

back. **She** looks at **The Woman**. Naturally.) I had a lot to drink. (**The Woman** takes away the handkerchief, looks at a stain made by the blood, and immediately brings the same stained handkerchief to the other's lips, wiping them. **She** lets **The Woman** do it. Pause.) The cupboard, the clock and the quilt.

Fourplay

by

Sergi Belbel

translated by

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Premiere in Catalan

Teatre Romea, Barcelona, 19 April 1990, directed by Sergi Belbel.

Premiere Production of the English translation

Lyric Studio Hammersmith, London, 2 February 1999, directed by Hans-Peter Kellner; designed by Simon D. Beresford.

The Man	Mark A. Benson
The Woman	Joscelyn Best
The Male Friend	Scott Maslen
The Female Friend	Debra Tammer

Characters

The Man
The Woman
The Male Friend
The Female Friend

Place

A completely empty bedroom, without doors or windows, with an enormous bed (two by two metres), off-centre to the right.

Time

– Real: from approximately three in the afternoon to nine in the morning on the following day. Any day.
– Within the individual scenes: odd-numbered scenes advance forward in time, even-numbered scenes go backwards.

Structure

– First part: nineteen brief sequences, separated by darkness (scenes one to nineteen).
– Second part: one single scene composed of nineteen sequences, with scene changes visible to the audience (scenes twenty to thirty-eight).

Scene One

*An empty bedroom without the bed. Voices of **The Man** and **The Woman**.*

The Woman What then?

The Man What?

The Woman That's right, what?

The Man What what?

The Woman When will it be here, then?

The Man When will it be here?

The Woman Yes, when will it be here, then.

Pause.

The Man Now, right now.

The Woman Right now?

The Man Right now.

Pause.

The Woman Are you sure?

The Man I'm sure.

Pause.

The Woman I hope this isn't another one of your awful little jokes?

The Man How dare you say that? A joke? How could it possibly be a joke, when we've been planning it for months?

The Woman You mean, you've been planning it for months.

The Man All right, let's be honest, for a change: I've been planning it for months. Yes, me, just me.

The Woman Hold on a minute! I've done my bit, as well!

The Man Hold on a minute! *You've done your bit, as well!*

The Woman I was the one who suggested more more more more . . . space.

The Man Comfort.

The Woman Space.

The Man Ease.

The Woman Space, space.

The Man I mean: comfort, ease. In a word, freedom.

The Woman Sometimes you say the strangest things . . .

Pause.

The Man What things?

Pause.

The Woman Are you sure it will be here today? This afternoon? In a little while? Right now, as you said? So, may I may I may I may I go and get them?

The Man Get them?

The Woman You know perfectly well I ordered them over a month ago. Oh, I made them promise they would have them ready for me in two weeks. And I swore I would go and pick them up two weeks ago, thinking, of course, that two weeks ago it would already have been here.

The Man Oh, right. I didn't realise what you were talking about.

The Woman Well, that's it, I'm going to get them.

The Man Aren't you going to wait for it to come?

Woman You mean: for them to bring it?

The Man For them to bring it?

The Woman Well, it's certainly not going to come by itself, is it?

Pause.

The Man Of course not.

The Woman You did say right now? Right now, yes? Right now? Well, it's already been 'right now' for the past two hours, hasn't it?, and 'right now' is already now, if I'm not mistaken, and it still hasn't come, it hasn't come, it hasn't come; at least, as far as I can see I can't see anything here, here, anything at all, anything at all, anything at all, oh oh oh we're going to end up without anything, tonight, tonight we'll have to sleep on the street if we go on like this, two hours like two idiots since they took the other one away, and there's still no sign of the new one, is there? Oh, yes, yes, yes, I'm going I'm going I'm going, perhaps we'll be lucky but I'm still going, perhaps if I leave, your 'right now right now' will become a reality and, then!, what a stroke of luck and it comes at that very instant; now if that happens, it's not a good sign!, it will mean that it doesn't like me! I'm going. I'll die of embarrassment when they see me walk in. Two weeks late! The way I hurried them to to to to put it together (oh, is that how you say it?, put it together?). And what, well, then, you, what do you think?, shall I go? is it clear to you or or or or not, come on, what do you think?

The Man Goodbye.

The Woman Oh.

The Man Yes, yes, yes, you'd better go. Better. Better. Better.

The Woman Well, then, now it's definite: I'm going.

The Man I'm sure that . . .

The Woman That what?

Pause.

The Woman If you need anything . . .

The Man Hmm . . . At the moment, I don't know.

The Woman Well, then, goodbye.

The Man Wait.

The Woman What?

The Man Will you be long?

The Woman Well, look, I don't know. I've got to go quite a long way. I may be.

The Man Oh, so I don't think that . . .

The Woman That what?

The Man Are you sure you don't want . . . You prefer . . . ?

The Woman It's just that I can't stay here any longer. I'm tired of doing nothing and I'm going to go and do what I should have done some time ago. I'm feeling very restless and stressed out, you know, so you stay here by yourself and I'll go. It'll be all right, in fact, just the opposite, it'll be better, because I know that . . .

The Man Do you want me to go . . .

The Woman No, no, no, no. You can't leave. You have to stay put. Just imagine if . . . Besides besides, I can do it by myself. By myself I can.

The Man You mean?

The Woman Of course! Of course, I can, you'll see, I don't think I'll get too tired, no, I don't think I'll get too tired, don't worry about me.

The Man Fine, do what you want.

The Woman Right. Come on then, that's enough pointless chattering away, as always. So . . . goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye. Goodbye.

Darkness.

Scene Two

Lights. The Man, The Woman, The Male Friend and The Female Friend, each of them seated at one of the corners of the bed. The Male Friend and The Female Friend in sensual positions. The Man, smiling, The Woman, excited.

The Male Friend I've got to go.

The Female Friend I've got to go.

The Male Friend I have to go to work.

The Female Friend Me too. To work.

The Male Friend I'm so tired.

The Female Friend My back aches. It aches right here, in my spine . . . Oh, it feels as if I . . . as if I'd . . .

The Woman As if you'd nothing, love. Nothing at all. Everything is just as it was . . .

The Female Friend I'm going.

The Male Friend Me too.

The Woman Me too.

The Man What?

Pause.

The Woman I'm going.

The Man Where?

The Woman I mean I'm leaving, I mean I'm not going anywhere in particular, no, no, I mean I'm going away, in . . . in general, I mean . . . not at all. Everything has turned out so terribly . . .

The Female Friend gets up, walks in front of The Man and The Woman, and goes towards The Male Friend. She holds out her hand to him.

The Female Friend Well, it's been a pleasure, a pleasure to meet you, I really have had an evening . . . a very . . . I mean, a night . . . really, it's been years and years and years and years since I've had, I can assure you, believe me.

The Male Friend Yes, yes, me, too. I mean . . . me neither.

The Male Friend coughs. **The Female Friend** points to his trouser pocket. He puts his hand in and takes out three extinguished cigarette butts.

Male Friend Of course, too much smoke.

The Female Friend Right.

The Male Friend gets up.

The Male Friend Goodbye.

The Female Friend Goodbye.

The Man looks at **The Woman**.

The Man Goodbye, then.

Darkness.

Scene Three

Lights. **The Man**, by himself, stares at the bed from a distance.

The Man Yes. Yes. Yes. Here we have it, our two-by-two, at last. Fantastic. Just right. That's it, just right. That's it. Or perhaps . . .

He goes up to the bed.

But no. No.

Pause.

A TWO-BY-TWO.

Pause.

Sorry? What? Excuse me? Oh, yes, yes: the advantages of a two-by-two metre bed?: ALL OF THEM, to put it in a deliberately simplistic way.

Pause.

In the first place, I should mention the numerical coincidence before going into detail: a two-by-two for two. To put it another way: a bed for two because there are two. Yes, that's it. There are two . . . bodies. In this case, mine and her her her hers. I mean: a single body for two bodies. Man and woman, masculine and feminine, duality that doesn't necessarily overstate itself but that implicitly conveys an inanimate object, asexual, not modulated of course, not stratified that is the beeced. Or as well: my . . . our two-by-two bed, double bed, for two, whose essence lies in its measurements, and whose only function lies in the utopian union for the nocturnal repose of two individuals of the opposite sex. Yes. Of the opposite sex. Of the opposite . . . sex. Sex . . . opposite. Yes. Opposite . . . sex.

Pause.

So, the first conclusion, the result of a simple mathematical operation – division – or bearing in mind, just, the parametric co-ordinates pertaining to a purely formal and objective delimitation and leaving aside any connotative implication that could invite misunderstandings of a subjective nature – in other words, everything immersed in an affective level which, because of its very nature, transgresses the merely denotative environment (which is the one that interests me, to begin with) – is, logically, the following:

Pause.

. . . two metres . . . two bodies . . . A METRE FOR EACH BODY!

Pause. He appears satisfied with his conclusions.

In other words: one body for each metre. Or a single body in each one of the metres. Or just one body – be it male or female, mine or that . . . which is hers – in each one of the half-spaces, right or left, so dividing, a single metre! One for me and one for her, two spaces in the two-by-two, one for oneself and one not, one definitely mine and the other someone else's, the other: hers, and the two of us the same size in this SINGLE and unique object (entire nights and nights and nights designing it) which I know is completely indivisible.

Pause.

Of course, since she . . . I mean, since I . . . she and I in the one we had before we . . . there wasn't . . . That is to say, of course, the one we had before . . . and she would always . . . well, oh, right?, oh!, well, she, well, hey, she's still not back, she's still not back?, no she's still not back, a long way, yes, yes, she must have gone quite a long way because she's still not back; and will she bring them?, will she bring them?, or won't she bring them?

A scream from The Woman. The Man becomes frightened.

Voice of The Woman Oh! Oh! Oh! Has it finally come?!

The Man Yes!

Voice of The Woman Oh, this is heavy, heavy, heavy, I can't, help, help!

The Man She's brought them.

Darkness.

Scene Four

Lights. The Male Friend and The Female Friend. On the floor, two extinguished cigarette butts. The Female Friend, wearing only a night shirt and knickers, is finishing a cigarette.

The Female Friend Hmm . . . a slight problem, just a slight problem: if you are you and I am me, and the bed is a bed (above all the bed, of course, which is a bed and nothing more, as I already know very well thanks to you), so, here, in my opinion, this place where we are right now, should be a BEDROOM AND NOT AN ASHTRAY!!!

Quickly, The Male Friend picks up the cigarette butts from the floor and blows on the ashes. The Female Friend looks at him and, ceremoniously, puts out her cigarette on her shoe and offers the butt to him.

Female Friend A present.

The Male Friend Thank you.

The Female Friend Don't mention it.

The Female Friend places the extinguished cigarette in The Male Friend's outstretched hand, next to the others. Both of them remain silent, staring at the cigarette butts.

The Male Friend/The Female Friend What a stench!

The Male Friend Sorry?

The Female Friend What?

Darkness.

Scene Five

Darkness. Someone is heard energetically clapping their hands. Lights. The Man and The Woman. In the centre of the bedroom, a parcel. It was The Woman who was clapping, in ecstasy, and admiring the bed from a distance. The Man, unmoved, gestures to her to stop clapping. The Woman calms down and gives him an apologetic look. The Man measures the right side of the bed, centimetre by centimetre. Meanwhile, The Woman mumbles in a low voice. When he finishes, he looks at The Woman and gives her

a nod of approval. **The Woman** smiles. The same thing with the lower side. The same with the left side. The same with the upper side.

Pause.

The Man straightens up and moves away from the bed. **The Woman** calms down and makes a grand gesture as though she were going to fling herself on top of the bed. **The Man** stops her with a severe and concise gesture. **The Woman** remains rooted to the spot and looks at him questioningly ("why not?"). **The Man** answers her with a vague gesture ("not yet"). **The Woman** sits up. **The Man** goes up to the bed. **The Woman** moves away from it. **The Man** moves around the bed, measuring it, counting his steps in a low voice. Gestures of approval. **The Woman** claps with joy. Gesture from **The Man** telling her not to make any noise (she needs to concentrate). **The Man** moves away from the bed. **The Woman** goes up to the bed and, once again, looks as though she is about to hurl herself on top of it. Gesture from **The Man** to prevent her from trying to jump again. Gestures from **The Woman** to calm him down ("I wasn't planning on doing it, oh, you're such a pain"). Gesture from **The Woman** asking him to let her touch the bed. Gesture from **The Man** ("not yet"). Gesture from **The Woman** ("not even a little bit?"). Gesture from **The Man** ("no!"). Gesture from **The Woman** ("just a little bit?"). Gesture from **The Man** ("I said 'no!'").

Pause.

The Woman Why not?

The Man Because you can't.

The Woman Oh. It's fragile.

The Man No. It's strong.

The Woman Oh.

Pause.

The Woman Who put it here?

The Man Me.

The Woman You?

The Man Me.

The Woman All by yourself?

The Man All by myself.

The Woman Could you manage?

The Man I could.

The Woman It's not heavy?

The Man It's not heavy.

The Woman AAAHHH! OHHH!! It's not heavy! It's not heavy, it's not heavy!! How marvellous! It's not heavy. We'll put it here, we'll put it there, like that or like that, to the right and turned round, and so on!

Pause.

The Man If you remember, we agreed that it was important for it to be simple, light, agile, light, dynamic and light, forgoing all complications and extravagances. Light, yes, light, but solid, too. In its own way. And here it is, just like that. I'm quite pleased with it. I like the way it turned out.

The Woman Are you sure about it?

The Man Yes.

The Woman Convinced?

The Man Yes.

The Woman Yes?

The Man Yes.

Pause. **The Woman** points at the parcel and looks at **The Man**.

The Woman May I?

Darkness.

Scene Six

Lights. The Male Friend, by himself, sings: 'Strangers in the Night'.

Darkness.

Scene Seven

Darkness. Noise of paper that someone is tearing and crumpling up. Lights. Some patterned fabric waving in the air. Bits of paper on the floor. The Woman, under the fabric (sheets). She lets out a rather hysterical scream when she finds that she cannot get out from under them (she opened the parcel and took them out in such a rush that she has become entangled in them). Finally, she manages to free herself from the sheets and throws them on the bed. She exhales and fixes her hair. Nervous, excited, she moves towards the bed. In a great hurry (she is really anxious about seeing the bed all made up and neat), she separates the sheets (the bottom and the top sheet). She stretches out the bottom sheet and covers the bed with it. She stretches out the top sheet. She quickly moves away from the bed to the other side of the room in order to see what it looks like.

Pause.

The bed, frankly, is poorly made up: wrinkles all around, corners that hang, uneven on all sides, etc.

The Woman Oh, oh, oh!, what a mess and what a disaster, oh, how awful, how awful!

In a fit of fury and shame she moves towards the bed, tears off the sheets and throws them on the floor. Pause. She calms down. She exhales. She looks at the bed. She looks at the sheets. She seems to be in deep concentration.

The Woman A second time, a second time, everything always turns out great the second time round. Now, come on, let's try again. Without rushing this time.

Smiling, she grabs the bottom sheet and unfurls it in the air. She lets it fall gently on the bed. With great care, with very delicate gestures, she takes the top sheet and places it gracefully on the bed. She evens out the wrinkles, checks that the corners and the ends etc. are the same. While she does all this, she sings a parody of 'My Way'.

Pause. She moves away from the bed and looks at it all. She smiles with satisfaction.

Oh. How stunning! Now that's it.

Pause.

That's it.

Darkness.

Scene Eight

Lights. The Male Friend and The Female Friend. The Male Friend is sitting on the floor, with a lost look, calmly smoking a cigarette. The Female Friend, standing, at the side of the bed, wearing only her knickers, bra and high-heeled shoes, lets out a cry of desperation and obsessively examines her hands.

The Female Friend Aaaaah!!

Pause.

Help me. Help me. Help me. Help me. I can't, can't you see?, I can't do it, there's a resistance, a contrary force, reactionary, contrary to the impulse, to the natural impulse, to the impulse I have, that comes from inside me, and it's preventing me, you see, oh, what shit!, you saw, how embarrassing, you saw, didn't you?, or no, or perhaps not?, but, so, the thing is there's no way, it won't open, it doesn't want to, yes, yes, that's it, it's the one who doesn't want to, oh, not me!, it's not me, you saw, didn't you?, oh, it doesn't want to, it won't let me, it's keeping me from, what?, oh!, bloody reactionary thing!, and it's also the fault of the

fucking, this fucking thing in the back, yes, that's it, it's the one, and it's also this other thing, it's their fault!

Darkness.

Scene Nine

Lights. The Man and The Woman.

The Woman I don't know if I should cry.

The Man Don't take it that way.

The Woman I do take it that way . . . and more.

Pause.

The Woman I think I'm going to cry.

The Man It's nothing to cry about.

The Woman It is something to cry about . . . and more.

Pause.

The Woman It takes very little. Very little.

The Man For what?

The Woman For me to cry.

The Man We shouldn't attach so much importance to it.

The Woman We should attach so much importance to it . . . and more.

Pause.

The Woman I'm crying.

The Man Crying won't solve anything.

The Woman Then, well, I'll stop crying because this problem has to be solved some way or another.

Pause.

The Woman I've stopped crying.

The Man That sounds fine to me. Now what?

The Woman I think I want to be alone, to think things over.

Pause.

The Woman I knew it.

The Man What?

The Woman That.

Pause.

The Woman I've got a theory.

Pause.

The Man About what?

The Woman About what's happening.

Pause.

The Man Tell me.

The Woman Do you know who's to blame?

The Man For what?

The Woman For what's just happened to us.

The Man No. Who?

The Woman I don't know if I should tell you.

The Man Why?

The Woman Because I know you'll laugh.

The Man I won't laugh.

The Woman You will laugh.

The Man Whose fault is it? Mine?

The Woman No. Not yours.

The Man Whose is it, then?

The Woman It's . . .

Darkness.

Scene Ten

Lights. The Female Friend, by herself, facing the audience. She smiles maliciously.

The Female Friend Yes, much more . . . much more . . .
Yes, yes, yes, this is my great opportunity!

She adopts a provocative pose. She sticks out her tongue.

Yoo hoo!

She struts about in a sensual way, looking at the audience.

Good evening . . .

She stops. She comes out of the pose.

Oh, no, no, even better!

With a high level of eroticism, she does a striptease, like a cabaret performer, until she is standing in her bra and knickers. She looks at the audience.

Hello, how're you doing?

Darkness.

Scene Eleven

Lights. The Woman, by herself, moving around the bed in circles.

The Woman I don't understand anything at all.

Pause.

Why? Why? Why?

Pause.

And how?

Pause.

Oh. Make fun of it. Make fun of it. But how can I make fun of it?

Pause. She looks at the bed.

Oh, it's already making me nervous, yes, it's making me hysterical, hysterical! It's beginning to make me hysterical, this thing! Ugh! Not good. If it's already making me nervous now, oh, how awful! All new, so new, too new!

Pause.

Make fun of it . . . Make fun of it . . . But how can I make fun of ill-fated Destiny? Destiny! Oh, fucking destiny! Fucking bed! And fucking sheets! Fucking evening and all that time wasted! Oh, yes, fucking everything!!

She starts to make a gesture of furious rage towards the bed, but then she restrains herself, amusingly.

Darkness.

Scene Twelve

Lights. The Male Friend, by himself, in the centre of the bedroom, facing the audience. He has one hand in his trouser pocket. He shakes, somewhat obscenely, the inside of his pocket. He takes out his hand. He moves his fingers as if there were something 'stuck' to them. He smells his fingers. He looks at them. He smells them again. He loves the smell.

The Male Friend Oh. What a stench. Mouldy.

Pause. He lets his gaze wander about the bedroom until he sees the bed.

Fantastic.

Pause. He looks at his body, his hands.

Not sweets.

Pause.

Or flowers.

Pause.

Or champagne, either.

Pause.

I'm a man of my time.

Pause. He looks at the bed.

Like you.

Darkness.

Scene Thirteen

Lights. The Man and The Woman. The Woman slaps The Man violently.

The Woman Your sweet revenge, eh? You did it on purpose, didn't you?

The Man No.

The Woman Well, it seemed that way to me, all the signs were there.

The Man You're right, I did it on purpose, but it was for your own good, to fix it for you, that's the way it's done, believe me, with one swift blow. Try it and you'll see.

The Woman takes a few steps.

The Man Better?

The Woman Better.

The Man You see?

The Woman Thank you and I'm sorry.

Pause.

The Woman Well, let's get on with it: you take care of him and I'll take care of her. It's obvious.

The Man It makes sense.

The Woman It's normal and don't interrupt me. Now, well, by phone, just a date. No explanations on the phone. I hate the phone. And even more so today, of course, after those pitiful calls. Oh, don't remind me of them.

The Man I didn't remind you of anything.

The Woman Be quiet and don't make me lose my concentration! Yes, that's it, ring them up straight away. And then . . .

The Man What?

The Woman Shut up! . . .

The Man Sorry.

The Woman Then . . . they arrive, they see, and we attack.

The Man OK.

The Woman You take him.

The Man And you take her.

They look at each other.

Darkness.

Scene Fourteen

Lights. The Man, The Woman and The Female Friend. The Man is crouching at the side of the bed, meticulously examining one of its corners. On the other side, The Female Friend, radiant with joy, walks towards The Woman with open arms. All of a sudden, she makes a funny and exaggerated leap, as in a circus act.

The Woman lets out a wild shriek, also smiling. **The Female Friend** lets herself fall spectacularly on the floor, on her back. **The Woman** goes up to **The Female Friend**, opens her legs like a ballerina, and also lets herself drop to the ground. **The Female Friend** screams and gets up. **The Woman** stretches out her hand to her so that **The Female Friend** can stand up. **The Female Friend** gives her her hand and both of them outline, between exclamations of joy, a strange choreographed spectacle. Finally, **The Woman** pulls **The Female Friend** energetically, who falls brusquely on her. Simultaneous squeals from both of them. **The Man** does not seem to have noticed anything that is going on. *Pause.*

The Man I think something's cracked.

Darkness.

Scene Fifteen

Lights. **The Man** and **The Male Friend**. Both facing the audience. **The Man** grabs **The Male Friend** by the shoulders, preventing him from turning to see the bed.

The Male Friend What's that there behind us; my friend?

The Man Not yet.

The Male Friend You like mysteries. I like mysteries. I like mysterious encounters; they excite me. I haven't played hard to get. I didn't take long to get here. I've come. And now you won't let me see.

The Man Not yet.

The Male Friend I'm almost trembling with expectation.

The Man Not yet, not yet.

Pause.

The Male Friend Speak!

Pause.

The Man It's special, very special. Dimensions that may seem implausible to you (nevertheless, they're well calculated). I myself am the designer: two by two metres. Someday I'll explain why. When I finally figure it out. I still don't know. Notice notice notice the spatial layout. Spatial here means 'in space'. Its position. It's very important, too important for someone like you not to notice, when it comes to formulating, postulating, formulating a judgement (I know you'll inevitably do it, I know you too well). Just right. Balanced in a logic of disequilibrium. I'll go on. It's just that I'd prefer to prepare you for it, to warn you.

The Male Friend I like listening to you.

The Man The Dimensions. The Position. Thirdly: the Material. Noble. Noble. Noble. Like me, like you, discreet and masculine. To sum up, a noble material. Dimensions. Position. Material. After that: Character. The most difficult, the character, the design of the character. What made my head spin night after night (I couldn't sleep). Sober, sober, sobriety, above all, sobriety, sensible sobriety and sensible above all. Overwhelming blow from the edges, rotund firmness of the corners, predictable autonomy, vigorous simplicity, visible functionality, energetic receipt of repose, maximum resistance at the limit of the wildest coitus, and above all: material mutability (I can't stand carelessness!). That's it, its character.

The Male Friend Oh. Don't stop, don't stop.

The Man And finally: Action. Action, which is a condition. Action inherent in the character (I just told you about that), required by the dimensional and material contents, although still to be resolved. (I don't know if you understand me.) It's the invitation: the rhythmic and zigzagging convulsions of the pre-orgiastic act that has yet to be consummated. The unrepeatably moment, which humbly and generously I've wanted to offer you. I don't know if you understand me but that's why you're here!

The Male Friend Ah!

The Man Now you're prepared. Now you are. You're in an optimum condition to judge and admire it, look at it and criticise it, my dear friend. Remember: Dimensions, Position, Material, Character, and Action and/or Condition.

Pause.

The Man You can turn round.

The Man *lets go of him. The Male Friend turns round.*
Silence.

The Male Friend Oh!

Pause.

The Male Friend I'm speechless.

The Man You don't need to say anything.

The Male Friend Oh!

The Male Friend *cries.*

The Man You're crying.

The Male Friend Tears of joy. I'm so moved.

The Man You make me so happy.

The Male Friend You're a genius, you're a genius, you're a genius, kiss me, my friend, my head is spinning, come, come and give me a hug, my friend, I need you to touch me, grab me, take me in your arms . . .

Darkness.

Scene Sixteen

Lights. The Woman and The Female Friend on either side of the bed.

The Female Friend No.

The Woman *looks at The Female Friend. Pause. The Woman goes up to The Female Friend.*

The Woman You've been looking rather thin lately. You can't have been eating properly, I can tell from the colour of your face. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately? Your skin is drier than ever and your cheekbones look awfully prominent, jutting out. Deep wrinkles are visible at the corners of your eyes, and you've already got dark rings under them like bin-bags. Have you been to the doctor? You've got to, got to, got to go, please, in case you're suffering from something serious. Extremely serious. Oh, look at you!, look at you, you've got some kind of yellow scaly thing underneath your lips, on your chin, and you have all that chafing on your neck! Malnutrition? Exhaustion? Stress? Anxiety? . . . No, I know what it is: neglect! Oh, I don't believe it. Ugh!, and that hair?! You look absolutely terrible. We'll have to do something about this, because if we don't . . .

The Female Friend You know what?, I hadn't even noticed, I hadn't even noticed.

Darkness.

Scene Seventeen

Lights. The Woman, The Man, and The Male Friend. All three, motionless, forming a semicircle facing the audience, stare at a part of the floor.

The Woman And that?

The Man That?

The Woman Yes: that.

The Male Friend I . . .

The Man The Stendhal syndrome.

The Male Friend The Stendhal syndrome, that's right.

The Woman Oh.

Pause.

The Woman And?

The Man What?

The Woman The thing.

The Man The thing?

The Woman Not yet...?

The Man Not... what?

The Woman You haven't...? You haven't yet...?

The Man Oh. Yes, yes... I was going to, I was going to, but you see.

The Woman Yes, I see.

The Male Friend If I'm bothering you...

Pause.

The Woman Well, as you probably already know, the thing refers to what they just brought us.

The Male Friend Oh.

The Woman The thing refers to tonight, as you well know.

The Male Friend Oh.

The Woman And since you know perfectly well that the thing is that he and I, we can't...

The Male Friend Oh.

The Woman ... You also probably know that it upsets us not to be able to.

The Male Friend Yes, of course...

The Woman And I thought (this, too, you probably know): 'so new, new, and with this smell of newness, will it stay that way until tomorrow? OH, NO!'

The Male Friend Oh.

Pause.

The Man Do you understand?

The Male Friend Eh?

The Man She said: 'OH, NO!'

The Male Friend Oh.

The Man 'OH, NO!'

The Male Friend Yes.

The Man Yes, no: NO!

The Woman No.

The Male Friend No, no, of course.

Pause.

The Woman To think that I even cried!

The Male Friend Oh.

The Woman Out of anger!

The Man You must understand what's worrying us.

The Male Friend Yes, yes.

The Woman That's why you're here, you know.

The Male Friend That?

The Man Yes, yes, remember: 'action inherent in the character'...

The Male Friend Oh.

Pause.

The Woman What the hell did you say, if you don't mind?

Pause.

The Man I understand your silence. You need to think about it.

The Male Friend Hmm . . . yes.

The Man Think it over slowly, of course.

The Male Friend Of course.

The Man Are you having doubts?

The Male Friend Well . . . what do you expect me to say?

The Woman A man like you, so young and vigorous and adventurous, can never say no.

The Male Friend Hmm . . . of course . . . not.

The Man So, you accept?

Pause.

The Male Friend The truth is that . . . that . . .

Pause. The Woman stares at The Man and gives him a strong slap on the back.

The Woman Listen, dear, I'm under the impression that either this bloke hasn't understood anything at all or he just doesn't know anything about it. Now, what doesn't surprise me at all is that, probably all this while, instead of telling him what you had to tell him, you've been chatting about the hibernation of mussels in the North Pole, about the orthogonal bisectors of Aristotelian philosophy or about the 'actions inherent in crepuscular characters' . . . No, no, that's fine by me, you know?, it's perfectly fine by me, really, I like to gossip, too, I think it feeds the soul, you know?, but of course, it just so happens that he's here, among other things, for this thing, which of course is my idea, therefore,

if he is here it is thanks to me, and, of course, I don't mind if you waste saliva on your concept of a 'sub-realist' aesthetic, of course not!, on the other hand there are some things which really get me going, you know?, that really turn me on, you know?, what I mean is, I do it too, chat about the sexual organs of angels once in a while, you know?, I too spend hours and hours talking about the Kafkaesque so and so and the underground such and such, you know?, I'm not criticising it, that, never, of course not, it would be like criticising myself, ha! ha! ha!, but, of course, it is after all clear that, well, that I think he is here for something, let's say, more specific, isn't he?, I mean he is here thanks to my hard work, well, it was mine, the idea that is, and we agreed that nothing would happen if you . . . that since he was more your friend than mine, much more yours than mine, well, let's be clear about this, that since he was ONLY your friend, and perhaps that's the point, I mean the funny thing, well that, that you would suggest it to him in the quickest and most direct way possible, right?, that yes, I mean between neoclassical geometry, philo-aesthetic contemplation and and and and Parsifal's disease, you might well have found a little space to explain everything we've planned for him tonight, you know? . . . That's all.

Darkness.

Scene Eighteen

Lights. The Female Friend, by herself, still, in the centre of the room with a handbag. She seems nervous, or shy. She looks at the floor. She crouches down. She stretches her hand out along the floor, mechanically. She gets up. She coughs, as though she wanted to attract somebody's attention. She smiles. She coughs again. She smiles. She coughs again. The grimace on her face turns into a pout. She holds back her tears. She walks towards the bed saying:

The Female Friend Hello . . . ?

Suddenly, a deafening scream is heard. **The Female Friend** gets scared and jumps back, staring at the bed with a look of terror, as if it were the bed itself which had screamed.

Darkness.

Scene Nineteen

Lights. **The Woman**, kneeling down, is cleaning a part of the bedroom floor with a damp cloth.

The Woman Clean. Clean. Clean. Clean.

Clean floor.

Clean room.

I am clean.

Everything is clean.

It has to be clean.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Pause. She gets up. She looks at the cloth with a certain 'distance'.

Ugh!

What a stink.

How revolting.

And how dissssusting.

And that lad, with all his good looks.

Darkness.

Scene Twenty

Lights. **The Woman**, kneeling down, is cleaning a part (the same one) of the bedroom floor with a damp cloth.

The Woman Clean. Clean. Clean. Clean.

Clean floor.

Clean room.

I am clean.

Everything is clean.

It has to be clean.

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Pause. She gets up. She looks at the cloth with a certain disgust.

Ugh!

What a stink.

How revolting.

And how dissssusting.

And that lad, with all his good looks.

Pause.

Oh! . . . I just don't understand it . . . !

Scene Twenty-One

The Female Friend, by herself, upstage. She looks to the right and to the left, as if she were looking for somebody. She carries a handbag.

The Female Friend May I?

She takes a few steps forward, timidly.

It's just that the door . . . I took it upon myself . . . and . . . since . . . hello? . . . since it was . . . hello? . . . I came so quickly that . . . and since it was open . . . well . . . Yes? . . . Is anyone there?

She stops. Pause. She looks at the floor. She crouches down. She gets up again. Facing the audience.

Oh, isn't this something, what a bundle of nerves I am . . .

Pause. She turns timidly and sees the bed. She looks ahead. She looks at the bed again, etc. (she wonders: 'oh, and what can that be?'). She bends over to take a better look at it (she appears to be extremely short-sighted). She thinks something ('could it be a table?'). Finally, with abnormal speed, she opens her handbag and takes out a pair of glasses. She puts them on and looks at the bed with a sudden gesture.

Oh. A bed? Yes, of course . . .

She takes off her glasses quickly and conceals them in the bag. She looks around as though she were afraid somebody may have seen her. Pause. She walks around the bedroom absent-mindedly. She sees a part of the floor that is wet. To check, she crouches down and touches the floor with her hand. She gets up. She coughs to attract somebody's attention. She smiles. She coughs again. She smiles, but less. She coughs again. She feels lonely and is unable to hold back her tears. She walks towards the bed and says:

Hello . . . ?

Suddenly, The Woman screams from inside. The Female Friend looks at the bed and gets scared.

Voice of The Woman Ahhh!! Dear, are you already here?

The Female Friend . . . Oh, yes . . . it's just that . . . I came . . . straight away and . . . oh.

Voice of The Woman Oh, I'm coming, I'm coming, I'll be out in just a minute, right now, right now, just a moment, I'm in the middle of doing the washing!

The Female Friend Don't . . . don't . . . don't worry about me . . . Go, go right ahead . . . don't . . . don't worry about me . . . I'll wait here, I'm just fine . . . oh yes.

Scene Twenty-Two

The Woman, The Man and The Male Friend. All three, forming a semicircle, facing the audience. The Woman speaks to The Man.

The Woman . . . It just so happens that he's here, among other things, for this thing, which of course is my idea, therefore, if he is here it is thanks to me, and, of course, I don't mind if you waste saliva on your concept of a 'sub-realist' aesthetic, of course not!, on the other hand there are some things which really get me going, you know?, that really turn me on, you know?, what I mean is, I do it too,

chat about the sexual organs of angels once in a while, you know?, I too spend hours and hours talking about the Kafkaesque so and so and the underground such and such, you know?, I'm not criticising it, that, never, of course not, it would be like criticising myself, ha! ha! ha!, but, of course, it is after all clear that, well, that I think he is here for something, let's say, more specific, isn't he?, I mean he is here thanks to my hard work, well, it was mine, the idea that is, and we agreed that nothing would happen if you . . ., that since he was more your friend than mine, much more yours than mine, well, let's be clear about this, that since he was only your friend, and perhaps that's the point, I mean the funny thing, well that, that you would suggest it to him in the quickest and most direct way possible, right?, that yes, I mean between neoclassical geometry, philo-aesthetic contemplation and and and Parsifal's disease, you might well have found a little space to explain everything we've planned for him tonight, you know? . . . That's all.

The Man Yes, you are absolutely right.

Pause.

The Woman And now . . . ?

Pause.

The Woman . . . WHO'S THE ONE WHO'S GOING TO CLEAN UP ALL THIS SHIT?

Pause. The Man and The Male Friend are left staring at The Woman.

The Woman What a nerve!

Scene Twenty-Three

The Woman and The Female Friend. *They give each other a kiss on the cheek.*

The Woman Darling! So sorry to keep you waiting!

The Female Friend That's quite all right.

The Woman Now, I'll explain everything, don't worry.

The Female Friend I'm not worried about anything.

The Woman What did you say? Are you feeling all right, dear?

The Female Friend A little nervous, but I'm fine, thanks, it's nothing, nothing, it's just that I'm a bit anxious.

The Woman *takes The Female Friend by the arm and enthusiastically accompanies her over to the bed.*

The Woman Et voilà!

The Female Friend Ah.

Pause.

The Woman Well, what do you think?

The Female Friend It's so . . . so . . . so big, isn't it?

Pause.

The Woman Yes.

Pause. The Woman goes towards the bed. The Female Friend also moves closer to the bed. Both of them stand still on either side of the bed.

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend Where did you buy them?

Pause.

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend You must have had them made to measure, mustn't you?

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend Aren't there any blankets?

Pause.

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend And wasn't it difficult to make up the bed on your own?

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend And won't you have pillows?

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend Isn't that an interesting colour scheme?

The Woman Do you like the sheets?

The Female Friend What kind of fabric are they? Cotton or a polyester blend?

The Woman Do you like the sheets?!!

The Female Friend No.

Pause. The Woman stares severely at The Female Friend.

Pause. The Woman goes up to The Female Friend.

The Woman You've been looking rather thin lately. You can't have been eating properly, I can tell from the colour of your face. Have you looked at yourself in the mirror lately? Your skin is drier than ever and your cheekbones look awfully prominent, jutting out. Deep wrinkles are visible at the corners of your eyes, and you've already got dark rings under them like bin-bags. Have you been to the doctor? You've got to, got to, got to go, please, in case you're suffering from something serious. Extremely serious. Oh, look at you!, look at you, you've got some kind of yellow scaly thing underneath your lips, on your chin, and you

have all that chafing on your neck! Malnutrition? Exhaustion? Stress? Anxiety? . . . No, I know what it is: neglect! Oh, I don't believe it. Ugh!, and that hair?! You look absolutely terrible. We'll have to do something about this, because if we don't . . .

The Female Friend You know what?, I hadn't even noticed, I hadn't even noticed, but now that I can see them better, now that I've had a more careful look at them . . . I love your sheets!

The Woman Oh, really? I knew it, I knew you would like them.

The Female Friend I mean I *really* like them. They're so nice and I hadn't even realised.

Pause.

The Female Friend And so, now what?

The Woman It's better if he tells you about it.

Scene Twenty-Four

The Man and The Male Friend. *The Male Friend is crying.*

The Man You're crying.

The Male Friend Tears of joy. I'm so moved.

The Man You make me so happy.

The Male Friend You're a genius, you're a genius, you're a genius, kiss me, my friend, my head is spinning, come, come and give me a hug, my friend, I need you to touch me, grab me, take me in your arms because I think I'm going dizzy! It must be . . . it must be . . . because of the impact, I think I've got . . . I'm getting . . . **THE STENDHAL SYNDROME!**

The Man What's that?

The Male Friend Over-excitement in aesthetic contemplation, a physico-somatic disturbance when in the presence of Sublime Beauty! Oh, I can't take it any more, touch me, grab me, take me in your arms, genius-friend, ah! . . . Aaah!

The Male Friend *vomits noisily on the floor.* **The Man** *is left staring impassively at the vomit, which is already spreading on the floor.*

Scene Twenty-Five

The Man, The Woman, and The Female Friend.

The Man And there you have it in a nutshell.

The Female Friend Oh.

The Woman What do you think?

Pause.

The Female Friend Yes, yes, yes, a brilliant idea . . .

The Woman I knew it. It was mine.

The Female Friend . . . A superb idea, exciting, different, brilliant, yes, and I know, I know, I can see it now, yes, tomorrow, tomorrow, everything will have changed and life will be different and I'll be different, and it's about time too, oh, yes, and you know what?, I could already sense it, my intuition told me, earlier, just a couple of hours ago, and I was at home, in my flat, yes, you know, with nothing to do after work, lazing around, and then, suddenly, flash!, without knowing how or why I saw everything: something came over me and I knew it, something was about to happen, it would finally happen to me, and do you know why?, do you know why I know now or I knew then, yes, a couple of hours ago, at home all by myself in my nice little flat?, look, it's very simple, it's very simple, it was nothing, so, without rhyme or reason, no explanation or anything, my heart started pounding, an immense pounding, like this,

like this: BABAM! BABAM!, and you see, I got scared, at first: oh no, a heart attack!, I thought, but it wasn't, but it wasn't, but it wasn't, because right afterwards, RING, RING, RING, the sound of the phone, and I go running like mad to grab it DADADA, DADADA DADADA, and 'yes?, hello, who is it?', and then your voice so convincing, so so so firmly categorical: 'come over straight away, I need to show you something and make you an offer . . .', and, there you have it, at that moment I said to myself, a sign, a sign, my sudden beating heart was a sign, I saw it all, all of a sudden, like a revelation, tonight, I saw it clearly, sharply and all all just when I hung up the phone, and without anyone telling me about it, tonight . . . tonight . . . that's why I was so flustered when I came here . . . tonight . . .

The Woman A real début.

The Female Friend Oh, I'd been waiting for so long for something like this, an experience like this, a night like this, a complete turnaround, a radical change in my boring, godforsaken life! Oh, and it's all thanks to you, darling. Here, give me a hug, give me a hug.

The Female Friend *walks towards The Woman with open arms and a smile of gratitude, but when she steps on the wet spot, she spectacularly slips and falls flat on her back. The Woman screams and goes to help her, but as she comes near, she too slips and her legs fly open. The Female Friend gets up and shrieks when she sees The Woman on the floor. The Woman asks for help, stretching out her arms. The Female Friend tries to lift her up but she cannot. There is a tottering struggle between them, amid cries of desperation from both women. Finally, The Woman swiftly yanks the arm of The Female Friend in one final attempt to lift herself up. The Female Friend ends up falling on top of her. Hysterical screams from both of them. All the while, The Man, who for some time has been paying no attention to what The Female Friend has been saying, seems to have discovered an irregularity in one of the legs of the bed. He has bent over and is meticulously examining the leg. He does not seem to have noticed anything else that has been going on, busy and preoccupied as he is with the bed.*

The Man I think something's cracked.

The Woman *finally gets up with an almost superhuman effort.*

The Woman It's the windows' fault, the windows, there aren't any windows, there aren't any, and there isn't any ventilation, and this hasn't dried up yet, shit! That . . . shitty Parsifal!

The Female Friend Yes, I think I'm the one who's cracked.

The Man The leg.

The Woman Good God!

Scene Twenty-Six

The Man and The Woman. *A shoe on the floor, and near it, The Woman stretched out with a leg in the air. The Man is giving her a foot massage, with absolute tenderness.*

The Woman Did you understand, or didn't you?

The Man Yes. Well, not really.

The Woman Sometimes I really think you're an idiot. Didn't we want a really big début, a solemn inauguration, tonight, this very night?

Pause.

The Man OK?

The Woman Yes.

Pause.

The Woman He is nice-looking and she is nice-looking, he is young and she is young.

The Man Is that OK?

The Woman Yes.

Pause.

The Woman It couldn't be more perfect, more complete: a real first-night *début*, the thing's *début* and their *début*, the *début* of a couple for a *début*, in the *début* they'll be making a *début* themselves, by making a *début* themselves they'll be giving it a *début*, by giving it a *début*, they'll be making a *début* themselves, it is **THE DÉBUT BY MAKING A DÉBUT**.

Pause.

The Woman Oh, sometimes I'm just so incredible.

The Man *violently grabs The Woman's foot and gives it a sharp tug.*

The Woman Ouch! That hurts! Oh, you've hurt me! You beast!

The Man Just a little jolt to put everything in place.

The Woman Do you expect me to believe that?

The Man Of course.

The Woman What's the matter?, you're upset it was mine and not yours, aren't you? The idea, that is. That's it, isn't it?

She gets up and puts on her shoe. She slaps him violently.

The Woman This is your sweet revenge, eh? You did it on purpose, didn't you?

The Man No.

The Woman Well, it seemed that way to me, all the signs were there.

The Man You're right, I did it on purpose, but it was for your own good, to fix it for you, that's the way it's done, believe me, one swift blow. Try it and you'll see.

The Woman *takes a few steps. Carefully.*

The Man Better?

The Woman Better.

The Man You see?

The Woman Thank you and I'm sorry.

Pause.

The Woman Well, let's get on with it: you take care of him and I'll take care of her.

Scene Twenty-Seven

The Male Friend, *by himself, at the back of the bedroom with a key in his hand. He walks towards the audience.*

The Male Friend Hey? Oh? Good evening good evening? . . . It's not a good evening? . . . Oh, never mind. Oh . . . never mind. Too early. Why am I always so reliable and oh, so polite, so perfect?

He looks at his watch.

So perfect that I'm early, yes, I'm early in everything, as always, I'm really what they call an earlycomer. Twenty. Minutes.

Pause. He looks at the key. He puts it in his trouser pocket. He forces his hand deep into his pocket as if it were hard to get the key into it. He takes out his hand. He moves his fingers (they are sticky). He smells them. He looks at them. He smells them again. He looks at his pocket.

Oh. What a stench. Mouldy.

Pause. He looks at the bed.

Fantastic.

Pause. He looks at his body, his hands.

Not sweets. Or flowers. Or champagne either. I'm a man of my time.

He looks at the bed.

Like you. Nothing ornamental or frivolous, nothing but our very own integrity intact, without any revolting romanticism, or absurd little gifts. Yes, you are perfect, too. Because you're like me, I'm like you and I've come too early, since the two of us are ahead of the game, on the cutting edge of our time, I haven't brought anything, like you, and I'm going out for a walk, oh, don't you worry, I'll be back, my bed-friend, for you, for you and with nothing, stripped naked in front of you and in front of . . . her, without frivolity or extravagance, without gifts, and God I'm hot and I'm leaving, the impact is too intense when I look at you and the unknown woman is unknown and that's why she'll be late, I bet she's a latecomer, of course, she's a woman, what do you expect, they knew how to sell her to me, my brother, but they don't know the truth, that I'm not here for the latecomer, but for you, and I've agreed to it for you, and I'll do everything for you, only for you, my soul-brother, my equal.

Pause.

Keep my secret.

Pause.

The secret between a man and . . . an object, like the secret between a man and another man.

Pause.

I love you.

Scene Twenty-Eight

The Woman, by herself, moving around the bed in circles.

The Woman How can I make fun of Ill-Fated Destiny? Destiny! Oh fucking destiny! Fucking bed! And fucking

sheets! Fucking evening and all that time wasted! Oh, yes, fucking everything!

With an attack of furious rage, she begins to kick the bed. For a good while. Suddenly, she remains still — she has doubtless hurt herself — and without the slightest sound of pain, with complete dignity, she arranges her dress, her hair, etc. She hobbles around the bed.

Oh, I've hurt myself.

She continues limping around the bed.

It had to be like this.

Pause.

And now, on top of everything, crippled for the rest of my life. It had to be like this, of course. It was also in the stars that I'd have to have my leg amputated, that was also in the stars. Just like everything else. Everything was in the stars. Yes, everything in the . . . stars!

She stops.

But . . . and if . . . ? Yes! Yes! Oh, now I've got it, I've got it!

Her face radiates with joy. She calms down. And, suddenly, she remembers her foot hurts.

Ah! Ah! Ah! Oh! Help! It hurts! Oh! I've hurt myself! Help!! My foot, my foot, my foot!! . . .

Scene Twenty-Nine

The Female Friend, at the back of the bedroom. She walks towards the audience. She is nervous.

Female Friend Hello . . . ?

Pause. She looks all around. She relaxes. Suddenly, she energetically scratches her armpits and her breasts.

Oh, this damn thing won't stop itching! I feel so so so hemmed in and-constrained . . . ! Oh!

Suddenly, she stops and remains still.

Oh, could he be hiding somewhere and spying on me?!

She looks under the bed.

No. Ugh.

Pause.

Ha, ha. And now what? And now what? Wait for him. Oh. Excitement? Intrigue? And what, what will he be like? I'm dying to know. Probably handsome, masculine, charming and a bit of a sadist. Ah, yes, yes, yes, if everything goes well, (it will, I'm sure), tomorrow I'll give up, yes, I'll give up my job, I'll tell them categorically: 'go to hell all of you, my life has changed, and I'm not dreaming, it's wonderful, exciting, different, and I'm leaving and you can all stay here, you're a bunch of boring louts!' Oh. Ha!, ha!, ha! Sometimes I'm so ADVENTUROUS and so so so wild! Oh, what fun! I can't wait to see their faces . . . they're going to be left right in the lurch . . . and how they'll hate me . . . !!

Pause.

Hey, he's awfully late, isn't he? Ahhh, it's better that way, it increases the expectation, the excitement, the . . . LIBIDO, well. Ah . . . the chance of a lifetime!

Pause.

Let's see, let's go over everything one last time: first of all, don't look dull; secondly, be natural, spontaneous, spectacular, divine and feminine at all times; thirdly, don't put my glasses on (that's most important because if he sees me with my glasses, he'll never get it up); fourthly, I've got to appear totally lewd, corrupt and degenerate. Oh, I'll be a provocative bitch, he'll love it, he'll love it. Yes . . . it could be exciting, yes, more exciting if I do the bitch thing, yes, much more, much more. Yes, yes, yes, my great opportunity.

She adopts a lewd and provocative pose. She sticks out her tongue.

Yoo hoo!

She walks about awkwardly, trying to be what she is not and cannot be, with her eyes on the door.

Good evening . . .

She stops. She comes out of the pose.

Oh, no, no, even better!

She takes off her clothes as if she were trying to perform a very sexy strip-tease. But it turns out to be absolutely ridiculous and even pathetic. She stands in her bra and knickers.

Hello, how're you doing?

The rattling of some keys in the lock of the door. Noise of the door opening and shutting. The Female Friend, who was practically in a state of ecstasy, realises that it is The Male Friend who is coming in. She reacts suddenly and, since she does not have time to get dressed, a look of terror appears on her face and she lets out a muffled scream.

Scene Thirty

The Man and The Woman.

The Woman I've got a theory.

The Man About what?

The Woman About what's happening.

The Man Tell me.

The Woman Do you know who's to blame?

The Man For what?

The Woman For what's just happened to us.

The Man No. Who?

The Woman I don't know if I should tell you.

The Man Why?

The Woman Because I know you'll laugh.

The Man I won't laugh.

The Woman You will laugh.

The Man Whose fault is it? Mine?

The Woman No. Not yours.

The Man Whose is it, then?

The Woman It's DESTINY's fault!, fucking destiny, it doesn't like me, it doesn't like you, it doesn't like us,

She points to the bed.

it doesn't like it and, as a result, it's a bad sign!, I'm telling you, believe me, it's a bad sign when destiny doesn't like you, that destiny goes and fucks with you, like it's just fucked with us now: it fucks with me by telephone and it fucks with you by telephone, too; destiny almost always fucks with you by telephone, you can see how amusing the whole thing is, can't you?; because the person who just called me was not my brother-in-law telling me tonight my sister's going to have an operation and I have to spend the night with her at the hospital, oh, no, no, just like the person who just called you was not your boss telling you that it's today and not three weeks from now that you have to begin the night shift, oh, no, no, it wasn't my brother-in-law or your boss, no!, it was the voice of destiny, of TRAGIC DESTINY, which diabolically disguised itself as my brother-in-law and your boss, and went over our heads to bog us down and fuck us up and play such a dirty trick on us, so we wouldn't be able to give it its debut tonight. Fucking destiny.

Pause.

The Man It's not so tragic.

The Woman If it's not so tragic for you that destiny is working against us and doing us harm, then we might as well just call the whole thing off once and for all.

Pause.

The Woman Alone! Leave me alone!

Scene Thirty-One

The Male Friend, holding a key, and **The Female Friend**.
He has just surprised her in her underwear.

The Male Friend Hello.

The Female Friend Hello.

Pause. The Female Friend tries to cover up the awkwardness of the situation. In spite of this, The Male Friend also feels uncomfortable and surprised.

The Male Friend Pleased to meet you. I'm sorry I'm late. But, in fact, I came earlier. Much earlier. So, I'm not running late and I'm not a latecomer either. I just went out for a walk. You see, I had already come. You hadn't yet. That's precisely why I went for a walk. Pleased to meet you. To get some fresh air.

The Female Friend I had a hot flush, as well.

The Male Friend Right. And a key, as well.

The Female Friend I was finding the heat rather oppressive, as you can see.

The Male Friend Yes, yes, I can see. And you had a key, as well.

The Female Friend As well. Ha, ha, delighted to meet you.

The Male Friend Right.

They shake hands, clumsily. The key falls from The Male Friend's hand. He picks it up and puts it in his trouser pocket. The Female Friend misinterprets his gesture and gives him a stare that is intended to be provocative. The Male Friend coughs, perhaps uncomfortably, rather coldly. The Female Friend misinterprets his attitude.

The Female Friend Well, then . . .

The Female Friend places her hands behind her to undo her bra. The Male Friend does not understand anything that is going on. Suddenly, The Female Friend becomes engaged in a serious struggle to undo her bra. The Male Friend does not laugh, nor does he make the slightest gesture to help her or to go near her. The Female Friend, indirectly, asks him for help and continues to struggle with her bra. The fight is already a feverish war with the bra and she is already sweating, she despairs in silence, gasps and nearly chokes. The Male Friend tries to help her, but immediately he has had enough. Unmoved, he sits down on the floor and calmly, takes out a cigarette, lights it and smokes. He contemplates, entranced, the smoke that he elegantly exhales. The Female Friend, weakened from the battle with her bra, takes her aching hands from behind her back, looks at them and lets out a cry of desperation.

The Female Friend Aaaah! Help me, help me, help me, help me. I can't, can't you see?, I can't do it, there's a resistance, a contrary force, reactionary, contrary to the impulse, to the natural impulse, to the impulse I have, that comes from inside me, and it's preventing me, you see, oh, what shit!, you saw, how embarrassing, you saw, didn't you?, or no, or perhaps not?, but, so, the thing is there's no way, it won't open, it doesn't want to, yes, yes, that's it, it's the one who doesn't want to, oh, not me!, it's not me, you saw, didn't you?, oh, it doesn't want to, it won't let me, it's keeping me from, what?, oh!, bloody reactionary thing!, and it's also the fault of the fucking, this fucking thing in the back, yes, that's it, it's the one, and it's also this other thing, it's their fault, the BRA and the CLIP, the fucking clip, this clip that you can't see, you haven't seen, but it's there, here in the back, revolting, difficult, screwed-up, twisted, it hates

me, it hates me and that's why it's burning my fingers, the bloody clip, it's destroying them, this fucking clip, you see, it goes on like a mad woman, like a strait-laced nun that won't open, it doesn't want to open, it doesn't want to, it's a hook with two hooks that grip each other, then come together, intertwine and they won't let anyone anyone anyone take them apart, not a finger, no, not a finger of mine, not one of mine, not one of my fingers can unfasten it, and look at what's happened to them: reddish, black and blue, hurting, frustrated!, oh you absurd hook!, and do you know what?, do you know the best part?, that, this afternoon, yes, this . . . very afternoon, when I left this place, I bought it for you, this REACTIONARY bra, yes, for you and for you, and now it doesn't want to, it won't let me, it doesn't want to, it's rebelling against me. It doesn't want to . . . let me show them to you.

The Male Friend Show them to me?

The Female Friend My breasts.

The Male Friend Oh.

Pause. He puts out his cigarette on the floor, slowly.

Listen . . . and who told you that I wanted to . . . ?, that I wanted you to . . . that your . . . that you would . . . ?

Pause.

The Female Friend I'm cold.

The Male Friend Right.

The Female Friend And I'm going to the lavatory.

The Male Friend Oh, OK. Female matters, women's business.

The Female Friend What?

The Male Friend Your period?

The Female Friend No.

Pause.

For a shit.

Scene Thirty-Two

The Woman, *contemplating the bed from a distance, nervous, in a bad mood, overexcited.*

The Woman Oh!, what a mess and what a disaster, oh, how awful, how awfull

Suddenly, something comes over her, a kind of hysterical fit, and she flings herself towards the bed as though she were insane. She tears off the sheets and brutally throws them on the floor. Pause. She has a wild expression on her face. She exhales. She seems to calm down. She looks at the bed and the sheets. She closes her eyes as if she were forcing herself to calm down, to concentrate.

A second time, a second time.

Pause.

Everything always turns out great the second time round.

Pause.

Now, come on!

Scene Thirty-Three

The Male Friend, *by himself.*

The Male Friend I can go to the chemist's!

Pause.

Well, I don't think she can hear me. What do you know, the unknown woman has turned out to be hysterical, histrionic and absurdly romantic, a strange specimen, a scatter-brained romantic, ridiculously old-fashioned, and I think

I'm getting bored, and that I'm falling asleep and I don't know what the hell I'm doing here.

He looks at the bed.

Excuse me. It was a small oversight, don't think I forgot about you.

Pause.

But, what should I do?: to kill or not to kill time?, to go or not to go, that is the question and tomorrow I've got a lot of work to do, oh, I am so tired, but no, no, I don't want to infect you with my lethargy, my friend.

Pause. To the bed.

I know what you're thinking: what a night and how odd, right?, two lost souls, especially her, two strangers, and you right in the middle, imposing, thinking: 'what are they doing here, two strangers in the night?' Oh, two strangers in the night . . . let's kill some time . . .

He starts singing, with a terrible accent and a sense of pitch that is even worse, a song that 'is intended to sound' like 'Strangers in the Night'. Just when he has finished singing, he sits down, and the loud flushing of a lavatory can be heard.

Scene Thirty-Four

Lights. The Man and The Woman.

The Woman Oh! It's not heavy! It's not heavy, it's not heavy!! How marvellous! It's not heavy.

The Man If you remember . . . we agreed that it was important for it to be simple. Light. Agile. Light. Dynamic. And light. Forgoing all complications. And extravagances. Light. Yes. Light. But solid, too. In its own way.

Pause.

And here it is.

Pause.

Just like that.

Scene Thirty-Five

The Male Friend and The Female Friend. *The Female Friend, having just emerged from the lavatory, in her knickers and one of The Woman's night shirts.*

The Female Friend I didn't know you were a singer.

The Male Friend I'm not.

The Female Friend You sing quite well.

The Male Friend Well, there you are.

The Female Friend There you are.

Pause.

The Male Friend I enjoy singing. That's all. There's no mystery to it: when I sing I enjoy myself, when I'm enjoying myself, I sing, I sing to enjoy myself and I sing when I'm bored.

The Female Friend Oh.

Pause.

The Male Friend A cigarette?

The Female Friend Shall we talk?

The Male Friend A cigarette?

The Female Friend Shall we sit down?

The Male Friend What?!

Pause. The Male Friend glares severely at her. He lights up a cigarette and smokes.

The Female Friend A cigarette.

The Male Friend *gives her a cigarette and moves away from her.*

The Female Friend A light.

The Male Friend What?

The Female Friend Hmm . . . A light.

The Male Friend Excuse me?

The Female Friend I would like to smoke it.

The Male Friend Oh.

The Male Friend *gives her a lighter. The Female Friend lights the cigarette and gives the lighter back to him. She is very suggestive: she closes her eyes and offers him her mouth. The Male Friend, with an obvious effort, brings his mouth close to hers, to kiss her, but he stops when he sees the ridiculous expression on her face. He moves away from her with large strides. She tries to hide her embarrassment.*

The Female Friend Hey, ha ha.

Pause.

Have you noticed? There's not a single chair in this bedroom.

The Male Friend In this BEAUTIFUL bedroom.

The Female Friend Yes.

The Male Friend No. There aren't any.

The Female Friend No.

The Male Friend That's the way it is. Austerity, austere, austerity above all else . . .

The Female Friend Of course, of course.

The Male Friend Just a bed. Because this is a bedroom. Not a living-room. Not a dining-room. Just as it should be.

The Female Friend Right.

Pause.

The Female Friend Because . . . of course, it would be absurd, wouldn't it?, for you and me . . . you and me . . . to sit on it now, wouldn't it?

The Male Friend I hope you're not serious, I hope and wish that it's merely a whim, a passing thought, for a brief, fleeting, spontaneous moment. A joke, ehemm . . . in bad taste. THIS IS A BED. Not a chair. Not a divan. Not a stool. Not a sofa. Not a pouffe.

The Female Friend Just what I was saying: it would be absurd.

The Male Friend It would be unforgivable. Imagine the situation just for a moment, please: you and me, perfect strangers, without knowing what to say to each other, without daring to look at each other, talking about the weather or about the whims of chance, you on the left and me on the right, arms folded in front of us so they don't betray the awkwardness of this stupid conversation and, above all, the most incredible thing about it, the most intolerable thing: WITH OUR LEGS HANGING OVER THE EDGE! Imagine!

The Female Friend Oh, yes, how horrible!

The Male Friend It would be . . .

The Female Friend It would be unforgivable.

The Male Friend . . . An absolute betrayal.

Pause.

The Female Friend Excuse me . . . you said . . . a betrayal? A . . . betrayal? Hmm . . . of who? Hmm . . . of what? Hmm . . . it, no, never mind, I'm not interested, you know?, well, actually, I am very interested, you know?, in knowing why . . . you think, you could possibly think or consider that you and me sitting here with our . . . (how embarrassing, really, now I can see, ah, yes, now I can see, oh) . . . with our . . . legs . . . like that . . . dangling (it really is something, isn't it, it really is wild, don't you think?) . . .

would be . . . a . . . betrayal . . . No, and I mean I'm interested, you know?, because, of course, I personally find the whole thing absolutely preposterous, out of proportion as an image, don't you think?, I mean I find it ridiculous and much more, you know?, but of course, come on . . . betrayal betrayal perhaps . . . perhaps not so much, you know?, of course God knows, you know?, God knows what you were *thinking when you said that*, you know?, but go on, it's just that in fact I don't know if I really understand you completely: which for me is rather embarrassing, it just so happens that for you it is a betrayal . . . no, no I've already told you: I'm interested, you know?, don't take it the wrong way, I'm interested perhaps in knowing what the hell could have compelled you to say so, and let it be said in passing, to say so in that way – how should I say? – which was so well put, wasn't it?, so strongly, well, yes, yes, I mean that if you don't mind, well . . . that there must be an explanation, I think . . . or perhaps not . . . what what what what were you referring to when you mentioned a . . . 'betrayal'?

Pause.

The Male Friend You and me sitting here, on it. A betrayal of the bed, obviously.

The Female Friend Oh, yes, the bed, of course. What else could it have been? Excuse me: WHO else could it have been?

The Female Friend, *offended, gives him a severe look.* **The Male Friend** *puts out his cigarette on the floor. She observes him now with an air of superiority.*

The Female Friend Hmm . . . a slight problem, just a slight problem: if you are you and I am me, and the bed is a bed (above all the bed, of course, which is a bed and nothing more, as I already know very well thanks to you), so, here, in my opinion, this place where we are right now should be a BEDROOM AND NOT AN ASHTRAY.

Quickly, **The Male Friend**, embarrassed, picks up the cigarette butts from the floor and blows on the ashes. **The Female Friend** looks at him and, ceremoniously, puts out her cigarette on the sole of her shoe and offers it to him with a certain aloofness.

The Female Friend A present.

The Male Friend Thank you.

The Female Friend Don't mention it.

The Female Friend places the extinguished cigarette in **The Male Friend's** outstretched hand, next to the others. Both of them remain silent, staring at the cigarette butts.

The Male Friend/The Female Friend What a stench!

The Male Friend Sorry?

The Female Friend What?

The Male Friend No, nothing.

The Female Friend Me neither, then.

The Male Friend Very well, then.

The Female Friend Well yes.

Pause. The Male Friend yawns unashamedly. When The Female Friend sees this, she suddenly feels insulted; degraded. She moves away from him with tears in her eyes. Pause. The two of them end up stretching out on the floor. The Female Friend once again catches the attention of The Male Friend in order to return the yawn.

Scene Thirty-Six

The Man, behind the bed, facing the audience.

The Man Two by two . . .

Pause. Very quickly:

Sorry? What? Excuse me? Oh, yes, yes: the advantages of a two-by-two metre bed?: all of them, to say it in a deliberately simplistic way. Blah blah blah. Blah blah blah. Blah blah blah.

Pause.

Blah.

Pause.

Blah blah of the opposite sex . . .

Pause.

Yes. Of the opposite sex.

Pause.

Opposite . . . sex. The opposite . . . sex, the sex of the opposite, of the opposite sex. Yes.

Pause.

The first . . . conclusion . . . well: bah!

Scene Thirty-Seven

The Male Friend, The Female Friend, The Man and The Woman. *The Man and The Woman have just entered the room. It is daytime. The Male Friend and The Female Friend are stretched out on the floor, in a deep slumber. The Man and The Woman stand and observe them in astonishment.*

The Woman But what's all this?!!

The Man Your idea on the floor.

The Woman Shut up, you bloody fool, no one asked you to speak!

The Man And how is your dear sister?

The Woman What difference does it make to you? Shit.

She turns and looks at the empty bed.

Oh, oh, untouched! Untouched! Untouched! But what's going on?, what's going on, or what's NOT going on? Oh, I think I'm going to have an attack!

The Man I'm going to wake them up.

The Woman Oh, nothing!, nothing!, nothing!, I'm going to go crazy! A bad sign, this is a bad sign, I know, I can feel it! There we have today's youth, snoring, sleeping on the floor with their legs spread out. Oh, how disgusting, there's no integrity here, or any self-esteem, or passion, or daring, or gallantry, nothing, oh!, impotent, diminished, null and void, yes, all of them wretched, godforsaken, impotent, nonentities!

The Man *first wakes up* **The Male Friend**, and then **The Female Friend**.

The Man Wake up.

The Male Friend Huh? Huh?

The Woman I can't, I can't, I can't believe it!

The Man Up, up, up, up, time to get up.

The Female Friend Oh. Ah. I was . . . Oh, hello. Where . . . ? How . . . ? Ah, I was dreaming that . . . that they were . . .

The Woman Dreaming, of course, dreaming . . .

The Woman, *whimpering*, *sits down on one of the corners of the bed.* **The Female Friend** *gets dressed.* **The Woman** *gives The Man a severe look.*

The Woman You know what? You can keep it and you know what you can do with it.

The Man What?

The Woman YOUR bed. As far as I am concerned, you can stuff the whole thing.

The Man What do you mean?

The Woman I've just taken an irrevocable decision.

The Man Are you feeling all right?

The Female Friend Good . . . good evening.

The Woman Good MORNING, my dear, good MORNING, love, and wipe the sleep from your eyes.

The Male Friend Hello . . . It's just that . . . that . . . I . . . ah, it must be late, I . . . was . . . wasn't . . . feeling very well, you know. I don't think she . . . she . . . either.

The Female Friend Huh?

The Male Friend *sits down on one of the other corners of the bed.* *He yawns.* **The Female Friend** *sits down on one of the other corners.* *She yawns.* **The Woman** *gives The Man a severe look.*

The Woman You don't need to pretend you're deaf.

The Man I heard you perfectly.

The Man *sits down on the unoccupied corner.* *Silence.*

The Male Friend I've got to go.

The Female Friend I've got to go.

The Male Friend I have to go to work.

The Female Friend Me too. To work.

The Male Friend I'm so tired.

The Female Friend My back aches. It aches right here, in my spine . . . Oh, it feels as if I . . . as if I'd . . .

The Woman As if you'd NOTHING, love. Nothing at all. Everything is just as it was! . . .

The Female Friend I'm going.

The Male Friend Me too.

The Woman Me too!!

The Man What?

The Woman I'm going!!

The Man Where?

The Woman I mean I'm leaving, I mean I'm not going anywhere in particular, no, no, I mean I'm going away, in . . . in general, I mean . . . not at all. Everything has turned out so terribly . . .

The Female Friend *gets up, walks in front of The Man and The Woman, and goes towards The Male Friend. She holds out her hand to him.*

The Female Friend Well, it's been a pleasure, you know?; a pleasure to meet you, I really have had an evening . . . ooh, a very . . . I mean, a night . . . really, it's been years and years and years and years since I've had, I can assure you, believe me!!!

The Male Friend Yes, yes, me too. I mean . . . me neither.

The Male Friend *coughs. The Female Friend points to his trouser pocket. He puts his hand in and takes out three cigarette butts.*

The Male Friend Hmm . . . of course . . . too much smoke.

The Female Friend Right.

The Male Friend *gets up.*

The Male Friend Goodbye.

The Female Friend Goodbye.

The Man *looks at The Woman, very seriously.*

The Man Goodbye, then!!

The Woman Yes, goodbye, you impotent fool, the play is over. Between you and me. Between all of us, as far as I can see. Nothing turns out properly if it doesn't start properly and nothing changes, my dear nonentity. And there's no way your shitty bed is going to change the shit between us.

Between anyone! Yes, Destiny, when it fucks you up, really fucks you up right until the bitter end.

The Female Friend *puts her glasses on in order to look at her watch.*

The Female Friend Oh, it's so late.

They all look at her.

Scene Thirty-Eight

The Man and The Woman.*

The Woman Well, what? Well, then. What do you think. Shall I go? Is it clear to you or . . . or . . . or . . . or not. Come on, what do you think?

The Man Goodbye.

The Woman Oh.

The Man Yes. Yes. Yes. You'd better go. Better. Better. Better.

The Woman Well, then. Now it's definite: I'm going.

The Man I'm sure that . . .

The Woman That what?

Pause.

The Woman If you need anything . . .

The Man Hmm . . . At the moment, I don't know.

The Woman Well, then, goodbye.

The Man Wait.

The Woman What?

The Man Will you be long?

*Translator's note: the original Catalan version specifies that the bed no longer be on stage during this scene. The Castilian Spanish version does not make any such indication.

The Woman Well, look, I don't know. I've got to go quite a long way. I may be.

The Man Oh, so I don't think that . . .

The Woman That what?

The Man Are you sure you don't want . . . You prefer . . . ?

The Woman It's just that I can't stay here any longer. I'm tired of doing nothing and I'm going to go and do what I should have done some time ago. I'm feeling very restless and stressed out, you know, so you stay here by yourself and I'll go. It'll be all right, in fact, just the opposite, it'll be better, because I know that . . .

The Man Do you want me to go . . .

The Woman No, no, no, no. You can't leave. You have to stay put. Just imagine if . . . Besides besides, I can do it by myself. By myself I can.

The Man You mean?

The Woman Of course! Of course, I can, you'll see, I don't think I'll get too tired, no, I don't think I'll get too tired, don't worry about me.

The Man Fine, do what you want.

The Woman Right. Come on then, that's enough pointless chattering away. (As always.) So . . . goodbye.

Pause.

Goodbye.

Pause.

Goodbye.

Pause.

GOODBYE.

The Woman leaves. **The Man** is left by himself. *Silence.*

The End.