now established; but Annabel fails to see that there was hardly ever a domination game without war, and never a war without victims. In this case, the victims are Beatrice, pushed out of this world because she doesn't fit in the story, and Charlie, who is reduced to a villain. And, inevitably, Annabel sacrifices her own self-image, by going to extremes in order to impose her version of what has happened. The end of the journey for Annabel is the realization that there is a price to pay for power. She makes peace with herself and disappears in her hazy future (or her predicted death).

Finally, Beatrice reappears to state a new order of things, a vision of a world as a circus. The outer reality is fluid, the possibilities endless and the human joy lies in plurality, not in the domination of a single truth. A limiting sense of identity is replaced by the vastness of experience. This brand new world that Beatrice proposes offers a promise of liberation and manages to win Charlie over. However, could it be

just another narrative; more captivating, more promising but, at the same time, equally domineering? Beatrice's last words sound like a warning. She announces "This is the end", sealing the door to another vision, to another reality.

## **2. The search for meaning**

The play's opening scene places the characters out of actual space and within their own narrations. These narrations are in fact segments of stories, given in unfinished phrases and imperfect structures, while the use of subtle linguistic bridges between them, such as the repetition of words, the rhythmic exchange of phrases and the occasional riming, fortifies the impression of a non-naturalistic setting. In doing so, I wanted to establish a non-direct, as well as non-representational, relationship between the stage and the outside world from the beginning.

This is a postdramatic universe and as such, it cannot offer a realistic solution to the mystery of where the characters are. However, this does not necessarily mean that the characters will not be looking for a dramatic solution, for a dramatic truth. When it comes to postdramatic texts, we are used to seeing the characters take their postdramatic situation for granted (we, too, take it for granted), no matter how unusual it may be. But, In *Odds and Clocks* the characters are at odds with the world and struggling to find a way to exist (either internally in the play or in a metatheatrical sense as dramatis personae trapped in a postdramatic text).

This paradox lies at the core of the play. I am deliberately playing with the reflexes of the dramatic theatre, in order to push the characters into a journey; from the question of space to the question of human essence, naivety to self consciousness and the dramatic to the postdramatic. At the end of the journey, no single truth will be found. The absence, however, of a single truth does not imply a lack of meaning but the plurality of meanings.

### **3. Perceptions of time and space**

“Everything is time and space”, Charlie insists, from the early scenes of Act One. “And how can one possibly know who he is unless he knows where he is?” he wonders. His initial response, that he is actually in his friend’s pub, falls flat in moments, leaving behind a feeling of uncertainty. With Annabel’s support, Charlie now starts to examine more possibilities, including relatively plausible scenarios, “Are we in a basement?” And climax with completely absurd scenarios, “Are we in somebody’s suitcase?” More hypotheses follow; they are librarians and even brains in vats.

It is clear that, no matter how difficult the task is, the characters need to go on with their quest and resolve the mystery of space. In fact, they realize that they need to tame time and space and, if they achieve that, if they manage to structure time and positively identify space, then they will unlock the mystery of their own condition. They will be able to answer the question of their own identity.

Obviously, apart from the enigma of space, there is also something awkward about the flow of time. "It's dark, surely, but my watch says otherwise" Annabel notices. Indeed, it feels as if there are seconds or minutes or an identifiable amount of time lost every time the candle mysteriously goes out. Also, there seems to be no sequential logic to events. Charlie speaks about his friend Mike when he thinks he's at the pub. Later on, when this assumption has collapsed, Annabel reminds Charlie of his friend. "Who the fuck is Mike?" Charlie responds. After some time, Charlie finds out that he has a bump on his head but that is before he is hit by Beatrice. A few scenes later, he suffers from an unexplained headache.

The lack of sequential logic gives a dreamlike feeling to what the characters experience. And, exactly as in dreams, the scenes in Act One are episodic and give the impression of something unfinished, or even unfulfilled.

Schematically, the scenic space of Act One includes a shared space, an imaginary space and a complex space. The shared space is the dimly lit space that the characters initially explore. Irrespective of the characters' wild hypotheses regarding the nature of this setting, it transforms only twice, when the door appears and when the counter appears (to accommodate the needs of Charlie's 'Bar scene story'). This space is a public space, although Beatrice keeps accusing the other two of trying to turn it into a private space.

The imaginary space is the scenic space of Annabel's first monologue, which I will refer to as 'The wedding dress story'. It is a shop, and then Paris, and then Annabel's long lost hometown. Clearly, this space is of a private nature.

Finally, Act One includes a complex space, both shared and imaginary, both public and private. There are two scenes of this kind. The first is Annabel's second monologue, which I will refer to as 'The one night stand story'. It is an imaginary setting, Charlie's bedroom, but it incorporates elements from the shared space, as Annabel constructs her desired reality from material present in her current situation. She is alone with Charlie, who is unconscious, having, in the previous scene, been hit with Beatrice's overstuffed bag, and she fantasizes a situation where Charlie has invited her to spend the night in his room but has drunk himself unconscious.

The second scene of the complex scenic space is, in fact, a scene within a scene (and works as theatre within the theatre). It starts with the shared space, until Charlie questions Beatrice's statement that she is a will writer. He then starts narrating a story in which he is in a bar and tries to tell a story to the unwilling ears of the barmaid. Suddenly, in the middle of the story Beatrice assumes the role of the barmaid and, along with Charlie, plays the scene in real time. In addition, an object appears, a counter, which affects (for as long as the bar scene develops) the space in a peculiar way. It is now two dimensional, as it is both the bar and the shared space. Annabel watches the bar scene as audience and Charlie, in a post-Brechtian fashion,

jumps from the reality of the bar scene to the one of the shared space, to and fro, in order to comment on Beatrice as a barmaid and make fun of her.

Similarly, there is no unitary time here. Time is idiosyncratic, perplexing and multi-faceted, and it follows the patterns of space. Real time characterizes the shared (public) space, and this is not a surprise. As Steve Waters (2010, p. 73) points out, “the true meaning of real time is the desire to tell a story without apparent artifice or cheating”. But if in *Odds and Clocks* each individual scene of this shared space presents a logical order of events in real time, the sum of them proves exactly the opposite: what is true in one scene is questioned in the next (e.g. Mike’s existence), or interpreted in a very different way. Therefore, all the events that happen in front of our eyes in public space and in real time are not to be trusted any more than the characters’ imaginary worlds.

These scenes begin with the sound of a match and finish when the candle suddenly goes out. This small object works as a device for time movement, bonding together time and space. It is a spatial object but serves the flowing of time, obeying the internal (and mysterious) laws of time. In fact, there is only one scene when the candle is put out by a character, and that is Annabel’s ‘One night stand story’. The scene ends with her putting the candle out and lying next to Charlie, which symbolizes her desire to stop time in her fantasy (and thus make it a reality).

The perception of time in Act One is, therefore, complex, subjective and cyclical at times and has a dreamlike quality, while the scenes have diverse rhythms and tempos.

I think it is worth examining 'The wedding dress story' closer, as its tempo directly refers to the world of dreams. Annabel finds herself in a shop, where she works. It is a perfectly ordinary day, but minutes later Annabel realizes that outside the shop the corridors of the mall have been transformed into a Parisian scene. And things get even more bizarre. Annabel notices a man trying to run out of the shop wearing a wedding dress. She immediately thinks that he is a shoplifter and starts a breathless race, chasing him into the Parc de Marco Polo. When she finally grabs him, she recognizes him as a friend of hers from her childhood. Paris has become her long lost hometown. The man in the wedding dress confesses his personal drama and bursts into tears, while Annabel discovers her feeling of empathy and hugs him.

This piece, which can be described as acoustic scenery, sheds light on the dreamlike logic of the play, where an intellectual or a linguistic conception becomes reality, and also foreshadows Annabel's internal journey in the play.

Now we can understand better the transformation of space in Act Two. For Charlie's last words in the 'Bar scene story', which concludes Act One, are: "I got into the train, heard the doors lock, waited, waited, waited for the next stop".

Act Two is the materialization of the idea of the train. The shared space is now identified as the internal space of an old, abandoned train carriage. From this moment onwards, they will only be one space, one reality. For, after Charlie announces that it is a train carriage, there is a consensus on this new truth. Even though Annabel and Beatrice are utterly surprised by this revelation, they do accept it as true - and now everything in the carriage, including the newly discovered objects, supports this truth. This train carriage, for the first time properly lit and with the candle now of no use, constitutes the first solid physical setting.

Obviously, time cannot remain unaffected. In this Act, which consists of one scene, time acquires linearity and consistency. The foggy and dreamlike movement of time in Act One now dissolves, and what remains is real time. This is because of the first concrete story in the play, 'The kidnapping story', which Annabel invents in order to break Charlie's resistance. There is now a structured and logical development of events, following the exposition of Annabel's argument and evidence. But this story makes Beatrice's presence in the train carriage problematic. It cannot be explained. Thus, the logic of this new reality makes the presence of one of the characters illogical. Beatrice simply does not fit in. This character is at odds with the space and therefore has to be ruled out (and thus Annabel pushes Beatrice out of the carriage and into the dark).

The perception of time and space in Act Three swiftly changes again. This last Act develops on a different ground. It is the aftermath of Annabel's actions. Space is

both actual and psychological. Annabel and Charlie are in the train carriage, but also in a psychological space, that echoes the opening scene. Sometimes the characters acknowledge the specific characteristics of the train carriage, and at other times they are found in the elusive reality of a dream. Indeed, it is difficult to say who among the characters is awake and who is sleeping. Annabel keeps asking Charlie, “Are you awake?” Later on, Charlie mentions that she was talking in her sleep and Annabel replies “I didn’t realize I felt asleep”. Both spaces seem to coexist and complete each other. It is the first time, however, that the characters are able to identify dreams as dreams, as with Charlie’s dream of the library.

The flow of time is slightly disrupted, and has a surreal quality, which coincides with the darkness of the space. When the first light of day comes, however, time becomes linear.

Beatrice’s reappearance, in the last scene, followed by Annabel’s exit, changes our perception of space again. But it is not the inside space that is of interest now, but the outside (reported in Act One as fields with bare trees and nothing much else) has now become a circus. Beatrice’s vision of a new world takes the place of the old and so the eerie feeling of the train carriage disappears, leaving behind a space with loads of dust and dirt that needs some serious cleaning.

The last alteration in space emerges in Beatrice's last words. "It is. Quite simply. The end." This is a meta-theatrical reference to the actual end of the play. The space, with these last words, becomes, surprisingly, a theatrical space.

#### **4. Appearances and reality**

Each spatial world in the play comes into view with the presence or absence of certain objects. There are no objects to be found in the opening scene; the stage is, in this first instance, "an empty space", to use Peter Brook's phrase (1968, p. 9), both literally and metaphorically. Nor are objects present during Annabel's monologues in Act One. The exception is the candle which, in Annabel's hands, discloses the character's entrance to an imaginary universe. The same candle has a slightly different function when used in the shared space: it is a physical object that helps the characters to see in the dark, and at the same time it has a symbolic meaning, associated with the disrupted flow of time. The real, the imaginary and the symbolic are thus woven together through the use of the candle, which also externalizes the characters' psychological state, their feelings of confusion and desire to shed light on their enigmatic situation.

There is a dynamic, multifaceted relationship between objects and physical reality. To start with, an object is connected in a certain way with a physical reality and therefore, when this reality changes, the object itself (or the way we see it) changes as well. A good example of this is Beatrice's handkerchief. When the physical reality

of the space transforms into a bar during Charlie's 'Bar scene story', the handkerchief reappears as a cleaning cloth to support this new reality.

On the other hand, there are objects in the play that come to exist only once they are required by a certain mental state. For instance, Beatrice's repeated and desperate cries that she needs to get out result in the appearance of a locked door, while Charlie's mobile phone emerges as an answer to everyone's screams for help. Correspondingly, mental acts initiate the appearance of various objects or of a complete physical reality, even in cases where what triggers these mental acts is wholly random. Charlie's 'Bar scene story' ends with a casual image of him being inside a train. This then generates a very specific mental act. He decides that the space they share in is in fact a train carriage and he goes on to announce this. A moment later, everything needed to prove Charlie's claim is immediately revealed; a window, seats and lamps appear and the space is lit. Indeed, Charlie's mind perceives this world as a train carriage, and so it is.

In all these examples we clearly see the semiotization of the object. As Keir Elam (1980, p. 6) puts it, "The very fact of their appearance on stage suppresses the practical function of phenomena in favor of a symbolic or signifying role, allowing them to participate in dramatic representation". The signifier of an object, therefore, is transformed according to the emerging reality of the specific moment.

In order, however, to make a harmonious whole, one must create a reality that includes all objects and soothes any contradictions between them, as well as soothe any incoherence internal to an object. The object has to be interpreted every time, so as to fit into this harmonious whole, and this interpretation has to be agreed upon. This becomes clear in the case of Beatrice's stun gun. When Beatrice uses it, it is believed to be a real gun, up until the moment Charlie questions it, "That wasn't the sound of a real gun firing bullets", whereas Annabel insists that it looks real to her. "Is it a toy?" Charlie asks Beatrice, but receives no answer. In these moments, the question of whether the gun is real or fake seems to hover over the characters and they are unable to decide. Then Charlie takes the initiative to determine what this object is: "I bet it's a stun gun" he says. And since there is no objection to this, the object establishes itself as a stun gun, and it is later used as such by Annabel. As illustrated in this example, the interpretation is something to be decided on and for that, a consensus must be achieved.

Another example of this is the definition of the external space. In Act One it is defined as "the middle of nowhere" and there is nothing but fields and bare trees. In the last scene of the play, however, when Beatrice returns as a fortune teller, she insists that the train carriage is actually part of a circus. At the beginning, Charlie fails to accept this and only sees the fields. Beatrice's perseverance will make him see the world as it is presented to him. The consensus is accomplished and the new reality is thus established.

## 5. On character and language

The characters' initial parallel monologues are undoubtedly the most compelling form through which they are characterized; they are introduced not through some kind of biography, or action, but through a mystified self-portrayal, an eccentric confession of desires and fears that takes shape with the use of the characters' own unique speech. What these characters have in common is a feeling of dissonance, a sense of displacement or even a clash with the world.

Apart from their psychological traits, these characters have also certain physical attributes that remain unaltered: For example, their sex, age and physical appearance. But their body language is also in discord with the world in which they find themselves, and this is revealed already in the stage directions in the beginning of the play: "Sound of a woman sobbing, followed by the sound of a match. Annabel, Beatrice and Charlie are sitting around a candle in the middle of the stage. They look uncertain about how to place their legs. The rest of the stage is dark and empty".

The empty stage can be seen as an expressionist articulation of the characters' inability to be in the world; almost as if the failure to find one's place in the world has destroyed the world. From this point of view, the struggle to find meaning in the world is primarily a struggle to deal with the sense of being nobody, of having no context. And this is in fact what drives the comedy, the philosophic interest and, as the play goes on, the near-terror of the characters' situation. What is at stake here is

not the certainty of existence. On the contrary, to prove that one does not really exist, as Charlie attempts with his theory of brains in vats, is a way of finding some kind of comfort. The true hazard is the suspicion of the absence of an essential self (contrary to Strindberg's well-known claim that "character is not essence but existence"). "Am I a sum of my days at work, my glasses of wine, my words?" Annabel asks.

In the same way that objects appear or disappear as the physical reality evolves, the characters' identities also materialize and vanish. Although the characters' objectives remain unchanged, the characters' social vehicle, their identity, is subject to debate, to questioning or to negotiation. This is not accidental. Identities express the characters' positions in the social structure, and thus they are expressions of social rank, hierarchy, power. The characters are involved in role-playing and they use stereotypes, creating a world of intense conflict, of antagonism. Whereas their starting point is to find a way to exist in the world, they are engaged in inclusion-exclusion games, trying to secure for themselves the role they think they deserve, even if they have to exclude the others from this world.

Beatrice's case illustrates this well: she first introduces herself as a will writer. This is not a surprise, given that Beatrice has a fear of death as revealed in her opening monologue. This identity is produced by a certain mental state, in the same way that objects emerge, as discussed earlier. This identity, however, is mocked and refuted by Charlie, who claims to know her as a barmaid. This new identity is now forced

upon Beatrice, who momentarily breaks and consents to Charlie's allegation (only to revolt against it later on, when Charlie's position is weakened and fragile). At the end of the play, she returns as a fortune teller. This role allows her not only to free herself from her fear but to acquire an extra bonus: as a fortune teller she can predict – or decide – the life and death of others too.

Annabel, on the other hand, assumes the role of a shop assistant in her imaginary world, 'The wedding dress story', and keeps this identity when she introduces herself to Charlie. His indifference, however, is exemplary. At the end of her story he yawns and asks for a painkiller. Annabel's opportunity to improve her position (and revenge Charlie for his indifference) surfaces in Act Two, through the kidnapping story. She first produces a tempting identity for Charlie, a well-known journalist, but then she uses it against him, to turn him into a puppet (he is supposed to have promised that he would make her a star). Annabel proves her ethical superiority by rejecting his offer, only to admit defeat in Act Three, realizing her actions.

Finally, Charlie's journey is equally varied. It starts with him expressing the epistemological and ontological skepticism that gives him some authority and control over the others, but it ends with him confused about his own identity and deprived of name or refuge.

In *Odds and Clocks*, it is evident that there is no plot without the characters. However, they do function in another, meta-theatrical way, as fictive characters,

exchanging among themselves the roles of the hero, the villain, the helper etc. This meta-theatrical layer is sometimes disguised, when Beatrice accuses Annabel that she equates life with acting for example and sometimes explicit, as discussed above. Without doubt, language is the primary force in this world; it shapes and reshapes the world endlessly. However, communication often fails, as the characters repeatedly strive to find commensurable discourse. Because epistemological and ontological skepticism has left the characters with no foundation out with their immersion in language, these breakdowns in communication contribute to a feeling of discomfort and an awakening of anxiety.

## **6. The development of the play**

At the beginning of the MPhil (B) course, I had only a vague idea of the play I wanted to engage with. The opening scene, which I had written a few years earlier and which I now thought worth exploring, was guiding me towards some kind of plot that included a situation of isolation, a ménage a trois and confrontation. One idea already available was a kidnapping inspired by a journalist's desperate search for a good story. But, obviously, my most important source was the opening scene, which provided me with some sense of who my characters were, or, in other words, how the characters spoke, which I consider the most important factor in comprehending and developing a character.

The play, however, only came into existence for me after the first tutorial with my supervisor, Steve Waters. He insisted that I should seek a defined theatricality which

uses a specific space and time. As far as space is concerned, I was asked to consider a precise location (for example, Birmingham) as setting for the world of the play. I was strongly opposed to that idea and I considered alternatives, which led me to the question, what if the characters themselves do not know where they are? This possibility triggered a certain interest in examining the theatrical conventions and their relation to each other in multiple ways. The course's seminars were helpful on this, since we were asked to think extensively on these conventions and to briefly define them in our own terms. Also, it was interesting to study the way these conventions were exploited in plays such as Harold Pinter's *Old Times* (1971), where character and space are melted together with extraordinary effects.

Revisiting Aristotle's *Poetics* made me think of the play's characters in a metatheatrical way, as fictive figures who keep failing in the quest for unity. Also, I was provoked into sabotaging the relation between character and action. This meant not only undermining the supremacy of action and replacing it with the speech event, but also, to a great extent, linking action to language. Consequently, action in *Odds and Clocks* is generated by random phrases or by externalized thoughts that are not always relevant to the characters' objectives. This resulted in the action of the play obtaining an element of absurdity, which strengthened the sense of discontinuity in the world. Strangely enough, this is not inconsistent with Aristotle's political philosophy, where the casual is a major cause of change in the human world.

There are strong philosophical concerns in *Odds and Clocks*, which originate from my background in philosophy. Sometimes the references to philosophical debates are explicit, as with H. Putnam's "Brains in a vat" theory (1981, pp. 1-21) or Wittgenstein's famous phrase "The solution to the riddle of life in time and space lies outside time and space" (1921, Trans. C.K. Russell, 1955, p. 149). There are also a number of not-so-obvious philosophical considerations in the play from influential theories of ontology, phenomenology, metaphysics, postmodernism and so on. The space as a train carriage may bring to mind Plato's allegory of the Cave, or Beatrice's final defense of experience as opposed to salvation could be a response to *The Confessions Of St. Augustine* (Trans. E.B. Pusey, 1907). As far as aesthetics is concerned, there are influences from the absurdist theatre, expressionism and even Brechtian theatre. But their juxtaposition does definitely not reflect or serve any theory as a whole.

Although the first draft did receive enthusiastic responses from a part of my class and from independent readers, it was not read in the way I expected. My supervisor felt that, although the play's interesting features included its distinctive use of language and its sense of humor, the logic of the play was questionable and the characters' intentions were unclear. In addition, he could not see the nature of change in the play and was troubled by the fact that there was no sexual interaction between the characters, which would put off any potential audience. That discussion was further complicated when I brought the tradition of the Theatre of the Absurd to my defence, with particular reference to the critique of language as an instrument for logic, the discovery of reality, the absurdity of the human condition and "the

bankruptcy of all closed systems of thought with claims to provide a total explanation of reality”, as Martin Esslin explains (1965, p.15). My supervisor held the opinion that the Theatre of the Absurd is irrelevant today.

In the two subsequent drafts I worked on the details, so as to sort out small dramaturgical problems and to further refine the language, while otherwise leaving the play untouched. I also worked specifically on stage directions, as my first draft was admittedly laconic as far as they are concerned. The development of stage directions had a great impact on how the play was subsequently read, as they offered a concrete visual story that shed light on the internal logic of the play and the characters’ relationship to each other.

Working on stage directions was indeed important as it also brought another problem to the surface. When reading the first draft it was possible to assume that the objects were already on stage, but invisible to the characters. The second draft, which provided clear stage directions, made it obvious that the objects do not exist up until the point they are invented by the characters. This clarification helped the readers to better understand the logic of the play.

My feedback from my second supervisor, Steph Dale, was that she had never read anything like it and was worried about whether an audience would be able to follow the spatial changes in the play. She was also worried that an audience might miss the point, namely the nature of the characters’ quest, by being misled to expect a

realistic solution to the mystery. To address this possibility and clarify the nature of the characters' quest, I had the characters voice more existentialist worries at the beginning of the play; for example, Charlie's questioning of Annabel and Beatrice's existence and his worry about the relativity of truth.

The major change in the third draft was to the title of the play; up to that point, the play had been titled *Crazy ride* and, as Steve Waters observed, this did not do justice to the peculiarity of the play. Another significant change involved the final words of the play, delivered by Beatrice: "It is mad". According to my supervisor, the word "mad" belittled the ideas of the play and was unsatisfying as an ending. My solution to this was to employ a metatheatrical hint of irony: "It is. Quite simply. The end."

Obviously, I had another interpretation in mind as well: The "end" refers to the end (or death) of metanarratives, to use Jean-Francois Lyotard's term (1979, Introduction, p. xxiv). For, the whole play can be read as the characters' attempt to create metanarratives, inspired and reinforced by power structures. "The hell with salvation" proclaims the fortune-teller Beatrice, who advocates instead the variety of human existence (which means that the grand narratives should give way to small, local narratives). Does Beatrice's circus symbolize the end of metanarratives? Or is it just another all-encompassing theory? This I leave to the reader/spectator to decide.

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# ***ODDS AND CLOCKS***

## **CHARACTERS**

**ANNABEL** a young woman

**BEATRICE** a woman

**CHARLIE** a young man

## **NOTE**

Punctuation is used to indicate delivery and does not necessarily conform to the rules of grammar.

# ONE

*ANNABEL, BEATRICE and CHARLIE are standing some distance from each other. The stage is empty.*

**ANNABEL** It's not up to me to say I'm attractive but

**BEATRICE** you won't get anything out of this

**CHARLIE** one confession I had to make that night

**ANNABEL** what if

**BEATRICE** nothing at all

**CHARLIE** no, there was no time to think about it, no time

**ANNABEL** that night

**BEATRICE** your time is running out

**CHARLIE** I had to spell it out, let it out of my system

**ANNABEL** a certain kind of light

**BEATRICE** tick tock, tick tock

**CHARLIE** that moment, that exact moment

**ANNABEL** bright light

**BEATRICE** out of time

**CHARLIE** as Jimmy was laughing, reading his horoscope in last week's rag

**ANNABEL** melting down

**BEATRICE** do you think there's still hope for you now?

**CHARLIE** and Rosie was smoking her silly thin cut fags, endlessly

**ANNABEL** my face glowing as never before

**BEATRICE** there is none

**CHARLIE** one after the other, the smoke choking her, strangling her

**ANNABEL** like from a deep, unnamed fever

**BEATRICE** hear that?

**CHARLIE** and that awful dog of hers vigorously chewing the leftovers

**ANNABEL** a flame, a fire, a whole world burning

**BEATRICE** time is real

**CHARLIE** of our nice, tidy Sunday meal

**ANNABEL** I didn't imagine that, I didn't

**BEATRICE** stop it

**CHARLIE** that moment, that exact moment

**ANNABEL** no

**BEATRICE** no more talking

**CHARLIE** no matter how much I loathed that dog

**ANNABEL** no, it was real, alive, more alive than ever

**BEATRICE** no

**CHARLIE** that ugly imitation of an animal with the sticky eyes

**ANNABEL** and one, one could say it was the dress

**BEATRICE** nowhere to go

**CHARLIE** and stinking breath as coming from a grave

**ANNABEL** the hair, the makeup

**BEATRICE** let go

**CHARLIE** and no, I couldn't stand her either

**ANNABEL** the neatly polished nails

**BEATRICE** you won't get anything out of this

**CHARLIE** that bubbly cow with the sad yellow fingers

**ANNABEL** two hours and a half, all night long

**BEATRICE** you're alone

**CHARLIE** always leaving her shoes everywhere, I mean everywhere

**ANNABEL** almost attractive

**BEATRICE** time won't freeze for you

**CHARLIE** I found her bloody shoes inside the fridge one night, third shelf, next to the  
butter

**ANNABEL** glowing

**BEATRICE** this is how it works

**CHARLIE** while all this time he thought he was better, from day one

**ANNABEL** that night

**BEATRICE** all spent

**CHARLIE** patting backs and sparing smiles

**ANNABEL** he did look at me

**BEATRICE** no time for regrets

**CHARLIE** lick his ear in return, tell him he's great

**ANNABEL** almost, somehow

**BEATRICE** sh...

**CHARLIE** that moment I was ready to confess

**ANNABEL** as if he really, really thought

I was special.

**BEATRICE** Yes. I know how this ends.

**CHARLIE** I was feeling rather lonely.

*Black.*

*Sound of a woman sobbing, followed by the sound of a match. The three of them are sitting around a lit candle. They look uncertain about how to place their legs. The rest of the stage is dark and empty.*

**ANNABEL**      *(Looks at **BEATRICE**.)*

Oh.

Why are you crying?

**BEATRICE**      It's all, it's all

**ANNABEL**      I know

**CHARLIE**      Do you -

**ANNABEL**      *(To **CHARLIE**)* No

**CHARLIE**      hear -

**ANNABEL**      What?

**CHARLIE**      I thought -

*Beat.*

Didn't you hear it? Them.

Frogs. Or ducks.

Or something in between.

Quack, quack.

Obnoxious little buggers.

*Beat.*

Can someone turn the lights on?

*Beat.*

*(Glances over his shoulder.)*

Hey, I'm talking to you!

Turn the lights on!

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Who are you talking to?

**CHARLIE** Oh, Mike, the young chap. He's kind of my kid, you know.

I found him this job. He was just a daft college boy and now he very much runs this pub.

I taught him a few tricks myself.

Hey, I even made him change his haircut.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** There is nobody here. Apart from us.

**CHARLIE** No, no, he runs -

**BEATRICE** *(sarcastically)* He runs what?

*BEATRICE blows her nose in a white handkerchief.*

**ANNABEL** I don't think we are in a pub.

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Well, where the fuck are we?

**BEATRICE** And who the fuck are you?

**ANNABEL** Are we in the countryside?

**CHARLIE** Are we?

**ANNABEL** You said you heard frogs. Or ducks.

Or something in between.

**CHARLIE** *(Thinks.)*

Are we in a cottage?

**ANNABEL** Are we by a lake?

**CHARLIE** A river?

**ANNABEL** Are we in a warehouse?

**CHARLIE** A basement?

**ANNABEL** Are we in a cellar?

**CHARLIE** Are we in somebody's suitcase?

*ANNABEL giggles.*

**BEATRICE** *(To CHARLIE)* You think this is funny?

**CHARLIE** Eh?

**BEATRICE** You piece of shit!

**CHARLIE** *(Groans.)*

Out of your league?

**BEATRICE** I -

**CHARLIE** What?

**ANNABEL** Stop!

**CHARLIE** and **BEATRICE** turn and look at **ANNABEL**.

*The candle goes out.*

*Black.*

*Sound of a match. They sit around the lit candle, exactly as in the previous scene.*

**CHARLIE** 's hair is messy. He looks as if he spent a considerable amount of time passing his fingers through it.

**CHARLIE** Cause this is important. It's all about space.

**ANNABEL** What is?

**CHARLIE** Everything

Everything is time and space

And how can one possibly know who he is,

unless he knows where he is, don't you see?

Look. Look. Let's say...

Let's say we are in a library, right?

**ANNABEL** A library?

**CHARLIE** It's –

**ANNABEL** The books, the old books

**CHARLIE** eight o'clock? Nine o'clock?

***ANNABEL** glances at her watch.*

**CHARLIE** It's dark

**ANNABEL** It's -

**CHARLIE** *(Jumps on his feet.)*

Why, why are we in a library at eight or nine o'clock?

**ANNABEL** I don't know

**CHARLIE** Give it a go

**ANNABEL** Eh...

**CHARLIE** Another guess

**ANNABEL** To read books? To find books?

**CHARLIE** Wrong again

**ANNABEL** Is it not about books?

**CHARLIE** Of course it's about books!

**ANNABEL** Then -

**CHARLIE** Come on! Why are we in a library at eight or nine o' clock?

**ANNABEL** Eh... for the books?

**CHARLIE** For the books why?

**ANNABEL** I don't know why

**CHARLIE** I'll tell you why!

Because we are librarians!

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Are we?

**CHARLIE** Yes! Or

**ANNABEL** Or?

**CHARLIE** We're professors. We're students.

We're professor and student.

**ANNABEL** *(Looks around her.)*

Are we in a library?

**CHARLIE** Well, probably not, but... if we were

**ANNABEL** If -

**CHARLIE** If we were, we would know exactly who we are.

**BEATRICE** Who the fuck are you people?

**ANNABEL** I don't think we are in a library.

**CHARLIE** Are we not?

*Beat.*

*CHARLIE sits down again, disappointed.*

**ANNABEL** We're in a cottage, or a warehouse, or a cellar, by a lake,  
  
or by a river, or -

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Are we?

**ANNABEL** You said -

**CHARLIE** What?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** What does that make us?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** I don't know

**ANNABEL** You don't

**CHARLIE** *(To BEATRICE)* Do you know who we are?

**ANNABEL**     *(Leaves a small scream.)*

You said Mike, he is kind of your kid

you know Mike

**CHARLIE**     *(Frowns.)*

Who the fuck is Mike?

*The candle goes out.*

*Black.*

*Sound of a match. ANNABEL is standing with the candle in her hand.*

*The rest of the stage is dark.*

**ANNABEL**     I am in the shop, and there is something strange today,  
I really don't know what, a peculiar feeling is tingling me...  
and yet, everything seems familiar.  
The shop is busy like every Saturday  
the girls are running up and down the stairs in their long, black  
cardigans  
carrying shoes and garments for the customers, smiling, always  
smiling for the customers,

the always annoying fifteen-year-old girls with the high-pitched voices  
and their copy-paste outfits.

Head to toe in tanning cream.

*Beat.*

I really don't like tanning cream. They smear the clothes with it.

They smear the ten-pound notes when they rub them in front of the  
till, "just making sure there's only one".

*Beat.*

But the strange feeling doesn't leave me, there's something bizarre...

Of course, there is something bizarre outside the shop

Outside

There is no sign of the mall's corridor outside

no sign of the security people with their grey suits and their funny

little walkie-talkies

Outside, it looks like

Paris.

*Beat.*

Yes, it is Paris on a golden summer's day

A sweet golden summer's day, a shiny cobbled street in the middle of

the cafes, and the scent of peaches makes me feel so incredibly

hungry

and I sigh under the neon lights of the shop, I smile to the customer

I take the card, I smile, I ask for a signature, she signs, I sigh, I smile...

But.

Something is happening, what? The other girls try to catch my attention, they point in the direction of the doors.

I turn quickly and yes, there is someone, not anyone but... a guy, wearing a wedding dress and holding a second one under his left arm

And he is making his way out of the shop!

And I think no, no, no

it can't be, he may have bought that wedding dress he is wearing, but he can't have bought the second one.

Of course, he doesn't have one of our bags.

He is a shoplifter!

So I jump over the till and run after him, I chase him down the cobbled street, under the warm sun, between tables, knocking over chairs, I run, I crash into a fruit bowl and the peaches scatter all over and a lady shouts and I run, I run, I don't let this long, white, shiny dress out of my sight not even for a second, I follow it into the Parc de Marco Polo, I topple statues and benches and fat old ladies with flowery hats, I run, I run, I run and finally, I grab it, I grab him and I

*Beat.*

"Why did you do that Philip?" I demand in despair, for, oddly, that exact moment, I know his name, as if he were a friend of mine from childhood

"Why did you do that?"

*Beat.*

We collapse, breathless, at the edge of a fountain. Suddenly it's just like the fountain in my long-lost hometown.

"My wife-to-be left me on our wedding day", Philip mumbles, brokenhearted.

"I wanted to know, I wanted to experience how it is to run away in a wedding dress."

And he covers his face with his big, bare arms.

*Beat.*

His reason sounds good enough in my ears.

I put my hand on his shoulder.

*Beat.*

And we stay there, at the fountain, feeling the warmth of that overwhelming, honeyed light.

*The candle goes out.*

*Black.*

*Sound of a match. The three of them are sitting around the candle.*

**CHARLIE** 's hair is messy, as in the previous scene.

**BEATRICE** If time and space is the answer

**CHARLIE** time and space, yes

**BEATRICE** if time and space is the key

**CHARLIE** the key, I like that

**BEATRICE** why are we still sitting on the floor like idiots?

Why are we wasting so much time talking

instead of actually doing something about it?

***BEATRICE** stands up with an expression of determination on her face.*

**ANNABEL** It's dark, surely, but my watch says otherwise

**CHARLIE** You mean -

***BEATRICE** makes a move to pick up the candle but **CHARLIE** grabs her hand.*

**CHARLIE** Wait.

We have to think about it.

**BEATRICE** *(Tries to pull her hand away.)*

What is there to think about?

Are we having a pyjama party here?

**CHARLIE** Wait

**BEATRICE** Oh, let go of me!

*BEATRICE violently pulls her hand and frees herself.*

*CHARLIE stands up and goes in front of her, blocking her way.*

**CHARLIE** Wait, I said!

You don't understand.

**BEATRICE** I don't understand

**CHARLIE** the weight of this decision

**BEATRICE** what you're up to, mister, but

**CHARLIE** we only live once

**BEATRICE** if you think you'll keep me in here

**CHARLIE** not twice, not forever

**ANNABEL** they say some things can live forever

**BEATRICE** if you want to try anything funny

**CHARLIE** like what?

**ANNABEL** like the colour of the afternoon light on the leaves

**BEATRICE** like, like

**CHARLIE** you can't deal with issues like this with a light heart

*BEATRICE tries to say something but CHARLIE raises his voice to stop her.*

**CHARLIE** There is a certain weight on things

And once you know, you know forever

you can't change things when you know

there is a finality about them

so sometimes it's better to wait

*BEATRICE opens her mouth to speak.*

*CHARLIE quickly covers her mouth with his hand.*

**CHARLIE** Look. Look.

Has it ever crossed your mind that we may be nothing but

“brains in vats”?

*Beat.*

*CHARLIE takes his hand away.*

*BEATRICE's mouth stays open in shock.*

**CHARLIE** Well, it probably hasn't.

It's all about questions.

Possibilities.

Brains -

**ANNABEL** *(Stands up.)* In vats?

**CHARLIE** Yes, exactly!

What if.

**BEATRICE** *(To ANNABEL)* What if

**CHARLIE** Exactly!

**BEATRICE** he is the one

**ANNABEL** No, no

**CHARLIE** No limits to possibilities

**BEATRICE** who brought us here

**ANNABEL** No, no, I won't, I don't think

**CHARLIE** Just think about it

What if we discover that we are nothing but brains in vats?

What are we going to do about it?

**BEATRICE** *(Grabs ANNABEL's arm.)*

What are we going to do about it?

**ANNABEL** *(Shakes her head.)* No, this is wrong

**CHARLIE** What if I'm right?

We should know.

We should search.

We should find out where the hell we are.

**ANNABEL** *frees herself from BEATRICE and turns to CHARLIE.*

**ANNABEL** Yes, we should do that. I'll help you. We can search and -

**CHARLIE** Yes. Yes.

*Beat.*

No.

Wait.

**BEATRICE** *(triumphantly)* See?

**CHARLIE** Just wait.

Cause this is not a decision one can take with a light heart.

And, you know, some people say -

**BEATRICE** Here is your proof!

**CHARLIE** Ignorance is bliss.

Do we really want to know?

**ANNABEL** *(to BEATRICE)* He is just -

**CHARLIE** I suggest we wait.

Yes. We should wait.

**BEATRICE** What? What should we wait for?

**CHARLIE** I don't know

**ANNABEL** If we all tried

**CHARLIE** Somehow I can't think clearly, my head hurts

**BEATRICE** This is hell

**ANNABEL** *(To BEATRICE)* You don't remember.

How can you make accusations like that?

**BEATRICE** Use your head!

**CHARLIE** My head

*(To ANNABEL)* Can you have a look?

*CHARLIE leans close to ANNABEL. She is embarrassed.*

**CHARLIE** Here, on my forehead. Something is... burning.

**ANNABEL** *(Touches his face.)*

Oh, here. A bump.

**CHARLIE** Where?

**ANNABEL** *(Guides his fingers.)* Just here

It's just a small bump

**BEATRICE** *(sarcastically)* And if you give it a kiss, it will disappear!

**ANNABEL** *(Pulls back, offended.)*

I was just trying to help.

How silly of me.

**BEATRICE** I'm sick of your little games!

**CHARLIE** Excuse me! I'm the one who is wounded here.

Don't you get it?

Isn't it obvious that someone hit me on the head?

**BEATRICE** How about you were pissed to death and fell and hit your head?

**CHARLIE** No, I -

**BEATRICE** I don't give a damn, don't you see?

I just want to get out!

**CHARLIE** Unless

There is another possibility!

Maybe... I'm saying maybe

this is just a dream, a nightmare

Maybe I'll wake up

have some milk, watch a film, whatever

*(To ANNABEL)* What do you think?

*ANNABEL says nothing. She doesn't raise her eyes.*

**CHARLIE** *(To BEATRICE)* Do you have a painkiller by any chance?

**BEATRICE** Give me the candle!

**CHARLIE** No, it will stay right here.

*He sits down again and takes it in his hands.*

**BEATRICE** Give me the candle!

I want to search this place, find out the truth.

**CHARLIE** The truth? What is the truth?

And even if I find the truth, how do I know it's the truth?

How do I know that you two exist in the first place?

I've got a fucking wound on my head!

I'm bleeding!

**ANNABEL** You're not bleeding. It's just a small bump.

**CHARLIE** So what?

**ANNABEL** You know I exist

You felt my hand on your face, I know you did

**CHARLIE** So what?

Senses lie. All the time. Everybody knows that.

*Beat.*

*(He thinks.)*

I know that I exist. But -

**BEATRICE** You stupid animal. Give me the candle!

**CHARLIE** No! The candle stays right here with me.

**ANNABEL** I felt -

So strange.

I felt I've known you.

**BEATRICE** *(To ANNABEL)* Tell me you are with me.

**CHARLIE** It's not that I have any reason not to search this place.

All I'm saying is that we have to wait.

**BEATRICE** Now. Tell me you are with me.

**ANNABEL** If we wait

**BEATRICE** It may be too late if we wait.

***ANNABEL** looks away.*

**CHARLIE** If we can just wait. For something to happen.

**ANNABEL** Something to happen

*Beat.*

*(To **CHARLIE**)* What can happen?

**CHARLIE** An indication. What the situation is.

And we could decide then what to do next.

**ANNABEL** But -

**CHARLIE** Ignorance is bliss, some people say.

Just think about it.

Think about

Yes, think about your brains in vats!

Do we really want to open a door and find a mad scientist

with his super-computer or whatever

messing around with our little grey cells

floating on a greasy jelly of nutrients in vats?

***BEATRICE** is now holding a ridiculously overstuffed handbag. She waves it in the air and hits **CHARLIE** with it hard on the head. **ANNABEL** screams. The candle falls off **CHARLIE**'s hand and lands on the floor. He follows, totally knocked out.*

*Black.*

*Sound of a match. A candle is lit. **CHARLIE** is lying on the floor. He isn't moving. **ANNABEL** is sitting close to him, fidgeting with the candle. The rest of the stage is dark.*

**ANNABEL** Great, he says.

Why did you let me drink?

He starts rubbing his forehead, like a kid.

My head is.

Hell my head is, he says.

*Beat.*

Whatever.

Come on.

Come to bed.

You

Whatever.

I promise I'll remember your name in the morning.

He says.

*Beat.*

Whatever.

Go home.

Take a cab, not my car.

Make sure you feed my cat.

Nice talking to you, he says.

He starts snoring.

*Beat.*

I haven't seen your cat.

*Beat.*

Are you thirsty?

Are you cold at all?

*Beat.*

I'm cold.

*Beat.*

There is a big, dark bulge on the floor.

*ANNABEL points somewhere in the dark.*

Just there, in the corner.

*Beat.*

It could be a carton box.

A painting that fell off the wall.

It could be a corpse.

*Beat.*

I just don't feel good looking at it.

*Beat.*

Did you know there is possibly a dead body on the floor?

Just there, in the corner.

*Beat.*

Is that all?

*Beat.*

Are you thirsty at all?

*Beat.*

I read, I read a lot.

*Beat.*

Did you know that scientists seek the proof to end all proofs?

Something like -

The perfect argument to end all arguments?

*Beat.*

Do you believe in love?

*Beat.*

Is this a blackout?

Can you do something about it?

*Pause.*

*After a while she lies next to **CHARLIE**. She puts her arm around him. She suddenly remembers the candle and turns. She blows it out. She hugs **CHARLIE** again.*

*Black.*

*In the dark.*

**ANNABEL** We could be two people who love books.

*Sound of a match. There is now a metallic door at the left corner of the stage, lit by a single spotlight. **CHARLIE** is trying the handle with **BEATRICE** next to him. **ANNABEL** is sitting at the floor as in the previous scene, with the candle in front of her. She has a box of matches. She tries the matches, one by one, but none of them manages to produce a flame. She continues as the others speak.*

**CHARLIE** Damn door!

*(Turns to **BEATRICE**)* It's locked.

**BEATRICE** Maybe it's stuck. Just keep trying!

**CHARLIE** I'm trying, are you blind? It's locked.

**ANNABEL** What's going on?

**CHARLIE** Locked!

I said it's locked.

**BEATRICE** And I said try again!

Or let me try.

**CHARLIE** *(Takes a step aside and bows.)*

Be my guest.

***BEATRICE** tries the handle violently, without result.*

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Well?

**BEATRICE** *(Starts banging on the door.)*

Help! Help!

**CHARLIE** Oh, don't be ridiculous.

**BEATRICE** Help! Help! Help!

**CHARLIE** Don't you know that nobody responds to this word?

Try hello. Or fire.

Fire is a good one.

***BEATRICE** gives him an uncertain look.*

*She is not sure whether he is serious or simply making fun of her.*

**CHARLIE** Go on. Fire.

**BEATRICE** Fire. Fire!

*Beat.*

Fire! Fire!

***ANNABEL** stands up and jounces the skirt of her dress to get rid of the used matches.*

*She walks to them.*

**BEATRICE** Fire! Fire!

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL**      *(hesitantly)* Fire. Fire!

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL and BEATRICE look at CHARLIE.**

**CHARLIE**      *(Shrugs.)*

Hello?

**BEATRICE**      Hello! Hello!

**ANNABEL**      Hello! Hello!

**CHARLIE**      Hello!

*Suddenly a mobile phone goes off. They all jump in surprise. They search their clothes. CHARLIE, confused, takes a mobile phone out of his pocket.*

**CHARLIE**      Hello?

*Beat.*

Who?

*Beat.*

What?

**BEATRICE**      What's going on?

**CHARLIE**      What woman?

**ANNABEL**      What woman?

**BEATRICE**      What is he saying?

**CHARLIE** Sh...

*Beat.*

**BEATRICE** Tell them to call the police!

**CHARLIE** Say it again

**BEATRICE** The police!

**CHARLIE** The address?

**ANNABEL** What -

**BEATRICE** *(Tries to take the phone but **CHARLIE** pushes her away.)*

Give it to me!

**CHARLIE** I can't hear

**BEATRICE** Say -

**CHARLIE** Wait, wait -

*Beat.*

Hello? Hello?

**BEATRICE** What's going on?

**CHARLIE** We were cut off.

*(Checks his mobile.)*

Oh, shite. It needs recharging.

**ANNABEL** Who was it?

**BEATRICE** What happened?

**CHARLIE** My battery just died.

**BEATRICE** The phone call!

**CHARLIE** *(Slips the phone back to his pocket.)*

Oh, some nutter, haven't got a clue what he was on about

A woman -

**ANNABEL** What woman?

**CHARLIE** was found or was she gone?

Dead or just dead stoned?

blah blah, and that's all

Look, I'm tired, let's call it a night

I'm going home.

**BEATRICE** You forget the door is locked!

**ANNABEL** What woman? What happened to her?

**CHARLIE** Don't despair, I'm sure there must be a way out.

*(Points at the other side.)*

A back door, why not? There is always one to get you in, and one to kick you out.

And this is how the world goes round.

**BEATRICE** You idiot! That (*points at CHARLIE's pocket*) was our best chance and now it's gone!

**ANNABEL** Let's not shout to each other, let's work together

**CHARLIE** (*To BEATRICE*) So shut your hysterical mouth

And, by the way, why don't you put your lippy on?

You look horrible.

**BEATRICE** How dare you speak to me like that?

You don't know me!

**CHARLIE** I know your type

**BEATRICE** You don't know a thing

**CHARLIE** Oh, please!

**ANNABEL** Please! What are you doing?

**CHARLIE** What is she doing?

And whose side are you on anyway?

Oh, whatever.

**BEATRICE** I won't take it

**CHARLIE** You will...

*Beat.*

Sh... Did you hear that?

**ANNABEL**      What?

**BEATRICE**      I'm talking to you!

**CHARLIE**      Shhh...

*Beat.*

Frogs. Or ducks. Or something in between.

Quack, quack. Didn't you hear it?

*Beat.*

I'm not kidding.

*(Points at the door.)*

There are creatures out there!

**ANNABEL**      *(Smiles.)* No, no

**BEATRICE**      *(outraged)* You -

**CHARLIE**      It's true, I swear it!

Listen. Sh...

***BEATRICE** turns her back, trying to calm herself down. They don't pay any attention to her.*

**CHARLIE**      Just listen.

*Beat.*

Quack-quack-quack

Quack-quack-quack

**ANNABEL** Oh!

**CHARLIE** Yeah, it's a song, isn't it?

It's got rhythm.

Come on, it's easy. Quack- quack- quack

One-two three, one-two-three

Quack-quack-quack

**ANNABEL** *(Joins in.)* Quack-quack-quack

You think?

**CHARLIE** Quack-quack-quack

What?

**ANNABEL** *(Giggles.)*

I don't think -

**CHARLIE** *(Stops and looks at **BEATRICE**.)*

Eh, what do you think?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *laughs and scans her up and down with a hint of irony, exactly as before.*

Oh, and I do remember you lady, by the way,

at that bar

me and my malt and you giving me that look

that frosty once-over

you just couldn't be bothered

**BEATRICE** What?

**CHARLIE** (To **ANNABEL**) She's a barmaid. How funny is that?

***CHARLIE** bursts out laughing.*

*Beat.*

**BEATRICE** Couldn't you come up with something spicier than that?

**ANNABEL** Stop! Please, stop!

I can't bear it.

**CHARLIE** Eh? What?

**ANNABEL** This! This! War!

This war.

Why can't we care for each other and help each other and... and...

***ANNABEL** wipes her eyes.*

**BEATRICE** You poor girl.

You think life is nothing but acting.

But here we are, in this hole in the ground.

Look around you!

It's dark and damp and we can't even scream

nobody will listen

no matter how hard we try, eventually we'll die

*Beat.*

And you think it's all about you.

**CHARLIE** Great. How typical.

I thought the point was to try and get out before there're no pizzas left in the world.

But. Wrong!

We have to get out before we start cutting each other into pieces.

**BEATRICE** You started it!

**CHARLIE** Whatever!

*CHARLIE sits on the floor. After a while he starts playing with his shoe laces.*

*Then he takes his shoes off and examines them carefully.*

*He seems satisfied with the shoes. He takes his socks off.*

*He brings one under his nose and sniffs it.*

Yak.

**BEATRICE** Thanks for sharing that with us.

**CHARLIE** Any information is valuable.

*(Waves the sock.)* This, this tells me we've been here for a while.

*Beat.*

Or, at least, I've been here for a while.

Won't smell your socks for you.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** and **BEATRICE** seem troubled.

**BEATRICE** Is it possible that we were brought here at different times?

**ANNABEL** It's dark, surely, but my watch says otherwise

**CHARLIE** Time.

Time is the key.

*Beat.*

It's all about time, isn't it?

**CHARLIE** somehow seems less excited about the subject now.

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *(To ANNABEL)* Are you sure you don't have a painkiller?

**ANNABEL** Me? No, no I -

**CHARLIE** Okay. Assuming we have brains after all, I suggest it's time to use them.

**BEATRICE** is about to say something but **CHARLIE** ignores her.

**CHARLIE** My question is: are we asking the right question?

**ANNABEL** *thinks about it.*

**CHARLIE** *is impatient.*

**CHARLIE** Look. The cops would ask you: what is the last thing you remember?

Because this is what cops do.

Because this is how cops think.

But I think otherwise.

I think

We should ask questions, yes

but time

how can one seriously ask the question of time?

There is no such a thing as the last thing

What is the last thing?

Something you did, or something you wanted to do?

Or something you thought, or something you dreamt or something you felt?

What is the last thing and how can it define the whole thing

Don't you see?

*Beat.*

The question of time.

Time is.

**ANNABEL** Time is.

Time kills. Kill time. All the time.

**CHARLIE** Eh?

What is the last thing you remember?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** My name is Annabel, I'm pretty sure of that.

I read, I read a lot.

I walk.

I work in a shop.

I spend hours in the shop. Hour after hour

break, lunch, cashing up

wages on Saturday

one and a half days to exist

sometimes two days, two and a half

my days off

and then back to the shop

I smile, I smile a lot.

*Beat.*

*(To CHARLIE)* On my days off I dress up, I do my hair

I don't smile back

I sit still, hour after hour, a glass of wine in front of me on the table

Never laid back -some say cause I try too hard.

Different places, different tables

The wine is always the same

The look on my face – or so some say.

*Beat.*

Did you say something?

**CHARLIE** No, I -

*Beat.*

*(Yawns.)*

If only I had a painkiller.

***CHARLIE** starts putting his socks and shoes back on.*

**ANNABEL** No, no, I have to know, I -

**CHARLIE** what?

**ANNABEL** Is living and being the same thing?

**CHARLIE** Eh?

**ANNABEL** Am I the sum of my days at work, my glasses of wine, my words?

**CHARLIE** Eh?

**ANNABEL** My silence

**BEATRICE** *(Laughs.)*

Who the fuck are you people?

**ANNABEL** I know now, I know

I'm not one word, I'm not a random single word, I'm not

I'm a word to somebody

I must be

**CHARLIE** I don't know

**ANNABEL** How can one make sense in silence?

**CHARLIE** I don't know

**ANNABEL** if only I could be that word

**CHARLIE** I can't think

**ANNABEL** that would be

**CHARLIE** Stop thinking aloud, you do my head in

**BEATRICE** Not everything is about you two!

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** And who the fuck are you?

**BEATRICE** Finally, someone asked!

My name is Beatrice.

I'm a will writer.

This is who I am.

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** A will writer, eh? That's a good one.

*He bursts out laughing.*

**BEATRICE** Why are you so amused?

**CHARLIE** Just wondering

Do you hear their last wishes,

their stories, their hopes and loves

who they are cross with

their little plans for their aftermath

their final line

before or after you serve them their pint?

**BEATRICE** I told you, I don't-

**CHARLIE** You don't serve Stella! I know that by now

my lying fat cow

**BEATRICE** How dare you!

**CHARLIE** *(To ANNABEL)* She's made of a pack of lies

however hard she denies

**BEATRICE** You -

**CHARLIE** *(Jumps on his feet.)*

You listen!

*(To ANNABEL)* If she had listened

*(Laughs.)*

You definitely didn't listen to my line

When I was telling you about HER pointing a gun between my eyes.

Now, this sounds very much like a final line, doesn't it?

A man ready for his will.

**ANNABEL** About HER? Who?

*CHARLIE smiles. He takes an acting pose. Pushes his hair back.*

*He uses a deep, masculine voice.*

**CHARLIE** Notoriously wild, SHE takes the gun out of her stocking.

I tell her: You know what's wrong with gangster films today?

Too much violence.

HER gun is still pointing somewhere between my eyes.

Give me a minute, I tell her. I need to explain myself to you, even if it's the last thing I'll do in life.

I'll take a deep breath first.

*CHARLIE takes a deep breath. He's loving it.*

**CHARLIE**        Okay, I tell her. I know you have your reasons  
  
and the money is good... the money is bloody good.  
  
I don't blame you, darling, I honestly don't. But hear me out, alright?  
  
SHE is hanging from my lips. HER gun though -  
  
HER gun is still pointing between my eyes.  
  
Too much violence, yes.  
  
Blood, blood, blood, we had enough.

*ANNABEL is about to say something but CHARLIE stops her with a strict look.*

**CHARLIE**        No, wait, I tell her. Don't part this lovely set of lips.  
  
You did promise me a minute.  
  
It's more than just the violence. It's the passion. Too much is too much. You  
know what I mean?  
  
SHE smiles, ironically. HER gun is pointing somewhere between my eyes.  
  
Is this an ironic smile? I ask her.  
  
Yeah, I bet it is. I bet it is.  
  
You think you know everything, don't you?  
  
Blood and bodies, either naked or dead. And that's all there is.  
  
That sucks, that's dangerous, that's bloody fascist, that's -

I don't give a fuck, lady, I tell her. HER gun is pointing somewhere between my eyes.

Go on, shoot me in the back bitch, I bark and turn my back on her.

I don't give a shit.

I hear the train approaching -

**ANNABEL** Are you telling me a story?

**CHARLIE** and I search in my pocket. I find my Stella.

But the barmaid...

*He makes a big, inviting gesture to **BEATRICE**, who now stands behind a metallic counter bar on wheels, lit by a single spotlight. She takes the white handkerchief out of her pocket and starts cleaning the surface of the counter. She has a totally different posture now, resembling a barmaid. She gives **CHARLIE** a cold look, then ignores him. Her voice is rough.*

**BEATRICE** We don't serve Stella here.

**CHARLIE** Eh?

**BEATRICE** I said we don't serve Stella here.

**CHARLIE** You don't? Why the hell should I care?

**BEATRICE** I don't take any abuse here, pal.

**CHARLIE** Alright, alright, don't get cross with me.

**BEATRICE** Now, if you want to switch to lager, there is Becks, Corona, Kronenberg -

**CHARLIE** Why the hell should I care about lager?

I'm immensely enjoying my malt here, thank you very much.

**BEATRICE** You said you wanted a Stella.

**CHARLIE** No, I... Well, since you don't serve Stella, I'll just stick to my malt.

If that's okay with you.

**BEATRICE** Suit yourself.

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Well. I was actually talking about that Stella. You know.

"I gulped down my Stella and said:

Shoot me in the back, bitch, if you dare...

**BEATRICE** Ah.

**CHARLIE** Yeah...

*BEATRICE stares at him expressionless.*

**CHARLIE** Well. Truth is. I didn't say much.

I got into the train and collapsed on the seat.

And as the train started moving I could see her watching me

with the gun in her hand,

from all the stupid black-and-white posters across the wall

of the metro station.

I stuck my tongue out in return, I honestly did.

Then I looked in my pocket for another Stella.

**BEATRICE** Now -

**CHARLIE** I know, you don't serve Stella. I know. I was just telling you  
a story.

*(To ANNABEL)* Not very smart, is she?

*(Raises his hand. His voice is loud as if to be heard in a crowded bar.)*

Can I have another one? Whatever. Just. Another one.

*(Winks at BEATRICE.)*

**BEATRICE** suddenly starts crying. **CHARLIE** turns to **ANNABEL** amused.

**CHARLIE** Did you see it coming?

Did you see it coming?

I guess you didn't.

A stupid poster on the wall

that was all SHE was!

*(Bursts out laughing.)*

And I got into the train, heard the doors lock

waited, waited, waited for the next stop.

*Black.*

## TWO

*CHARLIE lit by a single spotlight. The stage is dark.*

**CHARLIE** Ladies and -

Frogs. Or ducks. Or whatever you are.

I have an announcement to make.

*Beat.*

We are in a train carriage.

*Sound of a match. Apart from the door and the counter, there is now an extinguisher, a window and three seats. There are also some dirty grey blankets under one of the seats and four oil lamps, placed at each side of the stage in pairs. The objects stand in a strange geography and are lit by single spotlights. For the first time, there is enough light to have a clear view of the whole stage.*

Voila!

*ANNABEL and BEATRICE look around themselves, speechless.*

**BEATRICE** It can't be true

**ANNABEL** But we aren't moving

**CHARLIE** *(Laughs heartily.)*

Of course we aren't. This is a train carriage

but you shouldn't look for the train

if you want to remain sane.

*Beat.*

There is no train! That's what I mean.

**ANNABEL** How can it be?

**CHARLIE** *(To **BEATRICE**)* What do you see?

**BEATRICE** *(Walks to the window and sticks her face to the glass, trying to see outside.)*

Nothing.

**CHARLIE** *(To **ANNABEL**)* See? Nothing.

**ANNABEL** But how-

**BEATRICE** Fields. Bare trees. Nothing.

**ANNABEL** But we are -

**CHARLIE** In the middle of nowhere. Yes.

**ANNABEL and BEATRICE** *stare at him.*

**CHARLIE** *(Walks around the carriage, softly touching the objects.)*

Don't you see? A train carriage, left in the middle of nowhere.

Who knows how long ago.

Long, long ago.

Lost in time. A train carriage lost, forgotten

left to rot.

Deserted, abandoned, old.

Haunted?

Loaded with stories and smells and fears

and shadows and tears and torn grey blankets

and mould and dirt and dried up spiders

and corpses, perhaps?

And the echo of lovers who existed once

or came back to live forever

in this train carriage

Best joke ever!

*(Bursts out laughing.)*

My dear co-travellers, a big applause.

*(Applauds but nobody joins in.)*

*Beat.*

**BEATRICE** Joke? You said joke?

**CHARLIE** And a bloody good one, you have to admit

It takes imagination, courage, wit

A candle, two empty-headed chicks and a bloke like myself

It's perfect, a joke worth dying for

I love it, just give me more!

*(Looks up.)*

Hey, I'm talking to you! You are god, mate!

You are god!

**ANNABEL** Who are you talking to?

**BEATRICE** Open this door!

**CHARLIE** Mike!

**BEATRICE** Now! Open this door!

**ANNABEL** *(To CHARLIE)* I remember you!

**CHARLIE** Mike, I love you!

**ANNABEL** I remember you now

**CHARLIE** You are my god, Mike

**BEATRICE** Tell him to open the door!

**ANNABEL** I remember you now well

**CHARLIE** Mike, mate, my friend

I worship you man

**ANNABEL** Charlie

*CHARLIE and BEATRICE turn to her in astonishment.*

*Beat.*

**BEATRICE** Charlie? Your name is Charlie?

**ANNABEL** Your name is Charlie!

I saw you talking to that daft boy Mike

In front of the bar, at that pub

making big gestures with your hands

shouting about the deadline you couldn't catch

on Monday morning

worrying you didn't have a story to write

No story and I'm fucked, I'm sucked, I'm a piece of dead meat

in their frying pan, Mike, my boy

you said and took out a joint

**CHARLIE** Eh?

**BEATRICE** What?

**ANNABEL** *(Takes a step forward.)*

You suddenly looked at me.

My head hurts. It's spinning  
Spinning around earth, fast  
around all the places I've ever been  
All names I've ever heard  
All songs I've ever sung  
Weird, isn't it?  
You said.

*Beat.*

You turned to me.

You said -

**CHARLIE**     *(surprised)* I said?

**ANNABEL**    I guess I smiled

With you looking at me like that.

Staring at me. You were staring at me, weren't you?

I didn't know who you were.

That moment I didn't

But you did insist

**CHARLIE**     Did I?

**ANNABEL**    Two hours and a half, all night long

I am sure I smiled

You said -

**CHARLIE** No

**ANNABEL** You do remember, don't you?

**BEATRICE** What's going on here?

*Beat.*

***CHARLIE** looks at **ANNABEL** confused.*

*He chooses his words carefully.*

**CHARLIE** Obviously, you've mixed things up

I don't know you, do I?

I have no idea who you are

And all this crazy story about us

**ANNABEL** Listen! It did happen

I didn't imagine it, I didn't

You may as well admit it, you came to my table

sat down, ordered a drink, started speaking about your knee

**CHARLIE** My knee? Why on earth would I speak about my knee?

**ANNABEL** running up and down the city on a wild goose chase of a story

with fear and pity

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *takes a few steps away from her and looks up.*

*He is less confident now.*

**ANNABEL** *(Follows him.)*

I'd seen your photo in the paper, next to your piece

You were pleased, you said "I'm flattered"

**BEATRICE** *(To CHARLIE)* Where is your friend?

Where have you hidden him?

Mike!

Mike, let me out! Please let me out!

*(Grabs CHARLIE's arm.)*

Tell him! Tell him!

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *is about to say something but then stops.*

**ANNABEL** What is it?

**CHARLIE** It's all, it's all

I'm confused.

What's going on?

**BEATRICE** Yes, Charlie, what's going on?

What's the plan?

What have you done?

**CHARLIE** *(Turns to face her.)*

I haven't done anything. What do you mean?

**BEATRICE** A joke worth dying for

This is what you said a few moments ago, remember?

So tell us, what's your role in this story

In this joke

**CHARLIE** No, no

**BEATRICE** You know what's going on

Your words, explain your words

Tell us what's going on

Tell your friend Mike to open the door!

**CHARLIE** No, it was just a stupid idea, that's all it was

I thought

Well, obviously there is no Mike here, is there?

He would answer if he was.

I just thought

I suddenly remembered my friend Mike, that's all

Our practical jokes

Harmless, innocent jokes

But, this

No, it was just a stupid thought

*(To ANNABEL)* You do believe me, don't you?

**ANNABEL** Yes, I -

**BEATRICE** Where the fuck is Mike?

**CHARLIE** There is no Mike, are you listening to me?

It was just a stupid idea

that he found a way to get even with me

No way could he ever think of something like this

You're right, he is nothing but a daft kid

And next time I see him, I'll make sure I kick his ass

A daft college boy he is, nothing much, really

I promise you, I'll kick his

**BEATRICE** Shut up!

*CHARLIE grabs her arms to make her listen to him but he pulls back as he realizes that she is outraged.*

**CHARLIE** I have nothing to do with us being here.

I know as much as you do and nothing more

All I want is to open this door and go home, okay?

*Beat.*

*(Thinks for a moment.)*

If this isn't a joke, what are we doing in here?

What are we doing in -

**ANNABEL** A train carriage left in the middle of nowhere.

**CHARLIE** Yes! What the hell are we doing in a train carriage

left in the middle of nowhere?

It doesn't make any sense.

**BEATRICE** Why don't you tell us something that makes sense for once, Charlie

Why don't you tell us who you are

**ANNABEL** His name is Charlie, I know that

**CHARLIE** I'm Charlie, she knows me

**ANNABEL** Say my name

**CHARLIE** What?

**ANNABEL** Annabel

**CHARLIE** Yes, Annabel. Why don't you tell this woman, Annabel, who I am?

**ANNABEL** *(To BEATRICE)* His name is Charlie. He is a journalist.

**CHARLIE** Thank you.

*(To BEATRICE)* This sorts things out.

As Annabel says, I'm a journalist, not a crook.

Okay? A guy found in the wrong place, at the wrong time

So, if you don't mind -

**BEATRICE** *(Laughs sarcastically.)*

Why should I believe your story when you didn't believe mine?

You laughed in my face, humiliated me

Confused me, accused me

Forced upon me someone else's identity

Questioned me, examined me, shattered my defence

Left me desperate, hopeless, bleeding to death

Why should I give you a chance now?

Why should I take your word for who you are, for what you are?

A joke worth dying for, this is what you said

So don't play innocent now, it won't work.

**CHARLIE** I don't follow

**BEATRICE** Of course you don't!

It meant nothing to you

It was just a joke, calling me a liar

And a common cheat, a bartender who once served you a drink

You forced me to play your little game just for a laugh

what a laugh!

a silly woman pretending to be someone else

someone better, someone finer and neat while

all this time, she was really a nobody

You played with my mind but enough is enough.

I've never seen you before, I never served you your malt

I don't earn my living behind a bar

I'm a will writer, whether you like it or not

And I deserve some respect.

If you know the meaning of the word.

*(Tries to stop herself from crying from anger.)*

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** Look. I see what you mean.

I'm sorry if I wronged you.

I honestly am.

**BEATRICE** Do you really think you can mop this mess away as if it were

spilt milk on the floor?

**CHARLIE** *(Raises his shoulders.)*

I said I'm sorry.

And I'm sorry that's not good enough for you.

What do you need before you can let this go? Blood?

**BEATRICE** You still think it's fun, don't you?

You still think it's a kind of game

Mocking people and destroying them

and then forgetting all about it

**CHARLIE** No, you're wrong, I'm not having any fun

I'm hungry and cold and for some time now I've needed

to go and pee.

*(Takes a deep breath.)*

And, okay, I admit, I am probably not the nicest guy you'll ever meet

but I'm not a monster either.

I apologised for what I did to you, I said I'm sorry.

What else do you want from me?

If I could open this bloody door I would,

Trust me, I would

**BEATRICE** Why don't you tell the truth for once in your life?

**CHARLIE** There is nothing more to say!

If you don't believe me, ask her.

Ask Annabel.

**ANNABEL** You do remember me now, don't you?

*ANNABEL approaches him with a smile on her face.*

*CHARLIE avoids her eyes.*

**CHARLIE** Oh. Probably, yes. Yes.

**ANNABEL** You were staring at me.

You came over to my table.

My head hurts. It's spinning

Spinning around earth, fast

around all the places I've ever been

All names I've ever heard

All songs I've ever sung

Weird, isn't it?

You said.

*ANNABEL touches his hand.*

*CHARLIE feels uncomfortable but doesn't move. She pulls back.*

**ANNABEL** You said hello and then I knew who you were.

You were flattered.

You said.

**CHARLIE** Just tell her -

**ANNABEL** *(Giggles.)*

A certain kind of light, that night

Bright light

It felt like a flame, a fire, a whole world burning

*Beat.*

You liked my dress, you said.

**BEATRICE and CHARLIE** look at her dress.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** The hair, the makeup

you said you really thought I was -

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** What?

**ANNABEL** Don't you remember?

*(Takes his hand again.)*

You said -

**CHARLIE** I said. I'm sure I said. Since you say so.

*(Pulls his hand away.)*

But if you want me to star in your little, cheesy film  
make sure you first give me the script.

So I won't contradict you.

*(Glances at **BEATRICE**.)*

I won't destroy you as I did with her

**ANNABEL** *(utterly surprised)* Are you upset?

**CHARLIE** Excuse me! You go on and on about all these things

I supposedly said and that's fine, but where does it end?

**ANNABEL** You can't behave like that.

**CHARLIE** Like what?

**ANNABEL** Like you've forgotten you ever talked to me.

Like I made this up.

**CHARLIE** Maybe that's because I have forgotten that I ever talked to you.

Or because I really need to pee.

And I wouldn't mind some privacy.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** is on the verge of crying. **BEATRICE** smiles sarcastically. She goes and sits on a seat on the other side of the carriage. She doesn't take her eyes off them.

**ANNABEL** Don't you believe me?

**BEATRICE** shrugs.

**ANNABEL** I didn't -

*Beat.*

(To **CHARLIE**) Why are you treating me like this?

**CHARLIE** turns his back to her. He goes to the door and tries the handle again.

**ANNABEL** I didn't make it up!

You sat at my table, offered to buy me a drink

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Okay. You obviously made the whole thing up.

As I said, I don't know you, I've never met you before in my life.

And if I had, I wouldn't have taken the trouble of talking to you.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** I know... I know you are confused right now.

You hit your head. You are confused.

But, but if you just listen

**CHARLIE** (*shouting*) Will you stop playing games?

No way would I sit at your table and chat you up

I'm sorry, I wouldn't chat you up, you're not my type

And, to be honest, I couldn't care less

**ANNABEL** You said you liked -

**CHARLIE** I liked what? The dress, the hair, the makeup?

Darling, you look like a mouse! I wouldn't waste a second look on you

I just wouldn't

***ANNABEL** Starts crying. **BEATRICE** applauds.*

**BEATRICE** What a performance.

**CHARLIE** *(To **BEATRICE**)* Oh, shut up.

**ANNABEL** How dare you speak to me like that?

I'm not the one who makes stories up!

You are the one who makes a living out of that.

You said: a good story is what makes the world go round

Without it we are lost, forgotten, left to rot.

Remember that? You said.

**CHARLIE** Whatever.

**ANNABEL** People want to know, you said.

People need stories more than bread.

And if you can't find a good story, than you have to invent one.

You have to make it up.

*Beat.*

Should I go on?

**BEATRICE** *(Stands up.)*

What are you implying?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** *(To CHARLIE)* And all I wanted to do was to protect you.

How silly of me.

**CHARLIE** Whatever.

**ANNABEL** *(Wipes her eyes with the back of her hand.)*

Imagine. He said.

Imagine having your photo front page, on the news

in everybody's lips, in everybody's thoughts

in everybody's prayers before bed.

Wouldn't that feel lovely?

He said.

And I said yes, it would. It would feel lovely

But

Wouldn't it feel lovely if the world cared about you?

I said yes, it would feel lovely

But

You could make the world care, you know.

He said.

If something happened to you.

You don't have to be a princess or a star

Or anybody big like that

You can still win their hearts

If you know how to play your cards.

If something happened to you.

Nothing horrible, even a small thing would do.

A strange situation, for instance.

A situation like what? I asked.

Something funny, weird, a bit unreal.

Something like.

A kidnapping.

He said.

**CHARLIE**

What?

*CHARLIE takes a few steps towards her but she pretends she hasn't noticed him.*

**ANNABEL** (To *BEATRICE*) Yes.

The world would notice

The world would care.

A simple yet brilliant plan.

A kidnapping.

Just for a while, for a few days

hidden somewhere far away, he said.

Somewhere nobody would ever think to search

it would be a massive success

big titles, coverage in breaking news

he would get a promotion and I would earn his devotion and

I would become a star

How can one say no to that?

This is what he said and nodded to his friend Mike

who would make the phone call to the police about the

missing woman and Charlie himself would do the rest of the job

if I said yes, or if I just didn't say no.

*Beat.*

This is what happened to me!

*Silence.*

**ANNABEL** I'm telling the truth, Beatrice.

**CHARLIE** She's lying, Beatrice.

**ANNABEL** I didn't say yes

**CHARLIE** *(with controlled voice)* Of course you didn't say yes because  
you were never asked anything

Nobody suggested anything to you, nobody expected a yes from you

**ANNABEL** You did!

**CHARLIE** You are one of those women who wait all their lives with a big yes  
in their mouth, ready to pop out  
only nobody asks, nobody cares

**ANNABEL** The last thing I remember

*Beat.*

The last thing I remember was the colour of the wine in my glass

I said no- you laughed.

**CHARLIE** I bet I laughed! I bet I laughed at your mousy mug!

**ANNABEL** *(To BEATRICE)* I swear to you, I said no

**BEATRICE** Stop it.

**ANNABEL**     *(Turns to face him.)*

How can you know?

How can you possibly know if you don't remember anything at all?

How can you be sure that you wouldn't do such a thing?

**CHARLIE**     I know I wouldn't ever do anything like that.

**ANNABEL**     Oh, really? Do you know yourself so well?

Do you think it would never cross your mind to do something

like that?

**CHARLIE**     Even if it crossed my mind it would stay in my mind!

**BEATRICE**     I said stop it.

**ANNABEL**     It's always a matter of time, isn't it?

**CHARLIE**     And I would certainly not pick you for the job

You stupid-

**ANNABEL**     *(shouting)* What?

***CHARLIE** grabs her and gives her a big slap on her face. **ANNABEL** screams from shock and pain. **CHARLIE** is about to hit her again. He is frozen by a gun shot.*

***BEATRICE** is holding a gun that she took out of her bag.*

**BEATRICE**     Stop it! Stop it!

Just stop it! I can't stand you anymore, neither of you, I'm so sick

of you both

I wish you would shut up

just shut up

just never say another word

never speak again, never breath again, just.

Shut up.

***ANNABEL** touches her flushed cheek.*

**ANNABEL** You shot at us!

**BEATRICE** The way you speak

The words that come out of your mouth

the sounds, your sounds, your voices,

I can't stand it anymore

I can't stand your smell, the way you breathe

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Beatrice

**BEATRICE** Open the door! Let me out

Let me breathe

**ANNABEL** Put the gun down.

**BEATRICE** I'm so sick of you.

**ANNABEL** Your gun is pointing at us.

Put it down.

Put it down.

*BEATRICE collapses on a seat. She lets the gun fall on the floor, next to her bag.*

**ANNABEL** (To **CHARLIE**) Now.

*CHARLIE doesn't move.*

**ANNABEL** Charlie?

**BEATRICE** I feel ill.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** (trembling) I'm going to come and take this gun, okay?

*ANNABEL approaches her slowly. BEATRICE suddenly grabs her bag and holds it tight to her chest. ANNABEL picks up the gun quickly and points it at BEATRICE.*

How dare you shoot at us?

Are you mad?

**CHARLIE** Leave her alone.

**ANNABEL** She shot at us!

*Beat.*

*She puts the gun in her pocket and approaches CHARLIE.*

**ANNABEL** Charlie?

**CHARLIE** Leave me alone.

**ANNABEL** Charlie, I -

**CHARLIE** Go away

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** You hit me.

*CHARLIE doesn't reply. He makes desperate efforts to avoid her.*

*She follows him around.*

**ANNABEL** You wanted to harm me, didn't you?

*Beat.*

You wanted to-

**CHARLIE** No, I didn't, I just wanted

**ANNABEL** What?

*Beat.*

I know you don't remember and it's hard to take

**CHARLIE** Don't-

**ANNABEL** We could talk about it now

*Beat.*

I know you didn't mean any harm

and, maybe

**CHARLIE** Leave it, okay?

**ANNABEL** I won't hold it against you. I am ready to forget everything said if you

**CHARLIE** No

**ANNABEL** just, just, just

**CHARLIE** Leave me alone

**ANNABEL** listened and put some thought and

**CHARLIE** No

**ANNABEL** and we were doing great together so far, and I don't know how this thing turned so ugly so fast and I know you meant no harm but if you just looked at me and... and hear me out and hold my hand, nothing would spoil that, nothing would go wrong and I know you're cold and hungry and -

And I know you are worried about your job

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Are you

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** What?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *(Turns to face her.)*

Am I going to lose my job?

**ANNABEL** You had a deadline, remember, and who knows now

**CHARLIE** Are you going to tell them

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** No, no if you want me not to say anything, I won't

We can make up a story about the whole thing

We can say -

**CHARLIE** Okay, we can make up a story

**ANNABEL** (*fiercely*) But what matters is that you came to my table

You said you liked the dress, the hair

You said -

**CHARLIE** I don't remember what I said!

**ANNABEL** You said

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Yes

**ANNABEL** You don't remember because you were drunk.

*Beat.*

But you meant every word.

*Beat.*

I won't hold it against you because you were drunk.

*Pause.*

**CHARLIE** I wasn't going to harm you. All I wanted was -

**ANNABEL** Besides, she's the one who fired a gun!

*(Points at **BEATRICE** who's now wrapped with a blanket, still holding her bag tight against her chest.)*

I can't believe what she did!

She fired a gun at us!

*Beat.*

**BEATRICE** *(Laughs.)*

We're running out of time.

Didn't you notice?

Look around you.

No food, no water, no air to breathe.

We'll starve to death, this is what will happen to us.

We'll dry out, our skin will wither, will turn to sand

our breath will become our poison

the loathing we feel for each other

for all the people with whom our paths crossed

years of accumulated loathing, of disgust

poison will blacken our hearts our eyes our nostrils our senses our

memories our tongues

no words

nobody will be there to hold our last words

**ANNABEL** Stop it, you don't make any sense

**BEATRICE** These lamps, how long do you think they'll last?

The dark will eat you up

There will be nothing left of you, nothing left

of me.

*Beat.*

What is there to be left anyway?

What can we claim, what?

What can we really claim of ourselves?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Who are you? What are you doing here?

**CHARLIE** *(muttering)* Her name is Beatrice.

She's a will writer.

**ANNABEL** So she said!

How do we know it's true?

Think about it

We know nothing about her!

**BEATRICE** *(Smiles.)*

I was never a mother

And my cat left me long ago

Does this feed your curiosity?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Are you mocking me?

Are you making fun of me?

You shot at us.

**CHARLIE** Leave her alone.

**ANNABEL** She had a gun, remember?

**CHARLIE** Yes. But it wasn't real, was it?

**ANNABEL** What?

**CHARLIE** The sound. That wasn't the sound of a real gun firing bullets.

It's fake, isn't it? A toy for kids to play with.

*BEATRICE keeps on smiling enigmatically.*

*ANNABEL takes it out of her pocket and examines it carefully.*

**ANNABEL** But it looks real.

**CHARLIE** Can I see it?

**ANNABEL** *(Puts it back in her pocket quickly.)*

No, no

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *(To **BEATRICE**)* Is it a toy?

***BEATRICE** looks away.*

***CHARLIE** smiles. He scrutinizes her for a few moments.*

**ANNABEL** What?

**CHARLIE** I bet -

I bet it's a stun gun

**ANNABEL** What?

**CHARLIE** It doesn't fire bullets, but it can certainly cause nasty things.

Loss of balance, of muscle control

Temporary paralysis

Confusion, disorientation

It brings a man to his knees – or worse.

*(To **BEATRICE**)* Am I right?

*Beat.*

I didn't know they could make them to sound like real ones.

Why do you carry something like this in your bag?

**BEATRICE** That's none of your business.

**ANNABEL** Oh? Is it not?

*Beat.*

What do you have inside your bag?

*Beat.*

***BEATRICE** keeps on holding the bag close to her body.*

**ANNABEL** (To **CHARLIE**) Tell her -

**BEATRICE** Nights are bad. And I have my gun.

*Beat.*

Some nights are worse than other nights.

You remind me of -

*Beat.*

The night my sister said that it was worse than other nights.

She was whimpering, sprawled on her bed,

for the long hours of the dark.

Eventually she gave up.

I couldn't sleep.

Through the shutters I could see the dawn

pushing its way into the room.

The dark had lost the battle, it was over, gone.

*Beat.*

One should always wait for the dawn.

*Beat.*

Then I heard the door squeaking, and my mother walked into the room. Are you awake, darlings? she whispered and I said nothing.

She sat on my bed, started stroking my forehead as if I were a kid.

I heard my sister's voice asking if everything was okay, she said: Don't worry, darling, everything is fine. Dad is staying.

*Beat.*

It was so funny. She had put on the blue robe.

It was the first time I saw her using that robe,

nobody had ever worn it as long as I could remember.

It had always hung on the inside of the bathroom door, shabby and blue, forgotten by a passing aunt or a stranger on a visit nobody could recall.

She was wearing the blue robe, stroking my hair, smiling to my sister.

And I could see her body from inside the robe,

her white, flabby, naked body, calm and triumphant.

*Beat.*

I wished she would take her hand away.

*Beat.*

When was it?

How long ago?

*(To ANNABEL)* You think you would recognise me then?

I was a kid.

It was a long time ago.

**ANNABEL** Why are you saying all these things?

**BEATRICE** Why do you think?

*Beat.*

Because you are just like her.

**ANNABEL** *(Shivers without knowing why.)*

The things you say

Do they make you feel better?

They don't make me feel better.

**BEATRICE** I would call somebody, I would

If I had a phone

*(Points at CHARLIE)* If he didn't have a useless phone

I would call, somebody

*Beat.*

*CHARLIE goes and takes a seat next to her. The flame in one of the oil lamps flickers, then expires. BEATRICE gasps.*

**ANNABEL** (To **CHARLIE**) What are you doing?

Why are you sitting next to her?

*Beat.*

Why don't you ask her what she has inside her bag?

*Beat.*

She's hiding something, can't you see?

**CHARLIE** (To **BEATRICE**) I could use some painkillers

**ANNABEL** Why is she here?

I don't like her being here, don't you see?

Someone will find us in the morning, someone will open this door

and then what?

What is supposed to be her role in this? How did she end up in this

train carriage in the middle of the fields?

She'll ruin it all, don't you see?

She'll ruin it.

**BEATRICE** You silly little thing  
  
(To **CHARLIE**) This girl is a rotten apple  
  
but you are too thick to realise  
  
she pulls your strings and you dance in her rhythm

**ANNABEL** Don't listen to her, she's a witch!

**BEATRICE** She served you her story and you bought it.

**ANNABEL** Shut up, witch!

**CHARLIE** What do you mean?

**BEATRICE** Use your head. If you're the one who kidnapped her,  
  
what are you doing in here, locked up with her?  
  
Think about that.

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Why can't I remember anything?

**BEATRICE** You can't remember anything because you are a nobody.  
  
There is nothing about you worth remembering, nothing at all  
  
and that's why you have forgotten it all  
  
you prefer to forget than to recall the simple truth  
  
that there's nothing, nothing, nothing one could remember about you  
  
and your meaningless little existence

not even you, my dear Charlie, or whatever your name is.

Who knows? Maybe you're not Charlie at all, maybe you're Mike

that daft boy who wished he could have an impact on the world

Maybe that's who you are, a kid making jokes,

pretending he's somebody else, somebody better, just

somebody.

**ANNABEL** You want to leave, eh?

*She runs to the other side of the carriage and grabs the extinguisher.*

*She starts hitting the door manically.*

**CHARLIE** What are you doing?

**ANNABEL** *(Ignores him.)*

I'll let you out, I'll let you out

I'll save you from our boring little company, I'll

Oh!

*The door suddenly opens wide. A breeze of icy wind makes everyone shiver.*

**ANNABEL** *turns to BEATRICE, who stares at the opened door with disbelief.*

**ANNABEL** There!

Door is open! The minute we have all been waiting for!

*Beat.*

Come on, what are you waiting for?

Go!

*BEATRICE walks slowly to the door. She stops in front of it and looks outside. The dark is impenetrable. She freezes on the spot.*

**ANNABEL** I don't see any more locked doors.

Why don't you bugger off?

What's stopping you?

**BEATRICE** There is nothing out there but -

Dark.

I can't.

No, I won't be able to see anything out there.

**ANNABEL** *(Takes one of the lamps down.)*

Here, take a lamp.

And now go!

**BEATRICE** *(terrified)* Where?

There is nothing but fields.

Where can I go?

No, no, I'll freeze to death out there

in the dark, alone

I'm scared of the dark

I can't, no

I won't go.

**ANNABEL** *(Pushes her.)*

You will, you will go!

**BEATRICE** *(Grabs the door.)*

No! Stop it, stop it

**ANNABEL** Get out, get out

Get lost

**BEATRICE** I'll wait for the dawn

You can't force me, you can't

Take your hands off me!

*The lamp falls from **ANNABEL**'s hands. There is fire shaping on the wooden floor.*

**CHARLIE** Bloody hell! Fire! Fire!

*(Walks there quickly and grabs the extinguisher. He puts the fire out.)*

Okay.

Can we all just calm down now?

***ANNABEL** gives **BEATRICE** a sudden push. **BEATRICE** screams and is immediately out of sight. **ANNABEL** quickly closes the door and locks it.*

**CHARLIE** What did you do that for?

There was no need for that

*BEATRICE screams from behind the door.*

**CHARLIE** Come on, let her in, she's scared.

**ANNABEL** She wanted out and now she doesn't like it.

It's not my fault.

**CHARLIE** She'll freeze to death out there!

**ANNABEL** That's not my fault

Why can't you see that?

What are you blaming me for?

She wanted to get out, she is out!

Let her stay there, I can't stand her anymore.

**CHARLIE** *(Tries to open the door, but ANNABEL gets in the way.)*

Step aside. We'll suffocate in here.

We need some fresh air, how can you bear the smell?

Besides, I need to go and pee

**ANNABEL** Stay away from the door

Stay away!

**CHARLIE** Stop it.

**ANNABEL** No, you stop, it, you stay away.

Listen to me, listen to me, don't play her game

*(Starts crying.)*

Why don't you believe me?

**CHARLIE** Let me open the door

**ANNABEL** Charlie, no!

***BEATRICE's** screams from behind the door become more and more faint.*

**ANNABEL** Charlie

**CHARLIE** I'm opening this door, whether you like it or not

***ANNABEL** takes the stun gun out of her pocket and uses it on him. **CHARLIE** collapses on the floor. **ANNABEL** stares at **CHARLIE** with a shocked expression on her face. She drops the gun. She opens her mouth to speak but no word comes out.*

*Black.*



## THREE

*The stage is now dimly lit. Everything seems the same as in Act Two.*

**CHARLIE** *is lying on the floor. He is covered with a blanket. His mouth is dry. He speaks with difficulty.*

**ANNABEL** *is standing in front of the dark window.*

**CHARLIE** Is anybody -

Is anybody here?

*Beat.*

Can you hear me?

*Beat.*

Please. Talk to me. If you can hear me, talk to me.

*Beat.*

Is anybody here?

**ANNABEL** Sh... I'm here.

*(Approaches him and sits on the floor.)*

**CHARLIE** Okay.

Good.

*(Doesn't relax.)*

Can you take my hand?

**ANNABEL** *(Takes his hand.)*

**CHARLIE** Good. Nice.

*Beat.*

I'm sorry, have we met before?

**ANNABEL** I'm Annabel.

**CHARLIE** Hello Annabel.

**ANNABEL** Charlie.

**CHARLIE** Oh.

You-

*(Tries to smile.)*

You have a lovely voice.

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Thank you.

**CHARLIE** Can you keep talking to me?

Please.

I - I don't feel very well.

**ANNABEL** Yes, I'll keep talking to you.

**CHARLIE** Okay.

*(Thinks.)*

I'm sure we've met before.

You have a lovely voice.

**ANNABEL** Thank you.

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** Where are we?

I can't see –

It's dark

**ANNABEL** It's dark

**CHARLIE** I can't open my eyes. I'm trying -

**ANNABEL** It's fine, Charlie. You'll be fine in a few minutes.

**CHARLIE** Okay. Good.

*Beat.*

Cause I'm feeling a bit –

*(Can't find the word. He gives up.)*

I don't know why.

I can't move my body.

I can't -

**ANNABEL** You'll be fine in a few minutes.

**CHARLIE** Good.

Cause I got a bit worried.

**ANNABEL** Just relax now. There is nothing to worry about.

**CHARLIE** Okay.

*Silence.*

Where are we, Annabel?

I can't see a thing.

**ANNABEL** We're in a train carriage.

**CHARLIE** Oh.

*CHARLIE shivers.*

*ANNABEL doesn't notice.*

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** Am I going home soon?

**ANNABEL** Yes

**CHARLIE** Don't let me fall asleep.

**ANNABEL** I won't.

**CHARLIE** I don't want to miss my stop.

**ANNABEL** Yes

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** I'm cold.

I don't think I've ever felt that cold before.

Are you cold?

**ANNABEL** Wait, I'll get you another blanket.

*(Goes away.)*

**CHARLIE** Annabel? Are you still here?

*Silence.*

***ANNABEL** is searching under the seats for more blankets.*

**CHARLIE** Are you there?

**ANNABEL** *(Covers him with another blanket.)*

**CHARLIE** That's good. That's all I needed.

***CHARLIE** is still shivering.*

*He tries to pull his head up to see around him.*

**CHARLIE** Am I lying on the floor?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** Yes

**CHARLIE** Am I lying on the floor, Annabel?

**ANNABEL** Yes.

**CHARLIE** Why am I'm lying on the floor, Annabel?

**ANNABEL** You have to speak slowly, Charlie.

I can't understand you very well.

**CHARLIE** Why am I lying on the floor, Annabel?

Did I slip?

Am I drunk?

**ANNABEL** You'll be fine in a few minutes, Charlie.

**CHARLIE** I think I'm wet.

I'm wet. I'm soaked.

I think I've wet my pants.

**ANNABEL** Try to rest, Charlie.

**CHARLIE** Why on earth did I do that?

**ANNABEL** Don't worry about it.

**CHARLIE** Why did I -

**ANNABEL** Don't worry

**CHARLIE** I'm so sorry, I don't know what's happened to me.

**ANNABEL** Just relax.

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** Thank you for being so kind with me, Annabel.

You're the kindest stranger I've ever known.

**ANNABEL** *(Looks away.)*

Are you still cold?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Did you say something?

**ANNABEL** No

*Silence.*

**CHARLIE** I don't want to miss my stop.

Will you wake me up, Annabel?

**ANNABEL** Yes, I'll wake you up

**CHARLIE** I want to go home.

I can't really open my eyes just now, Annabel.

I'll just rest for a minute

Don't go away

**ANNABEL** I won't.

*Long pause.*

**ANNABEL** War is another thing.

*Beat.*

At night he dreamt: he dreamt of me.

He didn't hear the yelling, the screaming, the crying,

the glass smashing, the gasping of somebody

who threw himself in the dirty waters of a river

no, he didn't hear any of that and no dirty waters flooded him

while he was asleep

Nothing disturbed his sleep.

*Beat.*

Because the war is elsewhere, away, in a far away land

where people despair because they bear witness to themselves.

*Beat.*

Great, he says.

Why did you let me drink?

He starts rubbing his forehead like a kid.

My head is.

Hell my head is.

In a moment I'll tell him not to worry

He will lie back, close his eyes, hold my hand

Give me your hand, he says.

I am cold.

*(Wraps her arms around her knees.)*

Later I say: You'll be alright in a few minutes.

He says nothing.

He's shivering in his sleep.

I wish I could sleep.

*Silence.*

No, I won't bear witness to myself.

This is what an enemy does.

All I did -

War.

No, no, I did all out of -

[love]

*(To CHARLIE)* Didn't it ever cross your mind that

if you look for me you'll find me?

I was always there, sitting straight, with a glass of wine on the table.

Red wine. On the table.

*Beat.*

He said:

I feel pain.

I can't walk.

I don't feel my legs at all.

My hands, my arms, my head.

Hell my head is.

But he's now asleep

and I know, I know, I know nothing will disturb his dream

There is nothing to worry about

In the morning everything will seem fine

In the morning -

*Beat.*

We won't find her frozen to death in front of the door.

No, no.

*Silence.*

(To **CHARLIE**) And again, you have nothing to say.

*Beat.*

Are you awake?

*Beat.*

Charlie?

Wake up

*Beat.*

For a moment I thought you were dead

**CHARLIE** *(Thinks.)*

Why?

**ANNABEL** Your body spread on the floor like -

**CHARLIE** I am cold.

**ANNABEL** *(Has nothing to answer to that.)*

Were you dreaming?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** I promised not to let you drift.

**CHARLIE** *(Doesn't listen to her.)*

**ANNABEL** And you know what?

We never searched this carriage

not really, not properly

not looking for something

and maybe

we'll look under the seats and find a box nicely wrapped  
like a present with a handmade card on the side and beautiful writing  
saying "everything is fine"  
because if I really need to hear something right now it is this.  
That everything is fine  
now that everything has gone wrong.

*Beat.*

And then the light, the first light of the day will be warm  
And bright  
And everything will fit into place.  
All the small pieces of who we are.  
*(stands up and goes to the window.)*

*Beat.*

Charlie?  
Are you awake?

**CHARLIE** No. I'm just wondering what it means.

**ANNABEL** *(Turns.)*

What?

**CHARLIE** The phrase. In the book.

**ANNABEL** I don't understand

*Silence.*

Charlie?

I can't understand you, I can't hear your words

I can't make sense of what you're saying.

**ANNABEL** *turns back to the window. But she only looks at her hands.*

*Silence.*

**ANNABEL** It's because of the noise.

It doesn't stop.

The banging on the door.

War. War.

Stop it.

You have nothing to do with me.

Go away. Go away, go -

What's going on, he asks.

I say: Nothing. Everything is fine.

Why do you look so sad? he asks

And suddenly I want to cry even if I didn't think I wanted to cry

a minute ago

He waits.

You'll be fine in a minute, he says.

I go to him, I lie next to him, I put my arm around him.

He now remembers my name

For the first time

Someone remembers my name, and it's you.

*Beat.*

Charlie?

Are you awake?

***ANNABEL** goes and lies next to him under the blankets.*

*She puts her arm around him.*

*Long pause.*

*There is more light now, coming through the window. **CHARLIE** gets up.*

*He passes his fingers through his hair. He smiles. He starts muttering a rhythm. He tries to find words to fit the rhythm (it sounds like hip hop). **VOICE** is Annabel's, but distorted as if badly recorded.*

**CHARLIE** After everything, I found myself drinking.

*(Stops to think.)*

Pop in, the bus driver rapped and I jumped

I grabbed the handle tight as he was racing down the narrow path

through balconies and flapping ruby sheets, laughing, the driver said: check

out the chick! And the granny in black gave us the finger

**VOICE** Watch out!

**CHARLIE** someone pulled the trigger and I heard a big bang

a kid was driving a truck, he waved and I waved back, at the dark

and a cat with wild amber eyes reminded me of you

*(Stops.)*

Is it -

Is it you out there?

Is it you?

*(Laughs.)*

It's late

**VOICE** You stammer

**CHARLIE** Must get off now

Honestly, mate. Must get off.

Off -

**VOICE** Awful

**CHARLIE** Off -

**VOICE** Stammering

**CHARLIE** Off you go.

*(Bursts out laughing.)*

**ANNABEL** Charlie?

What's going on?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** What?

*(Turns.)*

**ANNABEL** *(Sits up.)*

What were you doing over there?

**CHARLIE** *(Shrugs.)*

I don't know.

Just looking for some water.

A painkiller.

*(Doesn't meet her eyes.)*

You were talking in your sleep.

I didn't understand what you were saying.

**ANNABEL** I can't remember.

*Beat.*

I didn't realise I felt asleep.

**CHARLIE** My eyes hurt.

*Silence.*

**ANNABEL** Do you -

Do you remember now?

**CHARLIE** *(Throws himself on a seat.)*

I remember having the funniest dream.

I am in a library.

And I need to find a book.

Nobody's there, nobody can help me find it

I'm alone.

I start searching one by one, hundreds

and thousands of books lying around in dust

wonderfully alone

After days and nights I finally find the one I'm looking for

Cause suddenly it is right there, in front of my eyes, third self.

Title in gold letters: The Ugly duckling.

**ANNABEL** You mean -

**CHARLIE** *(Smiles.)*

It's The Ugly Duckling, I'm sure of that.

I open the book, on the first page I read:

"The solution to the riddle of life in space and time lies outside space and time".

**ANNABEL** *(Smiles back.)*

What does this mean?

**CHARLIE** I don't have a clue.

**ANNABEL** *(Pulls the blankets aside and stands up.)*

I knew you loved books.

I do.

**CHARLIE** Do you? Know?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** No.

No. I -

**CHARLIE** What?

*Silence.*

**ANNABEL** Do you remember now?

*CHARLIE walks to the window.*

**ANNABEL** And I need all the small things, everything I can find  
  
I'll gather them all together in piles  
  
and everything will make sense  
  
and I will stop wishing things were done differently  
  
because you can't go back in time  
  
because no, no  
  
you can't.

**CHARLIE** To go back, where?

*Beat.*

I'm thirsty I'm hungry I'm cold I'm tired

**ANNABEL** *(Takes a step forward.)*

But if I had something to drink or to eat

I would share it with you

And it will be okay that I did what I did

Because I had to, because I had no choice but

*Beat.*

And all the small things will prove exactly this.

*Beat.*

Charlie?

Do you remember what happened in here?

**CHARLIE** *(Doesn't turn.)*

I remember you hitting me with the stun gun, bitch.

**ANNABEL** *(Leaves a small scream.)*

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** No need to worry. I won't hold it against you.

I hit you and you hit me.

And we know now what I am and what you are.

**ANNABEL** No, no you can't say that.

It was

It felt like war.

*Beat.*

But it's over now, it doesn't matter anymore

It doesn't matter, the dark is gone

and I don't need to check my watch all the time now

The dark is gone

Please, don't -

*(Stops.)*

**CHARLIE** Yes, it is morning now.

We are free.

*CHARLIE is looking out of the window.*

*They both stay still for some time.*

**ANNABEL** Do you think we love anything unless it's beautiful?

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Am I really Charlie?

*ANNABEL says nothing.*

*CHARLIE turns to her with a bright smile. ANNABEL shivers.*

**CHARLIE** You know we haven't searched this place properly?

**ANNABEL** Yes

**CHARLIE** Maybe we should do that. Search.

Find out - whatever there is to be found.

There's enough light for doing this now.

**ANNABEL** We could search it, yes

**CHARLIE** Yes

**ANNABEL** Why not?

**CHARLIE** Exactly, why not?

**ANNABEL** Although it doesn't matter much now, does it?

**CHARLIE** Of course it matters! This place

*(Makes a big, vague gesture.)*

**ANNABEL** What?

**CHARLIE** This place is our shelter

This place is our womb

*Beat.*

World.

**ANNABEL** But -

It's almost day now, the light changes it all

We can go home.

**CHARLIE** No.

The door -

**ANNABEL** The door isn't locked anymore.

We can open it and go any time we want.

You know that.

There is nothing keeping us here.

**CHARLIE** We are in the middle of nowhere

Where can we go?

**ANNABEL** We'll walk.

We'll find a way home.

**CHARLIE** *(Laughs.)*

Home?

Where is it?

Where is this place?

**ANNABEL** Charlie -

**CHARLIE** You have a home.

Annabel.

You can walk out of this door and go home.

But where am I supposed to go?

Where do I live?

Will I be safe?

**ANNABEL** Everybody has a home.

I'll help you and I -

*Beat.*

You said -

**CHARLIE** What?

**ANNABEL** I don't know.

**CHARLIE**      *(Thinks.)*

Jimmy and Rosie.

**ANNABEL**      Who?

**CHARLIE**      Jimmy and Rosie.

I said.

Yes.

*(Concentrates.)*

Jimmy was laughing, reading his horoscope in last week's rag

and Rosie was smoking her silly thin cut fags, endlessly

one after the other, the smoke choking her, strangling her

while that awful dog of hers was vigorously chewing the leftovers

of our nice, tidy Sunday meal

That moment, that exact moment

no matter how much I loathed that dog,

that ugly imitation of an animal with sticky eyes

and stinking breath as coming from a grave,

and no, I couldn't stand her either

that bubbly cow with the sad, yellow fingers

always leaving her shoes everywhere and I mean everywhere

I found her bloody shoes inside the fridge one night, third self,

next to the butter

While all this time Jimmy thought he was better, from day one

patting backs and sparing smiles

always expecting you to lick his ear in return and tell him he's great

Yes, that moment I was ready to confess:

I was feeling rather lonely.

*(Looks at her.)*

I do feel lonely now, Annabel.

I confess.

**ANNABEL** But, these people -

**CHARLIE** Jimmy and Rosie

**ANNABEL** Jimmy and Rosie, yes

They are -

**CHARLIE** *(Shrugs.)*

A story. Somebody's story.

Maybe they are my story.

Maybe they do exist.

Maybe they are now waiting for me to return

Rosie half lying on the sofa, a halo of nicotine over her head  
and her little beast chewing the nail polish from her toes  
and Jimmy standing next to her in his tie and his all the money smile  
on his mobile pushing for a better deal on his mortgage  
Yes,  
maybe they're waiting for me as we speak.  
And maybe they are not.

*Beat.*

They make a good story, that's all I know.

*Silence.*

**ANNABEL** You probably feel a bit confused right now.

But you are somebody, you must be.

You exist.

You have a life and I will help you find it and I will be part of it and -

**CHARLIE** Why are you so anxious to open this door anyway?

Nobody is waiting for you.

Besides. All you wanted, from the very first moment, was me.

Am I not the reason you did all?

**ANNABEL** *(Shuts her eyes.)*

What I did was –

Because-

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** Yes.

I love you too.

**ANNABEL** *(Jumps.)*

*Silence.*

*(Looks at him.)*

You don't remember

**CHARLIE** What difference does it make if I remember?

I'm a bargain now.

Auction. Hammer. Sold to the lady.

Isn't it what you wanted?

*Beat.*

**ANNABEL** You're humiliating yourself, Charlie.

**CHARLIE** *(Mimics her.)* You're humiliating yourself, Charlie.

*(Burst out laughing.)*

I am, indeed. You're right.

I am humiliating myself, Charlie.

Poor Charlie.

If I am Charlie I'm humiliating me so much.

If I am Charlie.

Or am I Mike?

Maybe I'm Jimmy! Do you think I would look good in a tie?

*(Approaches her slowly.)*

So, I am humiliating myself.

Who the fuck am I, Annabel, and where should I go when

you open this door?

**ANNABEL** *(Takes a step back.)*

I can't -

**CHARLIE** *(Grabs her arm.)* No, no, you can't go

You're my last resort

I have no one, I'm in the middle of nowhere here

and I don't know where I was or what I did or how I felt

but I swear, I have never felt that lonely before.

I need you, I need you, I -

**ANNABEL** *(Slaps him on the face.)*

How things expire in a few hours time.

Not once but twice I would walk into destruction and  
tear the whole world apart if necessary or even not  
I would not leave never leave never end the war at any cost  
I would rip off my clothes and cut off my tongue if that would mean  
to win it all  
there is no place or time I wouldn't go, not a thing I wouldn't do  
for beauty.

*Beat.*

But there is no beauty in you.

*(Turns her back and prepares to leave.)*

**CHARLIE** *is still holding her arm. ANNABEL tries to free herself but he doesn't let go of her.*

*None of them speaks for some moments.*

**CHARLIE** There is beauty in compassion.

But you have to feel as desperate as I do to discover this word

and you probably won't, ever

**CHARLIE** *throws himself on a seat, and covers his face with his hands.. ANNABEL looks at him for a moment, then kneels next to him and puts her arm around his shoulder.*

*Long pause.*

**ANNABEL** Suddenly I feel like asking you: Why did you do that, Charlie?

*Beat.*

It's afternoon. A glorious summer.

We sit by the fountain, freshly made ice cream all over your face

your hands, you laugh

I cry, you cry

I laugh

and it feels like it's going to last forever

and it will, it will last forever if we say nothing

if we just let the words pass us by.

**CHARLIE** *tries to say something but ANNABEL puts her hand on his lips*

*to stop him.*

**ANNABEL** And we stay at the fountain, feeling the warmth of

the overwhelming, honeyed light.

*Long pause.*

*The door opens and **BEATRICE** walks in, dressed in a gypsy-style costume.*

***CHARLIE** and **ANNABEL** look at her in astonishment.*

***BEATRICE** smiles devilishly at **ANNABEL**.*

**BEATRICE** In two week's time you will die as you wait for the bus.

The driver will be drunk. He will throw the bus on you all.

Nobody will ever walk.

How sad.

*(Giggles.)*

Obviously, you do have time for a good final line.

***ANNABEL** stands up and slowly walks pass her out of the carriage.*

***BEATRICE** watches her and then shrugs. She turns to **CHARLIE**. She leans close to him and scrutinizes his face.*

**BEATRICE** Hm.

You have been crying, my poor Charlie.

Why?

No, don't tell me. I know, I know.

I know the reason and all I can say is yes

You're right.

You are a mess.

*(Giggles again, then looks around her.)*

Yak. The dust, the dirt, the broken seats, the smell.

How awful.

The floor needs a good sweeping, don't you think?

**CHARLIE** What on earth are you talking about?

**BEATRICE** *(Makes a big gesture with both hands.)*

This place is a mess!

**CHARLIE** So what? Are we going to spend the rest of our lives in here?

**BEATRICE** *(Smiles.)*

I am.

But I don't think there is enough room for two.

**CHARLIE** What are you saying?

Have you lost your mind?

**BEATRICE** No, I've just found my keys. Amongst other things.

***BEATRICE** opens her bag and takes out a photo. She shows it to **CHARLIE**.*

**BEATRICE** See? That used to be my cat.

Eventually he ran away with someone else.

**CHARLIE** looks at her carefully. **BEATRICE** keeps on smiling. She puts the photo  
back in her bag.

**CHARLIE** Beatrice -  
What happened to you?

**BEATRICE** *(Fixes her hair.)*

*Beat.*

What happened to me, what do you mean?

**CHARLIE** Why are you wearing these clothes?

**BEATRICE** Oh. It took you ages to notice!

Well, this is my costume.

**BEATRICE** makes a turning so **CHARLIE** can see it.

**BEATRICE** For work.

**CHARLIE** For work?

**BEATRICE** *(Shrugs.)*

I am a fortune teller.

Do you want me to read your palm?

**CHARLIE** *(Stares at her.)*

To read my -

**BEATRICE** Palms or cards, you choose

and I'll tell you who you are and what you're after

and how to make things work for you.

What does your heart desire? Do you know?

Money, love, a successful career?

Whatever it is, name it and you'll earn yourself a deal.

Share with me your secret dreams, your fears, your tears

spare some change here, in my tin

and I promise you:

I'll set you free for all and every one of your remaining years.

***BEATRICE** gives **CHARLIE** a generous smile.*

***CHARLIE** tries to choose carefully his words.*

**CHARLIE** I don't understand. At night -

You were scared to death out there in the fields

Alone

**BEATRICE** Alone?

*(Burst out laughing.)*

But I wasn't alone at all.

I spent the last hours of the night with my new best friends.

**CHARLIE** What do you mean? There is nobody out there.

Just fields, bare trees.

This train carriage is in the middle -

**BEATRICE** Of the most wonderful thing this world ever created!

*Beat.*

A circus!

Oh, that look on your face, that look!

How despairing! So much disbelief!

Come on, have a look yourself.

What do you see?

*CHARLIE goes to the window to look outside. He is confused.*

**CHARLIE** What do you mean?

**BEATRICE** Tell me, what do you see?

**CHARLIE** Fields.

**BEATRICE** What do you see?

**CHARLIE** Bare trees.

**BEATRICE** Look carefully, Charlie. What do you see?

**CHARLIE** Nothing.

**BEATRICE** You are not looking

**CHARLIE** I see fields. Bare trees. Nothing.

**BEATRICE** Look again, Charlie

**CHARLIE** Fields, bare trees, nothing

**BEATRICE** Again!

**CHARLIE** Fields

**BEATRICE** and

**CHARLIE** bare trees

**BEATRICE** and

*Beat.*

**CHARLIE** *(Turns to her.)*

A circus.

**BEATRICE** *(Laughs heartily.)*

It's magical, isn't it?

Old train carriages spread around the fields like...

like cute little boxes

like presents,

yes, a whole bunch of them, more than you ever had

under your Christmas tree.

You pull the ribbon, open the box, inside you find -

*(Shrugs.)*

Everything you ever wished for!

It's a wild dream, only it's real.

**CHARLIE** A wild dream

Who would believe?

**BEATRICE** *(Laughs again and hugs him.)*

Who cares?

Come on, dance with me.

Sing with me, open a bottle of –

whatever you want

The hell with salvation!

Signs and wonders

simply for the love of experience.

**CHARLIE** But you had said before -

**BEATRICE** *(Stops him with her hand on his mouth.)*

Don't give me past words and scared thoughts

Don't give me so-called facts and fixed behaviours

Experience, that's what we're made of

Fluid like water

boundless like fire

Open your heart, open your eyes and look!

**CHARLIE** I have never seen anything like it before.

**BEATRICE** I know! It's wonderful

It's grandiose

**CHARLIE** Yes

Yes, it is.

*(Smiles.)*

It's good.

**BEATRICE** Just good?

**CHARLIE** *(Thinks.)*

It's as good as a joke worth dying for.

**BEATRICE** *(Giggles.)*

It's more than that, Charlie love.

It's. Quite simply.

The end.

*Black.*

**THE END**