

TANJA RADOVIĆ

ENTRAPPED IN A DRAWING

ENGLISH TRANSLATION: NIKOLINA JOVANOVIĆ

CHARACTERS: NELL

ALIDA

NINO

TOM

MARIO

PSYCHOLOGIST

THE SAME ACTORS PLAY THE OTHER CHARACTERS

SCENE ONE

(The psychologist is onstage arranging six chairs, the doorbell rings)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Come in! It's open!

TOM: Good morning! Am I the first?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Good morning, Tom! Sit down! You're a little early.

TOM: I always come first. Are you pleased with me?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Oh yes, of course, you deserve it.

TOM: OK then, please, tell me in front of everyone. *(doorbell rings)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: Come in!

NELL: O, you're here? Am I late?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Good morning, Nell! You're on the dot. Sit down!

TOM: *(to Nell)* Are you OK?

NELL: O...yes. *(doorbell rings)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: Come in!

ALIDA: Hello, everybody!

PSYCHOLOGIST: Hello, Alida! Here's a chair, sit down!

ALIDA: I've been on my feet all day. I can hardly wait to grab a chair...

NELL: How can you stand it?

ALIDA: I enjoy it...

NELL: It'd drive me crazy.

ALIDA: That's because you spend all your time at home.

NELL: You're on your feet all day long even when you're at home.

ALIDA: I didn't mean... (*doorbell rings*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Who's that? Come in!

NINO: Hi! Oh, everyone's here. Sorry about these five minutes.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Hi, Nino! Just relax. You're not the last.

NINO: Mario hasn't come yet? Right?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Mario... shall we start without him?

NINO: There's no sense in waiting. He'll burst in right in the middle of a story.

ALIDA: Lets!

TOM: Yes, let's start.

PSYCHOLOGIST: OK! Let's start! How are you all, are you feeling OK, do you feel good inside, what's happening or what has happened to make you the way you are right now... There, whoever wants to can start, who needs to share his or her feeling with us first? (*for a time they all look at one another or at the floor, waiting for someone else to begin*)

NELL: Well, I'll start. (*gets up; pauses, sighs, uses movements to illustrate what she is talking about, stumbles around the room in a very illustrative manner*) I've had a bad day today. I woke up with a headache. Whenever I wake up with a headache I know that some other illnesses will follow and bring the usual kind of trouble. I didn't take a painkiller right away and my head was throbbing. My husband was fast asleep, snoring, he didn't even hear the clock, and the children wouldn't get up. I didn't know where to start – breakfast, painkiller, getting up. I shouted at the children. They crawled out of bed, just dragged themselves along. My husband's snores grated on my brain like sandpaper. I bumped into the furniture. (*hits herself, cries out*) Several more bruises. I couldn't find the pills. The children found the cornflakes and milk, they spilt it on the floor, the table, the kitchen sink. I got their clothes together and got them off to school, but it was a terrible effort. They're slow and lazy. Then I could relax a little. The pain got a little better, but I still didn't feel well. I ate up the remains of the cornflakes. I was hovering on the edge – neither day nor night. I began to feel a stomach ache, the acid bit into me like into an old tyre. The doctor doesn't work until the afternoon, I'll probably make it, I thought. And then, as if through a mist – the snoring. Great God, I didn't get him up on time! Horror! I can't function in that mad morning rush. Anyway, why didn't he hear the alarm clock! I can't be on duty for everyone! I woke him up and he began to yell at me. I couldn't listen to it any more, I closed my eyes and I wished hard, very hard, "Get lost, get lost, let me be!" – and that's just what happened. (*she takes a deep exhausted breath; pause*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Your husband rushed out?

NELL: O, no, not at all! He actually disappeared into thin air, he evaporated, right then and there. I wiped him out of the room by force of will.

PSYCHOLOGIST: I must admit that I've never heard of anything like that. Perhaps you could explain a bit more clearly.

NELL: I didn't know what to do in the relationship between me and him. I mean, when he began to shout at me. I can't repeat everything he said. I don't remember. I always suffer from amnesia after a fight. I only know that I made a wish for the problem to disappear, and my entire husband disappeared. I got a fright, but I felt good. I felt more at ease immediately.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Why don't you just show us what happened, from moment to moment? Could you do that?

NELL: I'll try...*(change of lighting, the action moves to another part of the stage; the husband is snoring, Nell is walking about nervously)* How shall I wake him up? What shall I do? I wish you weren't here, I wish you'd disappear... *(shakes him)* Hey, wake up! Get up!

HUSBAND: O?! What's the time?

NELL: I didn't hear the alarm, we overslept. You're late for work.

HUSBAND: Late again! How many times is that?!

NELL: *(to herself)* O, get lost...

HUSBAND: How many times! They think I'm a complete idiot at work! Why do you stay at home?! What use are you?!

NELL: *(to herself)* Please disappear, just disappear...

HUSBAND: *(gesticulating wildly, so that it seems he will hit her, she jerks back at the same time)* Why do I keep you here?! I'll get myself a dog! I'll train it to wake me up! *(delights in the fear he has provoked in her, keeps getting crueller; barks at Nell)* Bow, wow, wow... *(Nell screams, and the husband stiffens, freezes in full motion)*

NELL: *(pause; comes to)* Ooooh...it's stopped! *(listens)* What blessed silence! Lovely! We'll move this away. *(carries her frozen husband out on her back like a log)* What peace! Perfect! I can't even hear my headache any more. I'm in store for a peaceful day. I don't have to cook, the main eater has gone. We don't need a cooked meal every day, anyway, that's for people who have nothing better to do. All my time is my own, I'll even have time to do some telephoning. *(the doorbell rings; the children troop in very noisily)* Oh no, how come you're here already?!

CHILDREN: *(interrupting one another, spoilt, loud, demanding)* Mummy, there's no school today. They let us go home. Is there anything to eat? Give us some money to buy something. We're going out! Can we take this from your purse? What's for lunch? How come you're not cooking yet?

NELL: *(to herself)* O, do get lost for a little, let me have a little peace!

CHILDREN: We're going out! Give us, give...*(Nell shouts, the children freeze)*

NELL: *(relieved)* What silence! No more demands for today. *(carries them out on her back)* Two fewer for lunch! I don't need to cook for myself. I deserved this. Mmmm... the chockie's all mine! *(suddenly she breaks off the act)* There, that's all. *(returns to her place in the circle)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: So that's what happened.

NELL: Yes...

PSYCHOLOGIST: You seem to have achieved your inner peace now, Nell. You feel good, as I suppose anyone would if he could cancel the undesirable part of reality.

NELL: I don't know...

PSYCHOLOGIST: What don't you know?

NELL: I don't know whether I feel as good as all that...

PSYCHOLOGIST: But you said yourself that you were enjoying your newly-acquired peace.

NELL: It was only at that moment...*(suddenly she begins to cry)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: You were looking forward so much to time that would be just your own.

NELL: *(cries even harder)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: No cooking, no snoring, no doorbell, no dog...

NELL: We don't have a dog..

PSYCHOLOGIST: Alright then – no potential dog.

NELL: My reality has disappeared.

PSYCHOLOGIST: That's true, we can't live in a select reality.

NELL: It's terribly quiet. I feel even worse now. My headache's got worse.

PSYCHOLOGIST: How about bringing them back in the same way? You can influence reality. You're much stronger now because you've gone through this experience. You can bear your problems. Nell, you're unbelievably strong. No living person can reshape reality the way you can.

NELL: Do you think so?!

PSYCHOLOGIST: Not only do I think so, I can see that is how it is. Bring them back. They're under your control. They're no danger to you.

NELL: Aren't they?!

PSYCHOLOGIST: No. What do the others think?

ALIDA: I agree, Nell should bring them back.

NINO: This is cool! I wish I could just – and pouf! *(gesticulates)*

TOM: Listen, Nell, if things take a bad turn you can always get rid of them again.

NELL: Thank you! *(now she is crying because she is moved)* I'll bring them back. I can do it. *(the doorbell rings)*

MARIO: *(enters in a hurry, confused and breathing hard)* I'm sorry! I overslept. Mummy didn't wake me up.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Ah, Mario! We began without you. You'll have to find your own bearings. Nell has just finished her story.

MARIO: *(confused)* I couldn't come earlier. *(self-reproachful)* What's the time?

PSYCHOLOGIST: That doesn't matter. Just relax and pay attention now. Nell, is there anything you would like to add?

NELL: No, I'm finished. I'm OK now, really I am.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Does the group feel good about this?

ALL: (*individual voices*) O, yes. It's all right. It's good. OK. Yes.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Let's go on! There, perhaps the person who is bowing her head lowest might continue. Let's see who is hiding under that hair...Alida! Would you like to go on, Alida?

ALIDA: (*takes a very deep breath, stands up*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: What a sigh! There, now you've got rid of that, you can start.

ALIDA: In the meantime I was... felt very well... then bad... now I'm... I don't know...bad...more or less... actually...yes... (*pause*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: You needn't say anything if you don't want to.

ALIDA: Well actually... it's not all that important... I met someone...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Can we hear the whole story? Only if you want to, of course.

ALIDA: OK. There's no mystery about it. I met him at a cocktail party after a book launch... (*the light dims in that part of the stage and brightens in another; the cocktail scene comes to life; the music of "Fascination" can be heard, Alida, holding a glass in her hand, is walking among the party guests and sees Him; she is visibly fascinated, she follows him around with her eyes. She circles around him and smiles when he looks at her, this game goes on for some time; there is also a She – seemingly uninterested, she is watching them from the corner of her eye, when He looks at her She pretends not to notice; he goes up to Alida, but secretly he is watching the effect this has on Her, who remains provocatively and outwardly uninterested. Alida cannot see this game because she is completely fascinated by Him, she begins to glow and smile when He walks up to her, she feels immensely honoured and full of admiration, which she doesn't hide, thus inflating His arrogance and self-confidence, He makes sure that She notices*)

HE: (*comes up to Alida, clinks glasses with her*) Cheers, young lady!

ALIDA: I'm Alida.

HE: Cheers Alida – and to the two of us! You alone?

ALIDA: Yes...

HE: I can't believe it! Of all the people here only you have a kind of magnetism. Alida, what a lovely name! It seems to have been invented specially for you. May I call you that?

ALIDA: Thank you! You're exaggerating...

HE: (*takes her hands for a dance*) Shall we dance?

ALIDA: "Fascination"... Our parents' generation fell in love when they listened to this music. I could still fall in love to it! (*she laughs too happily and enthusiastically; they dance around the room, spin around so that he can glance at Her*)

HE: You are so romantic. That's so rare. Are you a writer?

ALIDA: I do write a little... I'm not really...

HE: O, yes, yes! You must show me. I must see it.

ALIDA: Alright! Do you write too?

HE: No, no. But I understand the artistic soul. I know some publishers well.

ALIDA: That's good to know. I'll give you my number.

HE: We'll make some kind of an arrangement.

ALIDA: Perhaps you could read my manuscripts.

HE: O...of course.

ALIDA: I'd like to see you again. There are so few important encounters in a person's life...

HE: Well...

ALIDA: I think you are quite wonderful.

HE: Well... I mean! (*lets go of her*)

ALIDA: Thank you for this romantic dance. You know how to hold a woman in your arms. Everyone was looking at us

HE: It was super. I'm going now. Thank you. It was nice meeting you.

ALIDA: Here's my number. You can come to see what I'm writing...

HE: OK. See you. (*goes out past Her, stops and says to Her*) I'll call you.

SHE: (*pretends not to hear*)

ALIDA: (*doesn't notice this game because she is totally engrossed in her experience, takes a drink; Alida suddenly breaks off the theatre illusion and returns to reality*)
That's how I met him. The next week went by. He didn't call. I didn't move away from the telephone, even at night. I couldn't fathom losing someone like that. By the end of the week I realised that I had not given him enough encouragement. He couldn't have known how I had taken it, that I cared. I had behaved lightly, as if I was playing a game. I had to call him to show him how approachable I really was. Sensitive, gentle men yearn for encouragement. He is so wonderful, and after a week had passed he became my only, lovely, greatest wish. I searched through the telephone directory, called dozens of numbers. Ah, finally. (*Alida dials a number, the phone rings, on the other side of an imaginary wall separating them – He, yawns*)

HE: (*half awake*) Hello!

ALIDA: It's you! What a velvety baritone!

HE: Wrong number!

ALIDA: It's me, Alida!

HE: Alida?...

ALIDA: (*begins to sing*) "It was fascination, I know..."

HE: O, hi Alida! How're things? How're you doing?

ALIDA: I'm fine. Sorry to wake you up, I didn't want to, I only wanted to say, if you're interested, of course ... that invitation of mine, it's still on...

HE: I don't function so well this early. *(he smothers a yawn, sneezes)* Sorry. Can you call me in about two hours?

ALIDA: Sure, I'll be home. OK. Hear you in two hours time. Sweet dreams! *(He has already put down the receiver)* And - sorry! *(full of enthusiasm, she skips about happily, sings "Fascination", looks at the clock)* I'll cook... seafood! No, I'd have to go shopping for that, I won't have time... A steak with various kinds of salads, yes, I've got the wine...*(leaves the stage; re-enters, looks at the clock)* Ten more minutes. Just a little longer. Who cares if I call five minutes early? Yes! I'm not some kind of a time freak to call exactly to the minute. *(greedily, her hands shaking like an addict's, she dials; the number is engaged)* Engaged! I knew it! I should have called ten minutes earlier. We shall have to arrange something else now. *(dials again, nervously; at the other side of the imaginary wall we see Him dialling Her number at the same time, She is standing right next to Him, also separated by an imaginary wall; the two of them talk and as they do so they assume poses like cover models in fashion magazines; in the background the music of "The Boy is Mine" /Brandy & Monica/ can be heard, He and She perform a sexy choreography like in spots, twining against the imaginary wall; at the same time Alida thinks she is talking to Him – there is a misunderstanding, a short circuit in the communication channels; two telephone conversations are going on at the same time, He is in a sandwich between the two of them)*

ALIDA: *(cautiously)* Halo, it's Alida, again! I hope I didn't wake you up?

HE: Hi, chick!

SHE: Who do you think you are? You can't call me chick! *(pretends to be angry and uninterested, clings to the wall in a sexy pose)*

HE: *(returns the sexy pose; they cannot actually see each other but by chance their poses correspond very well)* You know very well who I am! And you know that I know that you're a top chick!

ALIDA: How frisky you are when you've had enough sleep!

SHE: No one knows what I think!

HE: You know what it does to my hunting instincts when someone plays hard to get.

ALIDA: You really are quite different! I'm not playing hard to get.

SHE: I've got other plans...

HE: I want you to be at home and wait for me!

ALIDA: I'm waiting for you already, don't worry. What do you like to eat?

SHE: It takes a tougher guy than you to keep me at home.

HE: You know what – I'll have you *au naturel*!

ALIDA: Would you like a steak? *Au naturel*? Do you like it well done or rare?

SHE: *(He and She are acting a burning choreography without really touching, clinging to the imaginary wall separating them)* What do you mean, *au naturel*, you're too slow. I'm wasting my time with you.

HE: That's true. We're wasting time for no good reason. I'm coming. *Au naturel*.

ALIDA: You're really making me happy. You know, it's a great feeling when someone is so close to you that you can share the same world, feel one another simply, without any great words. Yes, that's it. This world we are inhabiting together is beautiful.

SHE: You won't find me at home. I'm just going out.

HE: You're not going anywhere. I can feel you even at a distance. No mistake in that. I can guess at the shape of your receiver... the way you're holding it right now... O, yes, I know what you're wearing... I know you, baby... take off those superfluous clothes... get into the bath tub, pour some champagne and light a candle under some fragrant oils... what we need is speed...

ALIDA: O God!...Whatever you say...

SHE: I don't wait for guys who need speed! (*puts down the receiver*)

HE: Hey! Don't put it down!

ALIDA: I'm here! I'm waiting for you.

HE: (*stares at the receiver; speaks to himself*) The wires seem to have crossed with some idiot or other. (*puts down the receiver*)

ALIDA: (*speaking to the therapy group again*) I waited for him for hours. In the bath. The water turned cold, I turned blue. The cold steak, the warm champagne and the fragrant oils ended up in the garbage. By morning it seemed that I had to a great measure fallen out of love. (*sits down on her chair in the therapy group; begins to cry; pause*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Is that the end of the story?...Or...

ALIDA: Definitely it's the end of the story. What makes it worse is that this was the third case of the same kind in six months...

NINO: But didn't you say that this time it was something special?

ALIDA: It's always the same. I keep turning around in circles.

PSYCHOLOGIST: We'll do an assignment in connection with your story. (*stands up, points*) Like this. Mario, Tom and Nino will be the three men. Alida, you find places for them on the stage. Place them in a certain position, a certain distance apart, the way you see them in connection with yourself. Then say one sentence to each of them – telling how much you like them. You three, react without thinking about it first. OK? Go on, begin.

ALIDA: (*places them around the stage, thinks, finally puts all three in the same position in relation to herself – in half-profile*) No. That's wrong. Like this. You stand in half-profile. You too – right beside him. And you. I think that's right. Ugh. (*goes up to the first, represented by Tom*) You are a rarely sophisticated and refined person who stands out in a crowd.

TOM: I aaaam? Thanks! (*he feels uncomfortable*)

ALIDA: (*goes up to Nino*) I can feel that you are a being who is sharing my universe.

NINO: Oooo, yes I am, sure. We drink from the same bottle.

ALIDA: (*goes up to Mario*) I would so terribly like to meet you again in this formless, unrecognisable world...

MARIO: I have to go away for a while. It was nice meeting you.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Is this more or less what you usually hear?

ALIDA: Yes... (*they resume their places*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: What does that tell you? Don't you realise that you see them and relate to them exclusively through your own fascination? This makes them feel uncomfortable, or blocks them, or frightens them. In any case – you cool the situation.

ALIDA: What do you mean, cool it?! I admire them, I emphasise their best features, I encourage passion!

PSYCHOLOGIST: Actually, you do the opposite. Let them do something, too.

ALIDA: But I do encourage them, I encourage everything they do!

PSYCHOLOGIST: You encourage yourself...

ALIDA: (*interrupts*) I don't split hairs, I'm not interested in banality, I never, never let them know that I am aware of their weaknesses, too, I pass over unnecessary foolishness, I don't burden anyone with anything!

PSYCHOLOGIST: Why not? People should have to bear the normal kind of burden. That's part of exchange, emotional exchange, too, don't you understand? To get the best out of them, you must delve into their banality and weaknesses. It is your infatuation that makes them special, and they know it. They know how things really are, and when you do this it paralyses them. They know how unrealistic you are and there's nothing they can do about it. They can only run away from the discomfort. You'll have to keep your fascination under control.

ALIDA: But how? When someone's in love, fascination shines out of their eyes...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Reach out for those other parts of their personality.

ALIDA: I'll try...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Try. Practice a little, keep examining yourself. It won't be easy, but that's no reason to feel fatalistic. Nothing's been lost. It is only a change of approach. That's what you want, isn't it?

ALIDA: Yes.

PSYCHOLOGIST: To feel any change, you'll have to balance your efforts in connection with other people and experience all those feelings.

ALIDA: But I'm frightened...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Go right down into your own fears, don't worry about yourself. Think of how strong their fear is. You must remove their fear if you want them to stay close to you.

ALIDA: I want someone who won't be afraid of me as I really am.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Yes, but at the same time you want someone to disregard all his own fears, which you are encouraging, and to come to you.

ALIDA: A vicious circle.

PSYCHOLOGIST: You'll go on being attracted by weak men who'll pull back because you want them to renounce their weaknesses for – love. We're all yearning for that catharsis – for someone to disregard his fears for our sake. This is confirmation of love, whether we want to admit it or not.

ALIDA: It's like the prince who will get the princess's hand if he overcomes all obstacles, any fear...

PSYCHOLOGIST: We could go right back to Greek mythology, but where would that take us. You've understood the principle, that's essential. It will help you gain balance and help others to gain balance in relation to you. That is the meaning of mutual growth.

ALIDA: I understand.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Has anyone else had similar experiences with exaggerating and extolling partners? (*silence*)

NINO: Well, I have something... Actually, it's the other way around. Not extolling them. I'm more disposed to debase my partners, to humiliate them. I can be fascinated in a way, too – for example when I see that someone is an artist in leading a double life. That turns me on. I show my fascination immediately and give them advice.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Lets see it from your point of view.

NINO: Actually, the story is not originally mine at all. I was only a means, and this is the most entertaining part of the story.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Lets see it.

NINO: (*Nino's story takes place on the other part of the stage*) Actually, it is about my best girl friend. We've know each other for a long time, we understand one another, she has always known I'm gay. She lends me money when I don't have any, and that's always, I mean, she's OK. Some time ago she snared a bloke. For the first time she told me zilch, and I know all of her blokes, who are not worth even half of a bloke, if you ask me. Why did she keep this one back? Well, she was guarding him. I can't understand women at all. So much enthusiasm, so much grabbing, hiding in a nest. Love is free exchange. I didn't see her for a time, didn't hear from her, and I knew it – "I've got him under my skin", which meant that she would come to me soon because that was when problems always started. She's never had a bloke without a problem. Well, come to think of it, neither have I. And so she came, after less than a month she emerged from the twilight zone. She didn't ask how I was, and I'm always in deep shit. And then she started.

GIRL FRIEND: (*walks about sombrely, smokes, thinks, stares into the distance*)

NINO: Is there an eclipse today?

GIRL FRIEND: Do you have time to do something for me?

NINO: Like what?

GIRL FRIEND: I want you to go and see a guy. I'll pay for all your expenses. You won't be bored, believe me. He's good looking and sexy.

NINO: Wow! You know I'm always hungry for sexy hunks.

GIRL FRIEND: Stop acting up. It's my boy friend.

NINO: Sorry! There's no need to freak out! I don't understand – what have I got to do with your boy friend...

GIRL FRIEND: Now listen, seriously. Don't keep clowning around. I've got that guy under my skin. You'll meet him. You'll understand. But I haven't really been well all the time. I've been friendly with you for years, Nino, there are some things I understand. He's gay, there no doubt about it, but it would devastate him if someone told him so openly. He's awfully inhibited, I doubt that he's ever touched a man. But I don't know, and it's driving me crazy. I want you to check it out, Nino. You know, in that direct way of yours. Don't beat around the bush, I want a one hundred percent exact answer. Is he or isn't he. Try to seduce him. If he isn't, super, apologise for your lascivious behaviour, and if you do manage to lure him, then give him this message, "I was sent as a gift to you from – " me, of course. And get lost immediately. Don't even think of... you know. And let me know straight away. I've got to know whether he's using me as a cover or not.

NINO: I don't think that's playing fair. I'm not sure I want to do it.

GIRL FRIEND: Oh come on, please, since when have you been so ethical? I'll take all the responsibility, and you can tell him that if things go that far.

NINO: You're a wicked player...

GIRL FRIEND: As if I didn't know how sweet little acts of revenge turn you on. Don't let me have to remind you of...

NINO: Alright then, I'll buy.

GIRL FRIEND: Now, listen to how you'll get to him. He moves in artistic circles, you have friends there. It'll be easy for you to gain access, but don't put things off. You'll have to catch him before he draws back. A blitz, right then and there. You've got quick ignition and a short fuse anyway. Draw him out of his snail shell...

NINO: You mean – draw out his slug?!

GIRL FRIEND: Exactly. And don't forget that he's scared silly. He has a dirty conscience. But that doesn't worry me – at least you know nothing about shame.

NINO: You're wrong. I'm just liberated.

GIRL FRIEND: How's your boy friend?

NINO: Which one do you mean?

GIRL FRIEND: I don't know myself. Things keep changing so fast with you.

NINO: But not as often as you ask. Anyway, you only asked for the sake of form.

GIRL FRIEND: Sorry to treat you like this, Nino, I just don't have any strength right now. I must solve this problem. I've been on edge for months. As if I had been poisoned, and I don't know what's wrong with me. *(begins to cry)*

NINO: All right, then, I'll go. You know that seeing a woman or a man cry gives me the jitters.

GIRL FRIEND: Thanks. I'll give you money to buy some new rags. He's a designer guy.

NINO: *(tells part of the story)* And that's how it started. I went off to do this not quite ethical assignment like a James Bond although, I must say, it almost turned me on

professionally. I became part of his circle and we began to hang out. It didn't take long. I liked the guy physically. A firm body. Well cared for. A convinced heterosexual, of course, but when he saw me his pupils dilated. Excellent. A real titbit. And then, after a party, in a hyper-romantic, summer, seaside, cricket-filled night... (*crickets and distant music can be heard in the background, the two of them are half-lying on a beach, throwing pebbles in the sea*). A wonderful night. Everyone's disappeared under the pines and among the rocks to fuck. It's that kind of night...

BOY FRIEND: Come on...

NINO: There were people crawling and scratching against those rocks while it was still light.

BOY FRIEND: The locals don't do that.

NINO: What about you?

BOY FRIEND: You mean – do I make love in the middle of the tourist season – on the rocks?

NINO: Nooo, not that at all... what kind of “making love” do you like?

BOY FRIEND: The simple... normal kind. Its not a thing to tell big stories about.

NINO: You got a chick?

BOY FRIEND: No, not right now.

NINO: You don't say! You're putting me on. You're very sexy.

BOY FRIEND: No. I don't have anyone.

NINO: I'll bet you're banging them like anything!

BOY FRIEND: No I'm not.

NINO: Every tried it with blokes?

BOY FRIEND: What do you think I am, a fairy!

NINO: Are you a homophobe? What've you got against the poor fairies?

BOY FRIEND: O come on, get real!

NINO: No really, I'd like to know, answer me!

BOY FRIEND: Man, you're bullshitting!

NINO: Well, I'm gay.

BOY FRIEND: Jesus Christ!

NINO: It's no big deal, except that I lead a super life. I think it's cool.

BOY FRIEND: Are you for the loony bin or have you been making a monkey out of me all the time?!

NINO: Stop yelling. You've even driven the crickets silent.

BOY FRIEND: You're maligning yourself. What's wrong with you? I thought you were straight.

NINO: Oh, I'm madly straight. I'm sickeningly straight. I'm a completely straight gay fellow.

BOY FRIEND: You tricked me... I would never have thought, never dreamed... you don't act, you don't look, effeminate...

NINO: I'm a one hundred per cent man. I have nothing at all to do with women. I'm not a transvestite. They probably horrify you. I don't fuck them, if that's what you think. Wax dolls don't turn me on. I like real guys, not the women in guys.

BOY FRIEND: I don't care who you... make... sleep with! I don't have to listen to this!
(gets up, Nino take him by the hand and pulls him back, he doesn't resist too much, leaves his hand in Nino's)

NINO: I know you need an explanation. OK, I'll tell you something about myself.

BOY FRIEND: I understand completely.

NINO: No, you don't. Well, generally I'm – sexual, but I'm attracted by men's bodies. Men have firm bodies, compact, less entropic than women, they don't grow so shapeless as time passes, don't lose their structure...

BOY FRIEND: *(interrupts him, but does not take his hand out of Nino's)* What monstrous views you have!

NINO: No, it's an empirical fact. Goodness, you're jittery! You're too narrow-minded for such a young man. Have it your own way. It's sad to see you holding yourself back so. Don't you like this fine body of yours? Don't you find it difficult to act sexually neutral all the time? It's what everyone keeps doing, the world is sexually dead. Don't try to prevent sex that cannot be prevented. You'll go mad if you don't show yourself for who you are, not the other way around. Right now I have a boy friend, but that doesn't mean I have an obligation. My partner likes me to be free because that's when I'm alive. I find nameless sex terribly stimulating – in woods, parks – like in a dream, on the edge of consciousness. Bare pleasure.

BOY FRIEND: We don't all enjoy the same things...

NINO: What do you like on a man?

BOY FRIEND: I can tell you what I like on a woman...

NINO: No, you can't. You don't have a woman, anyway. What I like best are the flat muscles on a strong masculine stomach.

BOY FRIEND: Let go of my hand.

NINO: It's damp. You're shaking... *(puts it on his forehead, then on his face, his neck)*
You're hot all over but completely cramped in passion... Your nails are scratching me.

BOY FRIEND: *(visibly aroused, but also terrified by the course of events; breathless)*
What are you doing?

NINO: *(begins to massage his neck and back)* I'll try to relax you. You're completely stiff. You would have become impotent in several years, do you realise that? OK. I'll go slow. I know you've never been with a fellow before. Are you alright?

BOY FRIEND: Stop this! Leave me alone!

NINO: Look at me in the eyes! (*takes the Boy Friend's head in his hands*) We're not doing anything bad! Who has frightened you so? Am I so terrible? (*hums a song*) Who's afraid of the gay bad bloke, gay bad bloke, gay bad bloke...

BOY FRIEND: It's repulsive, it's making me sick!

NINO: I understand that you're afraid. But you're stuck with it, you may as well accept it. It'll get easier. I'm not rough as a rule, unless it turns them on. (*bends over his lips, the Boy Friend pulls back with a cry; Nino lets go of him*) Sorry, I made a mistake. Forget it. (*silence, a pause; when Nino wants to get up, the Boy Friend suddenly hugs him; darkness*) (*the light goes on, Nino is alone on the stage, goes on telling his story*) It's best the first time... (*sighs, pause, change of mood*) As everyone must realise by now, I betrayed my girl friend. I pushed her out. I think that this rather messed up her plans. I did find out the truth, but I acted on it straight away. So what? But this chap of hers began to beset me with all kinds of love demands. Lovesick ex-heterosexuals make me sick. I went back home, and he followed me. I mean, it's as clear as day, and I made myself perfectly clear, that I had no intention of carrying anyone on my back. I can hardly carry myself. I gave him some beginner's instruction, support, pleasure, and that's the end of it. We're not the marrying kind. It all makes me sick. He telephones me and yells at me, that I've turned his soul and body inside-out. "You betrayed me, you poof!", he shouts. Well, his body got pleasure, and I never had anything at all to do with his soul. Having to hide it from my girl friend is the worst. I make up some sort of a lousy story. I feel sick. I keep waking up at night because I dream disgusting dirty loos. I feel like the ultimate dirty loo. Actually, I don't even feel worthy of being a dirty loo. I hate reality because it is like a dirty loo. I hate it because everything in it is messed up, dirty and permitted. (*pause; looks at the floor, everyone is silent*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Look up your girl friend and tell her what happened. She's already got her answer. And this man, when he calls you again, apologise as best you can. Now we'll work on you a little. (*gets up*) Come here, all of you, make a circle around Nino. (*they all make a circle around him*) Now put your hands on Nino so that your energy runs through him. (*they put their hands on his head, face, arms, heart*). There. Surround him completely. Now each of you say one sentence that will have a positive effect on him and send him your energy, concentrating on what you said.

ALIDA: You are loved.

NELL: You are good.

TOM: You are whole.

MARIO: You are not in pain.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Nino, try to feel their energy and repeat those sentences with conviction.

NINO: (*his eyes shut*) I'm loved. I'm good. I'm whole, I'm not in pain.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Stay as you are and try to feel all that. (*after a time*) Go to your places. (*to Nino*) Better?

NINO: Better. This is a great feeling. I can really feel warmth running through me. I felt that you were protecting me.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Energy multiples and re-establishes wholeness. Don't break up the circle. How do the others feel after this?

ALIDA: I feel charged with energy in a way, too.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Right, excellent.

NELL: I'm glad Nino feels better.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Mario – what about you?

MARIO: It's good. I lack energy, too...

PSYCHOLOGIST: You'll have your turn, too, Mario. Tom, can we start with you now?

TOM: Yes, I'm ready.

PSYCHOLOGIST: What's been happening to you in the meantime? We saw you on television.

TOM: Ah, I'm terribly disappointed with what happened on the show.

PSYCHOLOGIST: It was very lively.

TOM: They ruined my Boutique.

PSYCHOLOGIST: O, I don't believe that they ruined you. You're a good businessman.

TOM: I've lost my work drive. I'm terribly tied to my Boutique. It's my original idea, my design, my esprit. The Boutique reflects my life's philosophy...

PSYCHOLOGIST: We'd like to hear about it. Tell us.

TOM: Well, as you know, right until the programme I was the owner of Suicides' Boutique. My company met the last wishes of people who had decided to end their lives. With complete discretion, with perfect charm, spirit, taste and measure, we discharged everything, even the most eccentric death wishes. And in doing so, we were completely distanced from those wishes, in an unassuming way we suggested the most stylish solutions. Because style, style is the most important in life and in death. People usually asked us to write very convincing suicide notes for them, or to invent something that would bug the conscience of the living. We did all this so well, with such inventiveness, and ours was a very well run business, too.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Hm... interesting. What kind of services do you offer?

TOM: Well, for example, dramatic letters of accusation for discarded lovers, hopeless letters for those who have been disappointed in society, politics and people, posthumous beauty services, unforgettable speeches, death notices in poetic verse, and lots more things.

PSYCHOLOGIST: I'm surprised that you decided to appear in the most popular talk show on television when you work in complete secrecy.

TOM: Ah, unfortunately, I was given no choice in the matter. A nice young man came to the Boutique one day, wretched, desperate... *(a light on the other end of the stage goes on)* Sir, you can talk to me freely. You are completely protected here. How can I help you?

MAN: *(sobbing)* He died... right there...

TOM: (*holds out his hand*) My condolences, sir.

MAN: Run over... my only, my beloved, my favourite...

TOM: There is really no consolation when something like that happens...

MAN: My dear doggy, my beloved darling...

TOM: O? Your dog? I'm sorry, truly sorry. An irreplaceable loss!

MAN: That's right! Nothing can bring him back! I want to join him!

TOM: What a noble sentiment!

MAN: Life has no meaning when...

TOM: I understand completely. We will help you absolutely. You know that we offer professional help for situations of this kind.

MAN: I have one wish.

TOM: Go ahead, say, we're here to make your wishes come true.

MAN: I want to appear on the most popular TV show, together with you, and say a gentle goodbye to people and the world. Money is no object. I have always wanted to appear on television and I think that this is my only chance, it's my last wish.

TOM: Oh, you've caught me off-guard. I must admit, we've never had a case like this before. We don't like to go public...

MAN: Your price list says all services – except those that are dangerous or immoral.

TOM: Yes, yes, of course. But you will agree – we'll have to make a special price for this (*the light goes on as for a talk show, a studio with Tom, the Man and the television Host*)

HOST: Hello, guests and viewers, welcome to *Live Show Again!* I hope that you will enjoy what we are going to show you tonight. As usual we expect your co-operation – our phones are open only for you. This evening we have two unusual guests – a future suicide and his, we might say, mentor. We will ask Tom, the owner of Suicides' Boutique, to tell us all about it.

TOM: As has just been said, I'm the owner of Suicides' Boutique, a firm that I devised myself and which offers specific services to a specific clientele. This evening we are going public, although we usually work with the utmost discretion, because our client wanted to say goodbye to a TV public. Since we are a company that absolutely satisfies the wishes of all our clients, we even decided to go so far as to break our rule of non-appearing in public...

HOST: ... And so we will make a hit-programme. Excellent. Thank you, Tom, for being so open and accommodating. I wish more people like you worked with us on TV! Most of us here are potentially suicidal, ha, ha. Joke. Things are as they are. We'll ask our second guest this evening, who has asked to remain anonymous, a simple, direct question: Why suicide?

MAN: I lost my beloved friend, my only dog, Lucky. For me life without love is a long pointless road leading nowhere.

HOST: Wow! Baudelaire, if I'm not mistaken. Beautiful, beautiful. I hope that such strong feelings will not leave our viewers cold and that they will join us. (*viewers call the programme*)

VIEWER: I congratulate you on your courage, sir! Bravo! If only our politicians thought like that!

HOST: We have another viewer on live. Do you agree? Would you chose death for the sake of a beloved animal?

VIEWER: Listen, sir, perhaps you don't need to kill yourself. I have a lovely litter of pups, I could give you...

MAN: Love cannot be parcelled out. You can't bring Lucky back for me.

HOST: Bravo! Excellent! The situation is being viewed from another angle. Look, say, we could have a vote – call us – vote for or against! Perhaps your vote will decide the issue!

VIEWER: Don't give up, sir. Think about your meeting in heaven!

HOST: Yes, yes, it is always good to think ahead...

VIEWER: Think again, sir. It would be a pity, you're young still, and good-looking...

HOST: Magnificent! It's two-all for now! As the ancient Chinese philosopher would say – don't let the reins out of your hands – everything is in your hands, viewers – life, death, love! Just think of all who could have been with you today if only you had paid more attention to their hidden entreaties! But let's go back to our guests. How do you feel in this evening's *Live Show Again*, Tom?

TOM: Very well.

HOST: Of course, a businessman's proverbial *very well*. And you, sir? Are there any changes? Do you find the programme encouraging?

MAN: I feel a little better.

HOST: This proves that many people would have survived if they had happened to appear on television. What luck! The great Greek philosopher Aristocrat was aware of the importance of publicity in every individual's public and private life. But let's go on. Hello viewers, have you given up? Please call us!

VIEWER: Hey, you weirdo! Are you crazy or just stupid? How can you kill yourself because of a mutt?!

MAN: It's you! You ran him over! You beast! My Lucky! And you left him in the street like a piece of shit!

HOST: Excuse me, sir, we're on live. This is a random viewer. You mustn't take it to heart.

MAN: (*throws himself about shouting*) I demand satisfaction! For my Lucky! Damned aggressive bastard! You killed my Lucky! (*the Host and Tom try to restrain him*) I'll avenge Lucky! First others, then me! (*starts kicking, then growling*) I owe it to Lucky! May you all drop dead, one by one! (*barks*) Bow, wow, wow!

HOST: (*holds one hand over the Man's mouth, he and Tom hold him down, gives him a tranquillising shot*) We'll just have a small break for commercials. (*a commercial for toothpaste for dogs appears*)

TOM: (*returns to the psychologist's circle*) In the end it turned into a funny show. The Man calmed down, promised not to kill himself and accepted the gift of a new dog. He went through a conversion and even received a gift-coupon from the programme's sponsor. For me it was a catastrophe. The raging mass of viewers demanded that my company should turn into a boutique for pets. They started a petition, they are threatening to close me down completely if I don't switch.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Is that what you want?

TOM: No, not at all. I'm not interested in animals. I'll close the Boutique. I'm deeply depressed.

PSYCHOLOGIST: We'll do a small exercise with you. Imagine a part of your body, one that you feel is weaker, more sensitive than the rest.

TOM: Well... say – the heart.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Very well, the heart. Now try to talk as if you were your heart. Speak from it, in the first person. Well, heart, what do you feel now?

TOM: I feel... I feel what an effort it is, how difficult it is to pump blood... and that I'm not getting any pleasure in return...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Heart, how do you get on with the kidneys, liver, stomach and everything else?

TOM: Well... I give them food, which I have to, but I don't do it gladly. They don't communicate with me except when they're in pain or hungry.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Do they bother you?

TOM: O, yes. I wish they'd leave me alone. They all keep wanting something, they're constantly demanding. They tire me out and make me dissatisfied.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Describe how you feel.

TOM: I'm closed in a cage made of ribs, I'm not free because I must never stop working. I'm at everyone's beck and call. I pump blood, but there is little of it left for me. I send everyone all the best. I feel lonely and cold, constrained ... That's all.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Tom, pay attention to the impulses of your body. Talk to your internal organs more often. Listen to what they tell you, don't neglect them. You will be able to find many answers to specific problems, too.

TOM: That is so nicely put. Thank you.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Don't give up, pay close attention.

TOM: I'll try.

MARIO: (*yawns, only connecting to what is going on from time to time*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: We've still got the yawner to listen to.

MARIO: (*does not hear, stares around him vaguely*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: Mario, here we are.

MARIO: O?! Is it my turn already?

PSYCHOLOGIST: There, you heard the others, didn't you? Can you tell us how you are now.

MARIO: Aha! Sorry, I'm so sleepy.

NINO: You on the night shift?

PSYCHOLOGIST: It's not your turn to ask questions yet. Let Mario talk.

MARIO: I didn't hear the alarm, and Mummy thought I didn't need waking up. She's always sorry to wake me up when I'm asleep.

NINO: *(can't stop an attack of laughter)*

PSYCHOLOGIST: Mario, what happens when you come home from work?

MARIO: Weeell... I have lunch... then I go and have a little rest because I'm tired. I wake up hungry at about ten, have dinner, and then it's bedtime.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Describe it in detail – how you get home from work, how you have lunch and then go to have a lie down – everything.

MARIO: You'll die of boredom.

PSYCHOLOGIST: No we won't. Go on, start.

MARIO: Ugh. *(a scene on the other side of the stage begins; Mario is leaning with his elbows on the table, listless, his Mother is running around him with incredible enthusiasm)*

MOTHER: Here we are, here's lunch! *(puts the food in front of Mario)*

MARIO: Ouch! I burned my tongue! Could the food be less than 100 degrees at least once?

MOTHER: How do you expect me to cook it at 30 degrees?

MARIO: With your hands.

MOTHER: And that's thanks to me for waiting on you all my life.

MARIO: You don't have to wait on me. You don't have to cook for me.

MOTHER: You don't say! You got money to pay for a restaurant? Eat up and stop fussing.

MARIO: Right. I'm not hungry.

MOTHER: Don't lie. I know when you've had enough. I haven't even put everything on the table yet.

MARIO: It's as salty as the Dead Sea. And too greasy. All my arteries will be clogged by the time I'm forty.

MOTHER: Stop making things up, this is the food you always eat. I cook this for you because I know how much you like it. I'd never do any cooking for myself, anyway.

MARIO: There's really no need for you to cook for me.

MOTHER: Don't make your only mother angry. You'll see how it is when I've gone. Go on, have a little, for you Mummy's sake. You know that there's very little happiness in my life.

MARIO: I really can't. I'm going to sleep.

MOTHER: Such lovely din-dins!

MARIO: I'm sleepy.

MOTHER: It's food for the gods. Promise me that you'll eat it for supper.

MARIO: (*gets up and goes to bed*) If anyone calls me, I'm not at home. (*lies down, yawns, goes to sleep immediately*)

MOTHER: (*takes the dishes out on tiptoe; the doorbell rings: she rushes to the door on tiptoe, returns with Mario's friend, whispers*) He said he was terribly tired and that he was not home for anybody.

FRIEND: Come on, I've been calling him for days and he's never home for anybody. Aren't you worried?

MOTHER: He's tired.

FRIEND: Tired my foot. (*goes to Mario against Mother's protests; shakes him*) Hey old man, get up!

MARIO: Leave me alone!

FRIEND: We're going out. Come on lazybones, you don't know the difference between day and night! (*pulls him up*)

MARIO: (*pushes him away*) I caaaaan't... leave me aloooooone...

MOTHER: Stop pestering him! Can't you see he doesn't feel like going!

FRIEND: Come on, you baby! Our friends are waiting for us!

MARIO: I'm sleeeepy... It's booooring outside...(*falls back on the bed like a sack*)

MOTHER: There are only kids outside.

FRIEND: What shall I tell the others?

MARIO: Gooooood night!

FRIEND: Unbelievable! I'm off! (*to the Mother*) Tell your son, if he wakes up, that I don't intend to come any more, or call. Good night, sweet dreams! (*goes away angrily*)

MOTHER: What a bad hat! I'm happy, so happy, that I have such a modest son. (*goes away*)

MARIO: (*dreams a dream in which he is surrounded by the people from the psychologist's circle, they are holding hands, behaving like children – they are singing and dancing fragments of "Ring a Ring of Rosies", laughing, tickling and teasing Mario, he is laughing in his dream: one by one they kiss his cheek and say: Your are loved. You are good. You are whole. You are not in pain. They repeat this one by one and leave, when they have all gone the alarm rings, Mario jumps up in bed, rubs his eyes and shouts in a panic*) What's the time? (*pause; Mario returns to the psychologist's circle*)

PSYCHOLOGIST: That is your afternoon...

MARIO: Yes... I don't dream at night.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Very well. Now we'll turn everything around. Nell, you'll be Mario's mother. Mario, you will cook for your Mother, wait on her and tell her to lie down after lunch.

MARIO: No chance! My Mother has not lain down after lunch in her life.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Good. We'll see how things would be if she did.

MARIO: I'd never... I mean, it's impossible... she wouldn't listen to me.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Never mind, try. You start, Nell.

NELL: What would you like for lunch today, son?

MARIO: I just caaaan't...

PSYCHOLOGIST: Don't shut yourself out. Be persistent in your intention to cook lunch.

MARIO: I'll cook lunch today instead of you.

NELL: That's out of the question, what would I do all day?

MARIO: Have a rest. Enjoy the rare occasion of your son doing something useful.

NELL: Don't you dare mess about in my kitchen!

MARIO: Calm down, Mother, I'll clean everything up when I've finished. It'd be a great help to me if you took a little nap.

NELL: Sleep in the daytime?!

MARIO: But you make me sleep in the daytime.

NELL: You're young, you need your sleep.

MARIO: I'll get everything done, you won't fall behind in your work.

NELL: Stop trying to destroy me, Mario! Do you want to make me cry?! I'll jump out of the window right now! That's what you want, isn't it, to get me out of the way. That'll happen soon enough, just you go on like this. Mario, I feel chest pains! Give me my medicine. (*in a panic, Mario hands her the medicine*) It won't be long before you'll have to do everything for yourself. No one will ever do more for you than what I'm doing. No one will care for you. You'll never get what you like most for lunch.

MARIO: Oh Mummy, I don't want you to die. I'll never put my foot in the kitchen again.

NELL: Don't make your Mummy sad if you want her to be around for a long, long time. Alright? (*Mario nods*) You're good. You're loved. You're whole. You're not in pain, Mario. And give Mummy a kiss to make up. (*holds up her cheek*)

MARIO: Surely I don't have to give Nell a kiss? Are we finished?

PSYCHOLOGIST: Alright. How do you feel now, Mario?

MARIO: I didn't achieve anything... But I somehow felt more awake while we were doing the exercise!

PSYCHOLOGIST: You slept through almost everything this evening. Next time you'll have to write down every time your mind wanders. At home you must write down how long you are awake, then stay awake half an hour longer each day. I expect your co-operation. Next time, and every time in future, we'll do a similar exercise.

MARIO: Ugh! Until when?

PSYCHOLOGIST: That depends only on you. Be ready to work on yourself for a long time with small results.

MARIO: Alright. I'll do as you say.

PSYCHOLOGIST: Not as I say, as you say, which is the most important. *(pause)* OK.

Now we've gone round the whole circle. I'll ask you some questions: How are you now? Do you feel better? How do you feel about yourselves this moment?

You're to draw it now, in the form of a flower. *(hands out crayons and paper)*

Here you are. Which flower is most like how you feel? Draw it carefully. I'll

leave you for five minutes or so. *(goes away, they draw and keep glancing at one another, here and there pictures of flowers are projected on the stage, they do not notice)*

ALIDA: Finished!

NINO: Me too. Hey, you're a daisy. I'm a daisy, too. See! She loves me - she don't, she loves me - she don't...

ALIDA: So that's why your daisy's so tattered!

NELL: Shush! *(Nino and Alida whisper to one another)*

TOM: I should be going. Where has she gone?

NELL: Be quiet! Some of us are still working.

NINO: *(peeps at her picture)* You're a lily of the valley. A plural flower. Sweeeet!

NELL: I'm finished. I had most to draw.

MARIO: I'm a dandelion.

NINO: That's not a flower. I can't be pollinated.

MARIO: It's pollinated already.

NINO: O really?

TOM: Hey, she's not coming back.

NELL: She'll be right back. She's never let us down. Just be patient.

MARIO: I have to go. I've got to get up early tomorrow.

NINO: At least you've had enough sleep.

NELL: Perhaps she's been taken sick. I'm going to see if she's gone out for a breath of fresh air. *(goes away, returns immediately completely frantic)*

TOM: What is it?

NELL: Don't go out there!

TOM: What's happened to her?!

NELL: No, no... I didn't find her. There's something... I don't know, someone else go and have a look...

TOM: Stop bullshitting! I'm in a hurry! O my God!

ALIDA: *(to Nell)* Tell us, what's outside?!

NELL: There are... flowers outside... flowers everywhere...

NINO: O, come on! *(rushes out, returns confused, frightened and smiling all at the same time)* Hey, mates, we definitely can't go out!

ALIDA: *(to Nino in a panic)* No kidding! What is there outside?!

NINO: *(to Alida)* The outside world's disappeared, mate. No street, no houses, nothing we know. No people. There are only flowers – daisies, dandelions... like the ones that we drew...

ALIDA: Stop putting us on, Nino!

NINO: Believe me, everything's gone literally haywire outside. Nothing's attached to anything else, everything's separate. Things are hanging in the air, without any volume – like on a drawing, everything's two-dimensional, there's just surface. This house we're in now is floating in space, you can't get out of it. There's nothing to step onto.

TOM: Tommyrot! Don't be paranoid! It's all in your head. Whatever it is, it's just an illusion that you're all of you supporting together.

ALIDA: It doesn't look like an illusion. Illusions aren't flower-patterned.

TOM: All of us here, on the inside, we must act together on whatever it is that's outside and you'll see, it'll pull back. *(to Nell)* Can you help us, with your special abilities?

NELL: No way! I didn't make this happen and there's nothing I can do to unmake it!

TOM: We must act as quickly as possible. We must all go out immediately, holding hands, without breaking the circle.

NELL: I'm staying here.

TOM: It's important that we don't separate!

NELL: O no, no! I'm not going anywhere! I'm waiting for the psychologist.

NINO: Don't you realise, woman, that she's evaporated into another dimension?! You and your lilies of the valley can hang around here until doomsday!

TOM: Don't be obstinate, Nell! Listen, is any of this your doing? Are you allergic to the whole world except lilies of the valley and daisies?!

NELL: I haven't done anything! I'm trapped, too! I'm staying here! Until everything goes back to normal again!

NINO: What do you mean, normal?! Are you normal? Who's normal around here anyway?!

MARIO: Ooooo! Where's the phone?! I must call Mummy to come for me!

NINO: What phone, you freak! There's no more Mummy! We're trapped in your idiotic dream!

MARIO: I don't dream flowers!

ALIDA: Stop it! Something's happening out there! Whatever's outside is breaking in! Look! *(the silhouettes of flowers are increasingly flooding the stage, the atmosphere of foreboding grows)*

NELL: O God, I don't want to become a daisy! I'm frightened! Something smaller, perhaps. A lily of the valley.

NINO: The flowers are breaking in, invading. We're part of whatever's going on...

MARIO: What's happening to my Mummy? I've got to leave at once! (*goes out*)

NINO: (*grabs him and gives him a cuff*) You immature selfish blockhead! We've all got to get out of here together! We'll dematerialise this together.

MARIO: I didn't mean...

ALIDA: Stop it! It's advancing! Do something!

NINO: It's incredibly real... It's bitten through the edges of the walls already, it's advancing towards the centre... I think we're too late... It's an idea for your Boutique, Tom...

TOM: Can we be serious!

NELL: Let's hide! We mustn't look at this! Does anyone have sun glasses? (*covers her eyes with her hands*)

NINO: We're lost anyway... The last thing I ever saw were flowers... Actually, that's quite cool...

ALIDA: What'll I do now?... What'll I do now?...(*shakes Nino*) Let's run!

MARIO: I've got to get out! I've need oooout!

TOM: Come on, get real! Whatever it is will burst like a bubble. It's hazy along the edges, like all illusions are. It'll burst when we touch the surface. Come on! Hold hands! Get moving, Nell!

NELL: All right, have it your own way. But we'll all disappear, you know. (*they take hold of each other's hands, the projections take over the stage completely; darkness*)

EPILOGUE

(the actors bow and introduce themselves)

NINO: I'm Nino, actor, performer and dancer, participant in this empirical-educational psychotherapeutic seminar for actors. I'm interested in the physical and sexual theatre method. I research my own body and that of other theatre people. I like to go to the greatest lengths. I have dozens of scars from wounds suffered in the cause of art. I get international engagements because I'm ready for anything. This workshop is completely different from what I'm used to, but it's interesting.

ALIDA: I'm Alida, an actress, I attend film and TV workshops and summer schools. I've played several small but well-reviewed roles in the new European independent film. This workshop will help me develop a close emotional approach to acting and to my acting partners.

NELL: I'm Nell, playwright for the Paranormal Theatre in London where I am head of a great multimedia transcultural project of liberating and exorcising spirits and demons from the plays in which they appear. This kind of psychotherapeutic approach to characters has a healing effect on me.

TOM: I'm Tom, actor. Up to now I have supported the critical theatre school, but its approach is not broad enough for my all-encompassing talents. I'm searching for a method to fulfil my capabilities.

MARIO: I'm Mario, actor and performer, I attend the Hypnotic Theatre School in Amsterdam. I have developed my extraordinary talents up to the point of completely hypnotising my acting partners on stage and subjecting them to my will. Right now I'm trying to get rid of hypnotic addiction, and this psycho-method is of great help to me.

PSYCHOLOGIST: I'm a director and playwright, founder of the Psychotherapy Theatre School. I therapeutically guide actors through characters. The essence of this school is for the actors to blend with characters whose reality changes completely. The school programme lasts for a year, and there is a fee in Euros. You may join us.

THE END