

ZUZANA ULIČIANSKA

EXERCISES

A gymnasium. A beam, gymnastics rings, wall bars, ropes, mats, horizontal bars, a ping-pong table, a few stools, balls, skittles, nets, in the background a changing room with benches and showers.

Scattered amongst all this, metal rubbish bins, a blackboard, buckets, remnants of discarded clothes, cans, newspapers, bottles, potatoes, chestnuts and so forth.

The whole scene is illuminated by an unpleasant bright light.

The acoustics of a large space is magnified by the canned hum of voices.

HER UNKNOWNNS gradually appear, one by one. They are slowly changing into tracksuits and sports kits, finding themselves a place to sit amongst the equipment. They take up their positions on imaginary marks. They all remain on stage throughout.

We see HER MOTHER usually sitting aside a bench. She is wearing an old tracksuit. During the play, she moves across the stage like a libero, occasionally interrupting the dialogue with her own comments or, reciting poems to herself, singing, or clearing the mess on the stage.

HER BOSS is warming up in a multi-coloured tracksuit.

HER HUSBAND lazes around on the mat.

SHE appears last, finds a space on the bench and starts getting changed. All of a sudden, she stops in a kind of freeze-frame in a funny, pointless movement whilst removing her tights, and stares blankly into space. At that moment, she is caught under the spotlight like some kind of semi-nude act. Everything else suddenly freezes, and plunges into darkness.

After a moment of total stillness, she gradually comes to, and starts to speak.

SHE

Why didn't anyone tell me sooner?

(HER UNKNOWNNS burst into prolonged, gleeful laughter.)

SHE Why didn't anyone tell me?
HER MOTHER Did you say something?
SHE Why didn't you tell me?
HER MOTHER If it's anything important, then you'll have to speak up. I can't hear properly without my glasses.
SHE Hmmmm.
HER MOTHER Why are you sitting like that?
SHE I'm getting changed.
HER MOTHER You're forever getting changed. Get dressed once and for all, or you'll catch a cold.
SHE I haven't got anything to wear.
HER MOTHER You can't just sit here like that.
SHE *(without moving)*: Yes. I have to keep moving or I'll freeze...
HER MOTHER I spent my whole life being cold.
SHE Mum, muuum...! Can you hear it?
HER MOTHER What?
SHE Hurrah, hurrah, hurrah!
HER MOTHER What is it?
SHE My voice sounds totally different, don't you think?
HER MOTHER *(laughing)* What's the use? We all want to be someone different. Oh how we want it. But what's the use?
SHE The acoustics in here are weird. Every word echoes. Everyone can hear everything.
HER MOTHER No one can hear anything. There wouldn't be any point. What is there left to say here anyway? Who would be interested?
HER BOSS Right then, let's get ready. We'll do a few rounds to warm up. Off we go...

(The full light returns. Everyone runs out on stage and starts exercising. They are jumping up and down, shouting... SHE finishes getting changed and tries to join in.)

HER MOTHER Wait.
SHE What is it?
HER MOTHER You haven't tucked in your T-shirt.
SHE I have to go now.
HER MOTHER Stand still!
SHE Mum, please!

HER MOTHER Don't forget that you've also got a behind. You look at yourself in the mirror from the front and think you're gorgeous.

SHE It doesn't matter

HER MOTHER Wait! Let me fix you...

SHE Leave me, mum. Please! Stop pulling me in front of everyone. I have to go now! I really have to go now! Let go of me! For heaven's sake, let go! Mum, let go! Let go!

(HER MOTHER maintains her grip on the T-shirt, which is being stretched to its limit. SHE tries to pull loose, but doesn't manage. Eventually, she resigns herself to it and sits down on the floor. She motions as if sub-consciously trying to fix her clothes.)

SHE But mum, this is my life. Do you understand?

HER MOTHER Live. I'll watch.

SHE I need to myself...

HER MOTHER Do what you want.

SHE I need my own...

HER MOTHER I'm not saying anything. I'm just looking.

SHE What are you looking at me like that for...? Do I look so bad? What did you expect? Were you expecting anything else? You might have known. All this in fact could have been expected. *(laughs)* I'm just so depressed... You have no idea what it means to me...that you are watching. You couldn't do any more if you tried.

HER MOTHER You can't stop me from looking, can you?

SHE No.

HER MOTHER Well then?

SHE Nothing.

HER MOTHER Go, for heaven's sake!

SHE Mum...

HER MOTHER Well go then!

SHE Have you got everything you need?

HER MOTHER Of course.

SHE Are you comfortable sitting there?

HER MOTHER Hmmm.

SHE Aren't you cold? Are you hungry?

HER MOTHER No. Don't worry yourself. Just look out.

SHE What am I supposed to look out for?

HER MOTHER You know.

SHE Do you want a guarantee, that nothing will ever happen to me?
You've got to admit that it's impossible.

HER MOTHER You're always doing dangerous things.

SHE You just think I am. You know I don't do anything. What have I
done so far? I haven't done anything. Absolutely nothing.

HER MOTHER That's true. You don't know anything. Not even how to walk or talk
properly. Your posture is awful. I didn't manage to teach you
anything.

SHE That's what happens to teachers.

HER MOTHER God, you're tiring.

SHE Sure I am... Be careful, mum. Are you sure you won't get ill?
Make sure that you don't die by any chance.

HER MOTHER That's one thing I can't promise.

SHE You see. What can you do? You can't promise anything. Neither
you, nor I... None of us can make any promises.

HER MOTHER You'd better go.

SHE And you'll be waiting here?

HER MOTHER You may as well accept that I'll always be here.

SHE Bye...

HER MOTHER *(pause)* I still don't understand what you're blaming me for. And
why you didn't tell me sooner.

*(SHE gets up to leave, pauses briefly and looks around. It has
gradually been getting darker during their conversation until there
is total darkness; her voice becomes child-like and full of fear.)*

SHE But you will stay here with me? Even when I close my eyes, even
when I can't see you anymore. Will you be with me even when I
fall asleep? Even when you're not here anymore?

(SHE goes to lie down beside HER HUSBAND on the mat.)

SHE Mum! Mum! Mum, don't switch the lights off... Please.

*(Suddenly the lights come on. HER MOTHER is still sitting on
the bench. Whilst talking to HER HUSBAND, SHE first lies down,*

then sits, before walking nervously in circles. HER UNKNOWNNS can be sensed in the background, and during the conversation make their way slowly forward, following the conversation intently.)

HER HUSBAND I don't get it. Why didn't you tell me?

SHE What was I supposed to tell you?

HER HUSBAND Everything you wanted me to know, that's what you should have told me.

SHE There is no point in telling anyone anything if they don't wise up to it themselves.

HER HUSBAND I am not wise. And I don't particularly want to be either.

SHE Too true. You don't want to be any different. You've never acted anything. Not even at the school academy.

HER HUSBAND I'm happy enough.

SHE We're all pushing ourselves, we are all going round the bend, but you alone are happy.

HER HUSBAND Why should I be doing anything? I don't have any problems with myself.

SHE If you'd at least once tried to act as if you're something better than you are...

HER HUSBAND I don't need to play at anything.

SHE Being yourself all the time needn't always be such a great achievement.

HER HUSBAND I just don't understand why I should pretend.

SHE What do you mean pretend? It's called flexibility, intelligence...

HER HUSBAND Pretence...

SHE The whole of civilization is built on pretence. (*Turning to him in mock menace*) Otherwise we'd all have killed each other by now!!! Why can't you understand that?

HER HUSBAND Calm down. It's fun to watch the way you style yourself. But I can do without it.

SHE That would be too much effort for you. It'd be beyond your capabilities. Demeaning. Unfair to your unstylised image. You couldn't even manage it... Because you've put on a lot of weight you know...your soul's just too heavy...

HER HUSBAND What?

SHE You've got no style. Nothing here has any style. Just look

around you. What have we got here? Rubbish, junk, old papers. What did we collect it all for? For what, tell me? Just because you're a fitness trainer, doesn't mean that the whole house has to look like a gymnasium. Just look at it. Can't you feel how uninviting it is? It really is like a gym. We've been here forever and we still can't find anywhere to sit, anything to lie down on. Who brought all this in here? Did we really think we'd exercise or work out? What's the point of those ropes, exercise benches, tell me? God, what a mess... What if someone comes?

HER HUSBAND Everyone is already here. You needn't get excited.

(Suddenly, the canned sound of many voices can be heard. The figures in the background start to move and to communicate with HER. They are being introduced to HER HUSBAND, who remains in his lying position.)

HER HUSBAND Welcome. This is our home.

SHE This is me, you don't know me. This is my husband, you don't know him either. Introduce yourselves. My mother, my boss... These are our Unknowns. Once again, welcome. We don't feel at home here. And you don't need to either...

UNKNOWN #1 It's so temperate here, so sporty. It's obvious that you work out a lot here, that's good and healthy.

HER HUSBAND I'm a sports instructor.

SHE Yes, I remember we actually did some sport at some stage. But there are times we didn't really. Especially when we're particularly tired, then we don't.

UNKNOWN #2 One should never be tired. It's unhealthy.

UNKNOWN #3 One should know when it's time for business and when it's not.

UNKNOWN #4 Do you work? How many people live in this house? Get undressed and read your gas-meter.

UNKNOWN #5 When did you first start your periods?

UNKNOWN #6 Are you having an affair?

UNKNOWN #7 Are you pregnant?

UNKNOWN #8 How many abortions have you had? How many children do you have?

UNKNOWN #9 Is it tax-deductable?

UNKNOWN #10 What did you cook today?

UNKNOWN #11 Are you sure you don't want insurance against the damages you incur?

(HER BOSS blows a whistle and HER UNKNOWNNS in their sports kits again start to jog around them. The light comes on fully, HER BOSS moves into the foreground and orderly exercises commence. He demonstrates a few simple exercises which HER UNKNOWNNS copy.)

HER BOSS Right then, end of warm-up. Catch your breaths. Back on your marks. Get in line...tallest at the back... And we can begin... Let's stretch, ni-cely stretch our backs... One, two. Look lively... Straighten your backs, that's it... All together now... and...and... ONE - TWO. One and two and one and two and one and two. Once again. And again. One - two. One - two. Exercise is effective only if it is repeated often. Everything should be repeated. Over and over. Many times. All at the same time now. One and. Once more. That's the only way it works. ONE and TWO. ONE and TWO and. Am I right or am I right? ONE and TWO and. Keep in step. Nice, very nice...

(HER MOTHER has moved forward from the back and starts to tidy up the discarded dresses, bottles... She looks at everything in detail. Occasionally, she joins in the conversation. HER UNKNOWNNS are catching their breaths and start to perform some simple exercises, almost as if working in the fields, or training for the Spartakiade. HER MOTHER looses herself amongst them and is later joined by HER. Together they begin to collect the scattered potatoes and chestnuts from the floor and gather them into metal bins.)

SHE What are chestnuts for?

HER MOTHER There's a poem about it: Human desire is like a chestnut blossom...

SHE Simple chestnuts. We spent most of our childhood collecting them. What is made from chestnuts? What are they actually good for?

HER MOTHER I have yet to eat a good mash. It always seemed a bit dry.

SHE We used to have competitions in recycling. Our class always won. We were good children. Good kids... Chestnuts, potatoes, napkins, oil bottles, scrap paper, scrap metal, stamps, points... In honour of the twentieth, the twenty-fifth, the thirtieth... anniversary...

HER MOTHER If you put two same things together, you'll find it easier to work with.

SHE Yes. Easier to mould them. That is probably the whole point of collecting. Good God, the things we've dragged in here... Nothing but rubbish. You can't even move here anymore... One day they'll say of us that we made a living by collecting. A generation of collectors... What's this? Awful... You know, when you're outside, you can still somehow pretend... But at home...at home you can't hide anything...

(Subconsciously, SHE tips all the contents of the metal bin back onto the floor, turns it over and sits down on it. HER UNKNOWNNS move into the background whilst continuing in their work.)

SHE I'm just so tired. I've got so much work to do. I'm probably too hard working. I even pay my cheques in on time.

HER MOTHER Laziness is a sin.

SHE Whenever someone tells me to work, then I work. And then I don't manage anything. Laziness as far as silly things are concerned must surely be considered a virtue. *(to HER HUSBAND)*: You know, you're right. But one thing I don't get. How do you manage to give the outward impression of moving, when in reality all you do is just swap positions without moving.

HER HUSBAND I move only when there is any point to it. Can I help it that the world is the way it is?

SHE And doesn't it bother you that I am so capable?

HER HUSBAND On the contrary. I'm proud of the fact that you are one of those young, promising women...

SHE ...young and promising...

HER HUSBAND One more or less of them won't make much difference. Look. In every couple there has to be someone who'll play the idiot. I am willing to put myself up for the job. You just go on and do your best and work. You'll be famous and I'll be your husband. I don't

mind.

SHE I do.

HER HUSBAND I don't see why.

SHE What if I've got other chances?

HER HUSBAND What chances could you possibly have now?

SHE There are always new opportunities to be had.

HER HUSBAND Potential possibilities, all right, but real chances, certainly not.

SHE Why not?

HER HUSBAND The point is, are they any better than the present situation. And since I know that you've got a brain, I am confident that you will do the right thing.

SHE Why should everything always just be behind us?

HER HUSBAND Carry on worrying about your opportunities if that's what you want, dabble in your doubts. I won't stop you. But I warn you, you'll need to exert a lot more energy to realise them than you think.

SHE So...

HER HUSBAND So nothing. Of course it's nothing. What else would it be?

(HER BOSS returns to the foreground.)

HER BOSS One and two and, one and two. Look smart... Straighten up, that's right... All the same now... and again...once more...

(HER BOSS approaches HER and begins to correct her movements, grabbing her stomach and bottom, in an attempt to teach her the proper posture.)

HER BOSS Right then, straighten up, pull your bum in, come on... That's it... If any of you have got your periods, then I respect that.. I understand women, young girls like yourselves in particular... Don't worry. Tell me if you're having any problems... Obviously not four times a month of course... And no flushing your sanitary towels in the loo. Who do you think's going to clean it up after you...

SHE No, please... Not again! Not that!

(SHE manages to break free. The rest of the exercisers suddenly take a break. An unpleasant hub can be heard. Everything falls into rhythm again, as if the exercises are continuing in another

form. HER UNKNOWNNS constitute a mass of indifferent people entering and leaving, loitering through streets. SHE joins in, confronting them, and with each contact, turns around to look back at them and count them off.)

SHE One. One. Just once. Hi.

UNKNOWN #1 How are you?

UNKNOWN #2 How are you?

UNKNOWN #3 How's it going?

SHE All right.

UNKNOWN #4 Hi!

UNKNOWN #5 Bye!

SHE Hi! Did you know that we are actually seeing each other for the last time? It's funny, but I'm never going to see you again. Hi! Bye! Hi! I always say everything back to front. Bye! at meetings and Hi! at partings. I'm so nervous when I have to meet anyone, that I always mix it up. As if on purpose...Bye! Hi. We'll never meet again. Yes, or should I say no. Never. And even if we did, then we wouldn't even notice. I'm so glad never to meet you again. Isn't it great? Hi! Are you pleased?

(SHE starts dancing wildly with the others , row by row; suddenly she notices HER FRIEND amongst them and stops in front of him.)

HER FRIEND Hi!

SHE Hi!

HER FRIEND Is it you?

SHE Me? No... Well, actually... I don't know...

HER FRIEND Is it, or isn't it?

SHE Who? Me? Maybe... I don't know...

HER FRIEND Do you remember?

SHE Well...Remember what?

HER FRIEND Don' t you remember?

SHE No, I don't know. I probably don't remember.

HER FRIEND Of course you remember!

SHE Remember what?

HER FRIEND Back then... When the whole class came in dressed in jeans...

SHE Really? Why?

HER FRIEND Because it wasn't allowed.

SHE Really?

HER FRIEND Didn't you know?

SHE When was that?

HER FRIEND That time we skipped class.

SHE Fancy that...

HER FRIEND God, it was so funny...

SHE I'm sure...

HER FRIEND And what about this? Do you remember that time we nearly wet ourselves laughing...

SHE Really?... Honestly? I don't know. I really don't remember anything. You say that we laughed once? When was that? Once? *(She suddenly distances herself from him and continues to speak only to herself.)* Once. Only once. How many times is once? Once, that's nothing. That's zero.

*(HER MOTHER jumps up and goes over to the scoreboard.
HER UNKNOWNNS all suddenly sit down on the floor like children.)*

HER MOTHER Awful, just awful. True, one isn't much, but it's still far greater than nothing. I'm going to draw you a number one, this big, so that you will remember that one is far greater than zero. If you have one dress, you're much better off than if you had none. Do you understand that? One is still just one after all. Zero is nothing. Nothing times nothing is nothing. Zero plus zero is zero, zero minus zero is zero again. Zero : zero, that's a negative result. Absolutely nothing. There is no point arguing whether once or twice, that is immaterial. The main difference is only between zero and one. Nothing else matters. Whoever's being silly can leave. All of you leave now, you're all absent.

SHE Mum?

HER MOTHER Yes?

SHE People talk about their experiences as if they don't even remember them. Do you think that they are all making it up?

HER MOTHER I don't know anything about the past. There was something, I'm sure... I remember we used to sing at home once... But I'm not

disappointed. I'm professional in that respect. I don't feel slighted. No. Why should I? It's just that I'm not interested in it anymore. In any of it. None of those memory shares. I'm not interested. I managed to get through my own life, that's all they can expect of me. I'm only afraid now of what will be.

SHE The future? Why so soon? It's not time for the future yet. I haven't got that far yet. I haven't even got enough energy for the present. I'm behind with everything. *(She turns abruptly to face HER HUSBAND, who is still lying on the mat):* Hey...Did you call?

HER HUSBAND What?

SHE Did you call?

HER HUSBAND Mhm...Yes.

SHE And?

HER HUSBAND I didn't get through.

SHE So how did you call if you didn't get through?

HER HUSBAND I called, but I didn't get through.

SHE And how many times did you call before you didn't get through?

HER HUSBAND I told you, I didn't manage to get through.

SHE Everything you ever do is just for the sake of having an alibi. Do you know the difference : calling and getting through?

HER HUSBAND I don't know why you're making such a tragedy out of it. I'll phone again and what's the big deal?

SHE But no... This really is a tragedy. There is a huge difference between those two words, you know, perfect and imperfect. The energy needed for getting through is about four million times greater than just trying to see if you can get through or not. Did you know that? Do you know why I hate your laziness so much? Because at the end of the day... But still... There's no point... I can't handle it anymore...

(SHE moves away from the mat, crosses over to HER UNKNOWNNS, who are climbing the ropes and poles. She attempts to climb a dangling rope without much success.)
God, everyone's getting on my nerves today.

HER BOSS What's wrong?

SHE I'm trying to acclimatize myself.

HER BOSS To what?

SHE To my new situation.

HER BOSS Oh yes?

SHE I feel sick, but that doesn't mean anything. There's usually no reason for anxiety. It's just a sign that that the body is adjusting to a change of circumstance.

HER BOSS Fancy that. Hang on, let me... I can feel that there's tension in your head... A stiff neck no doubt, I'll massage it for you...

SHE Let go... Leave me...

HER BOSS You need to exercise in order to be submissive, flexible...

SHE I don't want to... Let go of me...

HER BOSS You're stiff. You should loosen up. Relax. Don't chase perfection. It's enough that you are a woman.

SHE See how ill it's making me.

HER BOSS It makes you more human. And do you want a kid anyway?

SHE Whatever you don't make yourself, you don't have...

HER BOSS Has anyone done something to upset you?

SHE Everyone has. I just miss those simple repeated interactions. Something self-evident and normal. Positive emotions. I've just got all these nonemotions.

HER BOSS Forget about it all. Too much information ruins your illusions and leads to the loss of ambition.

SHE You've still got yours. Does that mean that you don't know everything either?

HER BOSS One never stops learning.

SHE Do you mean to tell me that you never feel the desire to stop?

HER BOSS Luckily, there's always someone new who comes along who regards the wealth and success which adorns us with admiration, in the same way that a child stares at a Christmas tree. And then you feel the responsibility for maintaining illusions... candles, tinsel, children's wide-open eyes...

SHE What, I'm that kid? I just love the hypocrisy. Are you looking for an accomplice or something?

HER BOSS Don't think that I've got it all easy.

SHE You people can be so repulsive. Have what you want, by all means, just don't complain if at all possible.

HER BOSS This is what I get for teaching you to stand on your own two feet.

SHE Everyone has just enough energy in their legs to support themselves. That's what you said, wasn't it?

HER BOSS Suddenly don't like the company philosophy?

SHE I thank you for your cooperation, and remain yours truly..

HER BOSS What's going on?

SHE I'm leaving. I don't want to be first or second, or anything anymore. You know that orgasm that comes over you when you think you're winning... So feeble...so demeaning...

HER BOSS But you enjoy competing, don't you? If you're not first, it's only too easy to come last.

SHE Why does everything have to be so...final...so *animal*...?

HER BOSS Because that's what it's all about.

HER MOTHER What did he say? I can't understand him.

HER BOSS Let's be honest about what this is all about.

SHE Let's be honest...

HER BOSS What's it about...?

SHE What it's about.

HER BOSS Well?

SHE About what?

UNKNOWNNS About that, of course. Even charity is all about money, your life even, everything... Anyone who thinks otherwise is missing the whole point about this world.

HER MOTHER What are you talking about? What did you say? Speak up. Children, you should always stand up nicely, and say what you want to say loudly and clearly. That's how it should be.

SHE (*shouting*): That it's all about money. That everything is to do with money.

HER BOSS Do you understand what I mean? It's all about trying to survive.

SHE Wouldn't it just be better to pop it then?

HER BOSS You're tense.

SHE Yes. So what? Anyone decent would need to be tense these days.

HER BOSS Why? You've got a right to be happy, haven't you?

SHE A right?

HER BOSS A duty.

SHE It's not imbedded in the constitution... Even then, would we really be happy, if we were happy?

HER BOSS Stop feeling so guilty.

SHE You know, sometimes I look at you and I wonder what I'm actually doing here... What is there between us?

HER BOSS Of course. I understand. But you've also got to understand me, that I need to know whether I can start planning my future with

you or not.

- SHE** I need time to get used to you. The future comes later.
- HER BOSS** The future won't happen by itself, it needs to be planned.
- SHE** In my experience, something always comes up. Even when I don't want it to.
- HER BOSS** How can you expect anything of the future if you don't prepare it yourself?
- SHE** Who knows what's going to happen?
- HER BOSS** You should think of everything.
- SHE** How can I think of something that I don't even know will be?
- HER BOSS** That's exactly what you should be thinking about.
- SHE** But then, it's too late to think about the future anyway. Why do you want to count on my future anyway?
- HER BOSS** Because I know that you have one... I don't want to force you into anything... But it's still possible that someone will decide on it for you.
- SHE** If only. Why do you think it's always best to decide for yourself?
- HER BOSS** It's a gesture at least.
- SHE** You're such an idiot. You're actually really limited. I mean, people can make such stupid decisions, such really stupid ones... Making a decision in itself doesn't really mean anything... Making a good decision... That's something. What if the only way we can save ourselves is if we stay rooted to the spot?
- HER BOSS** It's your right to decide that way.
- SHE** And if it's nothing other than feebleness, total paralysis of the brain, will, muscles, judgement, everything?
- HER BOSS** Then do something about it.
- SHE** It's all just cramp, nothing but cramp.

(SHE moves away and lies down on the mat, exhausted.)

- HER MOTHER** At the parents teacher meeting, they told us that some of the class were kissing behind the curtains. Were you one of them?
- SHE** Yes, I was too. *(pause)*
- HER MOTHER** With him?
- SHE** Yes. *(pause)*
- HER MOTHER** Have you been fooling around like that for long?
- SHE** Not really, I don't know. I need them. Both of them. That's how it

is... Or maybe even not. Actually, I don't need them. They're impossible to live with, both of them. It's not just dying. You know, you spend your whole life looking for someone to die with.

HER MOTHER I probably shouldn't agree with that.

SHE I don't know.

HER MOTHER Plain egoism. The worst kind of selfishness.

SHE I don't know anything anymore.

HER MOTHER Adultery. That's what it's always been called.

SHE Strange... It's such an exceptional word. It sounds so serious. I used to think that it had to be something significant, something important. No, that's certainly not it. I would have to have felt something. Something completely different.

HER MOTHER I shouldn't be agreeing.

SHE Doesn't matter. Look at them. They're talking together...
Everything's all right.

HER MOTHER We must have made a mistake... But I know... I know why... I had hoped that you'd be better off. Not that I know why I should have thought that... That was the problem... I probably thought that I could make you happy just by loving you. But that's never enough. It's not enough. No one can do it. No one... Only by chance... Only if some miracle allows it.

(SHE begins to distance herself from the conversation and joins the others. HER HUSBAND, BOSS and UNKNOWNNS freeze in the unnatural positions of their last movements, looking like mannequins in a window display. Only later does HER MOTHER notice that no one is listening to her.)

HER MOTHER What sort of a position do you call that? For heaven's sake, who are all those weird people around you? What sort of company do you keep? How long do you think you can keep this up? You can't, I know you only too well. For heaven's sake... You'll pretend at first that everything's all right, and then you'll just fall apart. It's an unnatural position, believe me, no one can manage to stand like that for long. It's pointless. You're not a model after all. You're not the type...

(HER FRIEND gingerly approaches on the beam.)

HER FRIEND Everything seems to be bent... Who can manage to be objective... and independent here... It doesn't bother me that I'll fall, but that I don't know which side I'm going to fall on. Crossing a bridge is more difficult than I had thought. It takes up a lot of energy. Loads of energy. Even an electron needs strength if it wants to cross from one wire to another. Except that I don't have anyone here anymore... They're all long gone. They're all narrow-minded. My wife, my daughter... All of them...

(He somehow manages to climb down, and clamber over to HER, enthusiastically greeting everyone else who, following his example, looses their stiffness and relaxes.)

It's me. Imagine that. I've come. You've got guests? Well? Is your husband here as well? You haven't divorced yet? Don't worry, it won't be long now... Mother dear... Well, mummykins...am I glad to see you again . I congratulate you on your successful daughter She's just as she used to be... Are you still the same as you used to be? Of course you're not. You're a big assistant now. Sexy, but an assistant. What can you do? Although...you don't really have long enough legs for the job. Or have you? Show me. Can I call you assistant? Star pupil. An assistant. Haven't you got any money or something? Golden alumni. 4C. You're stupid. Were you also as sexy as that in your youth, mum? Why didn't you marry again anyway? I mean, you're still all right...

(He grabs HER by the hand and tries to steer her towards an improvised staircase made up of wooden crates; they end up falling under them, where they remain like playing children. Their speech is now hushed. The light dims, and falls only upon the pair. Everyone else remains standing in darkness, in the background, as if at a reception.)

Have you gone mad, or what? You know, you're totally stupid. For God's sake... You have to realise that all those people around you are idiots. You have to insist on that, get away from them. Repeat to yourself every morning : People are idiots.

SHE Exactly. I've got what it takes to have what every other idiot's got.

HER FRIEND It's all a load of crap. It's crap, ignore it.

SHE Except that I don't want to be poor anymore. You know? It was their turn, and now it's their turn again?

HER FRIEND That's not the point, you understand... Look at me. I haven't got anything, I'll curse something, get another divorce, and everything will be up the spout again. That's not what's important...

SHE I can't handle being poor! Not any more! I've had enough of it!

HER FRIEND So don't count on it. Calculate the cost of lost opportunities. What you loose when you don't do what you should be doing.

SHE What am I supposed to be doing? Do you know what I should do?

HER FRIEND Do you want a lot? Giving good advice to a sceptic is up there amongst good deeds, I can tell you.

SHE No, it really is impossible... You can't even help yourself...

HER FRIEND *(pause)* Don't worry about it. It will be all right.

SHE All right... Well... You know... Everything would be all right...if... in fact, nothing is all right... One thing is certain... The less emotional emphasis I put on things, the better I can handle them. My biggest mistake is the meaning I attach to my life... Look at them. They're all so neat, so perfumed, happy...

HER FRIEND That appeals to you? You'd like to look like that?

SHE There's no danger of that at the moment.

HER FRIEND That's not the point at all. You shouldn't even want it.

SHE The problem isn't really what to choose, but what not to choose. When... decision making has always seemed to me like chopping off your own fingers.

HER FRIEND You'll chop off one... Then another one... You'll see, in the end, you'll start to enjoy it... You'll be chopping left, right and center, to order, as it comes... One here... Another there...

SHE But how...What?... When I don't know anything...or have anything... I could manage a decision, but how do I know how it will turn out. If I had an inkling at least...

HER FRIEND ...that way you'd only be confirming it...

SHE But it still seems so unnatural to me... Like breaking in to your own fate... As if I were stealing something that doesn't belong to me. I wish that everything...everything just solved itself of its own accord...you know, simply... So that we wouldn't need to interfere in our lives too much... Wouldn't it be nice, if these doors would open up in front of us, one after another... we could then just go on...and on...always forwards... We'd practically be flying...If you feel sick, or you have seizures or an abnormal heart beat, there's usually no cause for alarm. That's just your body

adapting to new circumstances... Bzzz...

(SHE flaps her arms like wings, but eventually loses her footing and falls. HER BOSS tries to pick her up, grabbing her hand, but SHE does not get up.)

SHE What?

HER BOSS Come on.

SHE What are you pulling my hand for?

HER BOSS What's wrong with you?

SHE Hmm...

HER BOSS What?

SHE Nothing. I admire your confidence.

HER BOSS What do you mean?

SHE You know, I'm wondering that it must take a lot of guts.

HER BOSS What does?

SHE Coming up to someone you don't even know, just like that, grabbing them by the hand and telling them to come on.

HER BOSS Have you got something against me?

SHE No, it's just that I admire you. Anyone else might waver.

HER BOSS What, I've offended you by taking you by the hand? You consider that sexual harassment, or what?

SHE I was just thinking.

(SHE eventually gets up and goes off with him. As she passes by the horizontal bars, she stops and stands, as if recollecting something. She walks up to the bars and motions, as if wanting to climb up, and then decides against it. HER BOSS takes note.)

HER BOSS What's wrong? What did you want to do?

SHE Nothing.

HER BOSS But you wanted something.

SHE No, nothing. I didn't want anything.

HER BOSS You were trying something out. What was it?

SHE Yes.

HER BOSS Well there you go. You should say so. Don't be embarrassed to want something.

SHE I don't know how to...

HER BOSS That's a presumption. You can do anything you want... You just have to try...

SHE Oh for God's sake! Stop it! Do you mean to say that everything I do is proper and lovely? I've never been able to get the right thrust. Never. I was always told that my bum was too big. And what am I supposed to do now? What am I supposed to do about it now?

(HER UNKNOWNNS suddenly surround them and start exercising. In a burst of general enthusiasm, they encourage each other with shrieks of "You can do it, that's it, come on...and again, a bit more..." Only with effort does SHE manage to escape their clutches.)

SHE Can't I just stay as I am, once and for all? Do we always have to keep reassuring each other? Keep on having those legends? Is every child born a genius, or something?

HER BOSS No, but to a certain extent, we can convince him of it.

SHE What's the point of that?

HER BOSS It's not enough just to establish whether something is good or bad, but how terrible it is, and more important, in comparison to what.

SHE I give up.

HER BOSS You can't finish like that... If you fail once, try again. Everything should be repeated often. That's the only way you can perfect anything.

SHE Good grief, leave me... in my imperfection. Leave me alone. Let's go home.

HER HUSBAND We are home.

SHE Well there's not even hope left for us anymore. That's awful.

(HER FRIEND interrupts.)

HER FRIEND Why not? Maybe you'll get wise in your old age yet. I still believe that you'll turn into a sensible woman one day.

SHE I haven't got as much time left as you seem to think I have. Everything is taking me so much longer than I thought it would. *(pause)* Lately I've been playing my old records... It's only now that I can

hear how ruined they are. Crackles everywhere... Actually, I don't listen to them. I just want to remind myself of how we once were.. What sort of taste did we have back then...? What was it like? And how was it? What did we actually talk about then? I don't remember anymore. Do you think we might have promised ourselves something important back then? Do you get the feeling we did?

HER FRIEND Make your mind up for once.

SHE Don't worry... I'll have to sooner or later, one way or another.

HER FRIEND I'm not worried. We're all standing in the same queue for the unavoidable.

SHE I still think that...everyone's waiting for chance... For what someone else will give us...What someone will give us...

(After a while, SHE goes in amongst HER UNKNOWNNS, who take turns in jumping over the horse beam. SHE too, attempts to jump, albeit with an insufficient burst of speed in the run-up and is thus left sitting atop it. This provokes hysterical laughter in her. She jumps off the beam and goes over to HER HUSBAND. During the following conversation, SHE and HER HUSBAND sit by a ping-pong table and sporadically bounce balls off each other.)

SHE We need to talk.

HER HUSBAND What about?

SHE Everything.

HER HUSBAND Am I likely to discover anything new?

SHE We've never sat down together in the mornings to talk about what we are going to do...what's bothering us...what's important... What's most important, because nothing is ever going to happen if we don't for at least that one second, consider it the most important thing in the world. Whenever I wanted to talk about life...

HER HUSBAND What on earth have we got to talk about life? Sorry, but you talk such nonsense.

SHE About our future. About us. About our children.

HER HUSBAND Get a grip. There wasn't ever anything.

SHE Precisely. We should have thought about it more. You always

told me, don't think about it. Don't think about it. So I didn't...

HER HUSBAND This is what I get for being considerate enough not to bother you about it. I could hardly stop you from thinking about it. What are you trying to stir... You could have done as much thinking as you wanted. About your little baby... If you had really wanted it. What are you suddenly acting like the good mother for? You've never talked about it before.

SHE That's what I mean. We spent so little time talking.

HER HUSBAND What's the point of tormenting yourself over something you don't have. It doesn't make any sense.

SHE Everyone else told me: You really have to want it. You know, sometimes I think that if I had had a sick child, I would have told myself that it now came first, that I'd have to devote all my strength to caring for it. And it would all suddenly have been so much simpler. You know, somehow, any old how, a way of lowering that level of uncertainty.

HER HUSBAND You do not have a sick child. What are you on about? You don't have any children. And it's questionable whether you ever will.

SHE I know, I know... I'm just thinking.

HER HUSBAND Lower your level of uncertainty, by all means, but not at my expense.

SHE Or if something important were to happen. If something came up, something decisive, that would influence and determine everything else. If suddenly everything became clear, if it was the only way. Everyone would say that's how it is now. And that's how it really would be... There wouldn't be anything anyone could do about it...

HER HUSBAND What sort of thing could happen?

SHE I don't know, something, an accident, or some kind of shock... anything...

HER HUSBAND Stop tempting fate. You really have gone mad!

SHE Like the time when dad skidded... It was obvious to us that we were going to hit that tree, that there was simply nothing we could do. There was ice everywhere... I had this odd feeling that it was all happening so slowly... And yet in reality it was no more than a few mini-seconds... That's the only thing I remember from my entire childhood... I don't remember anything else...

HER HUSBAND No. Forgive me. I don't yearn for any shocks. I'll be happy just to

live as peacefully as I have up to now.

SHE Life with you really is settled. As much as one could possibly .
want it to be. You constantly live your life on the same level.
Neither up nor down, nothing. Are you sure you don't want to?

HER HUSBAND What?

SHE I don't know...

HER HUSBAND To be happy? Give me a break, with your happiness. I don't need
to be happy.

SHE If I was sure that you were stupid, then I'd say: he's stupid,
there's nothing for it. But you're not. Those last tests showed
that.

HER HUSBAND Would you mind just leaving me out of this never ending
conversation?

SHE Why should it be never ending? I have to talk to you, because
otherwise, you wouldn't notice anything. You don't have any
peripheral vision. Do you notice me at all? Come closer, a bit
more...can you see me? What about now? Can you see me now?
No, you can't. That's how it is. You can't see, you can't hear.

HER HUSBAND Where is it written that two people have to talk all the time?

SHE All the time? All the time? Do you have any idea how many times
I gritted my teeth and said to myself that I wasn't going to start up
any conversation. It's always me who has to make sure that it's
not totally quiet at home. I have friends, I telephone everyone, I
write letters, I...I do everything.

HER HUSBAND I've got mine, you've got yours. And?

SHE So what do we have together?

HER HUSBAND How am I supposed to guess what it is you want?

SHE People who can't tell instinctively are boring, to say the least.

HER HUSBAND So sorry, I'm such a thicko, but I still can't quite work out your
reasons. Would you mind listing them for me when you begin?
Do I beat you? Do I lie? Do I cheat? Do I go out and get drunk?

SHE No.

HER HUSBAND Well then, we've finished. Anything else you'd like to bring up?

SHE Yes. I'm having an affair. With my boss.

(SHE slowly walks over to the WC and sits on the toilet bowl.

*HER MOTHER communicates with her across the length of
the stage.)*

SHE Mum? Hi!

HER MOTHER Hi!

SHE What's new?

HER MOTHER Why do you always ask me what's new, when you know that things are always the same? What on earth could be new with me?

SHE We're not going to argue about whether you're likely to have or not now... I haven't got enough change for that...

HER MOTHER Why is it so noisy around you?

SHE I'm calling from a phone box.

HER MOTHER Why are you calling from a phone box?

SHE Oh, mum, it's not exactly important now whether I'm calling from a box or not, is it... I'm just saying that I haven't got enough change for this sort of...

HER MOTHER What do you mean? I'm just asking why you're not phoning from home. Has anything happened?

SHE Nothing's happened. I just wanted to ask how you were.

HER MOTHER And what, you just got the urge, walking past a phone box?

SHE Mum, stop wasting time, I'm in a rush. Is there anything?

HER MOTHER Anything what?

SHE New...

HER MOTHER I feel ill. Like always.

SHE What do you mean, ill?

HER MOTHER Ill. How else do you want me to put it? What about you?

SHE I'm all right, what else...

HER MOTHER But something must have... Hasn't it?

SHE Nothing. What are you on about. Everything's OK.

HER MOTHER Are you eating well?

SHE Of course.

HER MOTHER And what are you eating?

SHE The usual... Do you want me to list you the entire menu now...

HER MOTHER It's all right. I just wanted to know if...

SHE Mum, please, I haven't got any...
(SHE *tries to restore the connection.*)
Mum... Mum... Hello... Mum... Can you hear me?

(The sound of the loo flushing, and the loss of contact. SHE

gets up and returns to HER HUSBAND. As she does so, she is surrounded by HER UNKNOWNNS who begin hassling her.)

HER HUSBAND We've ruined our evening. I haven't found out anything new. Now what? Are we going to sleep in separate beds?

SHE Why? Nothing's changed between us. We've always been this distant, the only difference is that we didn't talk about it before.

HER HUSBAND Sorry. But there's a big difference in that. A huge difference. I get the feeling.

SHE You're a hypocrite if that's what you really think.

HER HUSBAND But you of course acknowledge the importance of hypocrisy. What one doesn't talk about, doesn't exist. You really shouldn't have told me. Why do you think it's better this way? Did you fancy being a heroine? Who were you trying to show off in front of? Who did you have to prove it to? Let me tell you the truth. You really pissed me off. But that's probably what you wanted anyway. So I'm letting you know that you've succeeded.

SHE Stop attacking me. I really... I don't know what to do... Admit at least that it's not easy for me... I mean, we've been together forever. We went to nursery school together, then primary... I'm almost starting to feel that we're committing incest.

HER HUSBAND You really haven't got it easy. That's true. But that's because you're such a perpetum mobile. You create your own problems, and then you solve them yourself. And then you create another one, and again, you have something to solve. You've even created this for yourself. Like a headless chicken. You're always on the go. Until someone will give you as good...

(They both lie down on the mat and spend what seems like an age, just staring at the ceiling.)

SHE Sometimes I think that if we hadn't met then, we'd never meet now. Don't you think?

(Suddenly the silence is broken by rattling, banging, the sound of things being rearranged. SHE gets up and goes over to see what is going on.)

SHE What in God's name are you doing here?

HER BOSS I'll bet this gets in the way. Look, like this... You'll have more space... And you should wash this too, at some stage...

SHE What... What exactly?

HER BOSS And here you could have a...some kind of...cupboard, or something...

SHE But why?

HER BOSS So that you'll have somewhere to put all those bits and bobs so they're not in the way.

SHE What's suddenly possessed you to do this?

HER BOSS Because of you. I just want to show you something. You're always complaining that you haven't got enough space for yourself... I'm demonstrating how easily you can help yourself... If you move this...and you fix that corner over there a bit...like...

SHE Don't touch that! It doesn't belong to you! Nothing here belongs to you!

HER BOSS No offense meant. I'm not taking it away... I just wanted to help...

SHE It's my youth. You've got no place touching anything here.

HER BOSS Well, if you don't want me to, then of course I won't... I'll put everything back the way it was before. If it bothers you that I moved things around a little bit.

SHE It's my right, isn't it?

HER BOSS Certainly.

SHE It's my right, this is my home.

HER BOSS Of course... No harm done.

SHE What do you mean, no harm done. It has been. I told him.

HER BOSS What?

SHE That...that...you love me.

HER BOSS Why?

SHE Why did I tell him?

HER BOSS I mean, it's got nothing to do with that.

SHE What hasn't?

HER BOSS I've never told you that I love you.

SHE Didn't you? But...well...what then?

HER BOSS I said that I could picture my future life with you. That I could manage to arrange it so that I would love you.

SHE I see.

HER BOSS I think that's more than enough.

(pause)

- SHE** But then I don't understand why me?
- HER BOSS** And why not you? You're bright, you're determined...
- SHE** Really?
- HER BOSS** ...a successful young woman.
- SHE** Really? Sure. Success is that thing you have left when you've given up on happiness.
- HER BOSS** Come off it... Stop it. You've got just the right amount of self-confidence. That's what I like about you.
- SHE** Is that the impression I give you? That's good... It's excellent that that's the impression I give.
- HER BOSS** But why not? I like independent women. You're not exactly ugly either...
- SHE** Really? I'm not totally ugly?
- HER BOSS** And what does that matter, anyway. You dress well...
- SHE** The way that I dress is a cover for my natural shyness...
- HER BOSS** You and shy? I've never seen you be shy...
- SHE** That's how wrong you are. You know...I'm actually very unsure of myself... You know? Somewhere deep inside, you know... Take a look. Can you see it? I don't have any skin. Sometimes I have barely any skin at all. I always feel everything, I can never get close to anyone, because everyone pressures me so... Like for example now, you hurt me, you have no idea how much...

(During the conversation, HER BOSS starts to exercise on the rings. SHE consistently tries to keep up with him, or sits disheartened beneath him.)

- HER BOSS** We're all afraid of something. That's normal. It's better to admit to it before you do something stupid just to prove to yourself that you're not scared.
- SHE** All right then, there's not going to be any grand passion today, let's go home.
- HER BOSS** I don't believe in fate. Fate is what you make it.
- SHE** Are you so sure?
- HER BOSS** Why not? I'm flexible enough, I can adapt to anything... Like look... I'm here with you now... What does that mean? That I'm here and that I might stay here for a while, not because I couldn't

be anywhere else in the world, but because I have made that decision at this moment in time...

SHE

But what guarantee have I got?

HER BOSS

What sort of guarantee do you want? If you want to be sure that you'll never be better off than you have been so far, then you don't need me for that.

SHE

But of course. My husband is such a pillar of strength. I can be confident that he won't move of his own accord, unless someone forcibly rips him out of the ground.

HER BOSS

Yes, for your own sake, you have to work out...what you want... if what you want is to go for walks in the park, grow carrots, spend evenings visiting mummy, then... You know, I want to spend the remainder of my life as creatively as possible...

SHE

What does that mean, to be creative? How many women does that involve?

HER BOSS

I'm saying that those are two completely different things. You either want one or the other. You can't have both. Decide for yourself. You know, I'm your friend, I'm offering you something, either you take it, or you don't... But you must do something towards it yourself... That's your affair... I can offer you advice, but I can't make your mind up for you. Decisions have their consequences, and consequences should always be faced. You have to learn how to live in harmony with your decisions. To live freely, make decisions freely. If you take on more than you can handle, then you'll always buckle under and you'll get nowhere. You can be certain of one thing with me, and that is that nothing will ever be certain.

SHE

That's all very nice, but it's making my head spin.

HER BOSS

You'll manage. You just have to learn how to think positively. When kids are always being told: watch out, you'll fall, don't run, you'll get run over... How can we achieve anything?

SHE

Yes, but how can I explain, that...

HER BOSS

Why do you keep thinking that I'm such an idiot? Tell me, I'll understand. You'll tell me all about your life, and I'll tell you about mine...

SHE

We'd be talking till the end of time. We've already wasted too much time. We've spent too long looking at different things.

HER BOSS

What, do you think that we wouldn't be able to hear each other

out?

SHE No... We wouldn't manage to talk about it.

HER BOSS We'll go to the places that you have visited first, then to all the places I've been to, and then all the rest.

SHE It's impossible. There'd be no time.

HER BOSS You shouldn't talk like that. You have to think positively. Of course I won't be able to be with you all the time, I'll have to pop off to conferences from time to time... But you'll be able to read something in the hotel, before I come back...

SHE Read something? I'll be able to read?

HER BOSS Well yes, read. You like reading, don't you?

SHE And what exactly should I read?

HER BOSS What do you women read? I don't know... Something womanish... You won't mind being left alone sometimes, will you?

SHE No, I won't mind.

HER BOSS Great.

SHE One needs nerves of steel for that positivity of yours, too.
A positive tragedy, having to maintain a permanent state of happiness. Even more dangerous, if you have to make decisions in that state.

HER BOSS You see, you're being negative again. You should get rid of any bad thoughts as soon as they appear, before they cause damage to your conscious and sub-conscious. You should get rid of everything negative in your mind. Wipe it out, completely out. Anyone who thinks negatively, acts negatively too.

SHE If everyone's positive, then who will pay the price? Someone has to pay for it, don't they? Who's it going to be? Dealers in optimism, those at the top of the pyramid, certainly won't. They can only make a killing. That's how it was intended, after all. That's the whole basis of their successful marketing ploy. If you can convince enough people about your optimism, then the rest of your life is taken care of.

(HER BOSS ceases his exercising abruptly.)

HER BOSS You know what? As soon as you're in a positive mood, you can catch up with me.

(SHE is left standing alone, with the still swinging rings. HER MOTHER approaches, as if only passing by. She is again collecting the scattered objects from the floor. After initial hesitation, SHE suddenly grabs the rings, runs up and starts swinging on them, as if like a child, as if on a walk through a meadow... In the process, she suddenly starts to swear and complain about something.)

- HER MOTHER** What are you on about? You blaming me for something too? Have you got something against me?
- SHE** Yes. Of course. You too. When you knew that it was all a sham, you should have systematically retaught me not to have respect for authority... You should have beat me, and not taught me poems and songs... Why did you let me go on for so long? Why? Why did I have to bother with it for so long? Do you know how much time I wasted before I realised for myself what you should have told me right from the start? You could have saved me an unbelievable amount of time and energy. Because, you knew it! A teacher! You knew what a load of balls it all was! That was when you should have told me: Don't believe anything, don't listen to anyone, do what you think is right... Don't bother about anything else...
- HER MOTHER** I didn't want to cause you problems...
- SHE** Oh, you've really succeeded in that. You tried so hard. So hard. But why didn't you tell me before?
- HER MOTHER** Do you think you would have believed me?
- SHE** You're right. I wouldn't have believed you, even had I seen it with my own eyes. You used to tell me that people can be happy only after they've been fed and had their forty winks, and I didn't believe even that nonsense. You shouldn't have told me so bluntly...
- HER MOTHER** What did I know?... I didn't know anything...
- SHE** Why were you so good, huh? Why didn't you ever let me down? Why? You were always with me. You'd would always wait for me at home. Why didn't you have any lovers? You could have married twice over, since dad's death...
- HER MOTHER** Your father was dead long before then.
- SHE** There you go, all the better. So why didn't you take advantage of

that? What good was a father like that? He was never at home... He just worked and worked, just drove himself into the ground till he created this life he couldn't live with... And then he just went and died... Why didn't you give me a chance to leave you as well? Given me a pretext to let you down... Like he did... Why couldn't you be more selfish, then I could feel free... What am I supposed to do with your unspoken love? Are you listening? It's time that we finally went there, where...where...

(Everyone gathers around her as soon as they hear an argument taking place. Nervously, SHE tries to break free from the net.)

HER HUSBAND Well, are you staying or not? Once, I could handle, but twice, I don't think I could forgive you again. No...

HER BOSS Think about it... You've got plenty to loose. You'll never get another chance like the one I'm offering you again. You know I'm here now, but I won't wait forever. I can't afford to.

SHE My God, why are you all suddenly going against me... Let me go... I can go on my own, just as soon as I pick myself up... But just leave me alone now... Please...please... Just for a little bit... Let me think...

HER FRIEND Well, what? Have you decided yet? Stop brooding on it so much... This sort of thing needs a snap decision. Here, take my hand... come...don't worry... You won't have anything to worry about if you come with me, no one has yet broken their neck going with me. I haven't fallen from here before... Not even when I'm totally drunk... Yeah, even when I'm always drunk...

(He helps her climb up on the beam. He goes first, with HER following behind, unsteady and shaky...)

HER FRIEND Come on, what's there to be scared of... Climb. You'll never fall with me...

HER MOTHER Take care of yourself. That thing you're on is very narrow. You might fall.

HER HUSBAND Where did you spring from? Haven't you got anywhere else to walk? What are you trying to prove this time?

- HER FRIEND** Never hold on to anyone, or you'll fall...
- HER BOSS** You're wasting your time, you'll never get anywhere like that. No one's interested in that... Other things make a difference... What are you clowning around up there for... You'll achieve something all right. You'll only fall. Nothing else. Break your neck once and for all.
- HER FRIEND** Look straight ahead, not at your feet, don't look around, go forward, go on, straight ahead. Forward...
- HER MOTHER** Slowly...slowly...slowly does it...careful... Don't run or you'll fall.
- HER FRIEND** Good, you're getting the hang of it... Come on!
- HER BOSS** You'll never get anywhere like that. Listen to me. It's utterly pointless.
- HER HUSBAND** Can't you think of anything else to say? Do you always have to crop up everywhere?
- HER MOTHER** Be careful!
- HER FRIEND** Come on... Don't give up... You're on your way! Don't look at them.
- HER BOSS** Straighten your back! Don't fall!

(SHE loses her footing and falls from the beam, everyone gathers around... They lift her up and carry her into the background. As they do so, she starts kicking and shouting hysterically.)

- SHE** Leave me alone... Leave me... Are you waiting for something? Did I promise you something? Did we arrange anything? What are you all looking at me like that for? Answer me! What are you waiting for me to do? Why have you all gathered here together? Why is everyone pressing against me? What do I have to do to be alone? You're all standing around here as if nothing is happening. Even those of you who aren't here anymore, even those of you who have never been here before. Those who have always been missing take up the most room... Dad... Hello... Can you hear the echo in here? Can you hear it? Everything I say echoes. It's awful. Everyone can hear everything. What are you saying?

(HER MOTHER tries to calm HER, sits her down on the ground.

Then she sits down herself, a little further away, singing something to herself. SHE joins in inaudibly, amidst snuffles. HER HUSBAND remains lying as usual, not far from HER. HER BOSS can be made out in the background. HER FRIEND sits resignedly somewhere on the sidelines. They are all distanced from each other, and yet there is a common link that joins them. Perhaps it is a melody, or the rhythm of conversation, perhaps the outlines of the parquet flooring.)

- HER BOSS** I wanted to tell you, I'll be away for a while. Here's my number. You can call me...
- SHE** What use is that?
- HER BOSS** It's very practical. You can contact me anywhere.
- SHE** It's not at all practical. It's awful. Knowing that I can always contact you is just as frustrating as never being able to phone you again.
- HER BOSS** I don't get it. Why?
- SHE** Because then one automatically loses the hang of spontaneous telepathy. And that's what this world will die from one of these days. The proper kind of tone in people's relations isn't being maintained anymore. Any sort of tension is immediately translated into banal banter. And that prevents the accumulation of enough energy for any true exchange of ideas. That's not a telephone, but a leech, which sucks every bit of life out of you, every time you put it near your ear.
- HER BOSS** I don't know what is worse. I might not say any earth shattering things, but then, people like you don't say anything at all. You keep going around the pot for so long, that you eventually burn yourselves on it anyway. You never just say yes or no. It's easy to have a friendly chat, about nothing at all, with you, but it's futile to expect any definite opinion from you. I haven't got the nerves for it anymore. Learn how to talk. Good bye. If you need anything... then...
- SHE** Bye!
- HER MOTHER** What did he say?
- SHE** That I should learn how to talk.
- HER MOTHER** That's true. That's what I say. You forget to open your mouth when you talk. Conversation is a one-sided act of thinking, the

way you talk. You seem to think that it's enough just to say it to yourself. But the whole point of talking is that two people need to understand it. At least just about. You need to learn to articulate. To open your mouth.

(SHE walks around for a while, mutely opening her mouth, as if exercising her muscles.)

- SHE** It's just that...everything that I say, that I somehow name, immediately ceases to exist. I can't seem to repeat any sentence, because as soon as I have said it, that which it is describing, disappears.
- HER MOTHER** So don't speak, write. I don't want you to phone me. Everyone always feels good after a phone call. It's a kind of genre by now. But you could write to me, from time to time.
- SHE** What, write to you? That will be a laugh.
- HER MOTHER** You can read letters over and over again, and you'll always find something new in them. Especially with handwriting as illegible as yours.
- SHE** I can't write to you. By the time you would get the letter, I'd have changed my mind about things three times over.
- HER MOTHER** I would at least have some kind of footing.
- SHE** You'd always be reading something that hadn't been true for at least two days.
- HER MOTHER** So write about things that will still be valid despite the time difference.
- SHE** What about? The past, or the present? My memories are useless. I went down a ski slope once, and it was fun... I remember that... I should think up some story to go with it. But I don't have the time.
- HER MOTHER** Well, if you haven't got the time, you can put all your receipts, old notes, cinema tickets...in an envelope and send it to me... From that, I'll at least be able to tell that you've been somewhere...seen something...bought yourself something...
- SHE** What for?
- HER MOTHER** So that I can picture you. Like now, for example, I don't know what you are wearing. When I think about you, wonder what you are doing, I can never think of what you've got on... I mean, I

can't very well picture you naked, can I? What did you wear today, for example?

SHE Today? A dress.

HER MOTHER Which one?

SHE The one I bought myself.

HER MOTHER It doesn't suit you. Don't wear it.

SHE Why shouldn't I wear it, if I bought it for myself ?

HER MOTHER I'm telling you, you shouldn't wear it.

SHE We've never had the same taste.

HER MOTHER No.

SHE Well then, nothing.

HER MOTHER Of course it's nothing. What else would it be?

(The light fades and is replaced by more intimate spot-lights, which highlight each woman separately. Everyone is humming the same tune. Gradually, they all fall silent, and total darkness descends.)

THE END