

PASS THE BOTTLE

- a two-hander

Note

There are a number of ways to tackle this piece in terms of staging. Rather than pre-empt these, I have left the script (almost) entirely without directions, though as presented here it supposes five 'scenes' in continuous time, with minimal props and some back-projection.

PASS THE BOTTLE

The Setting

Two old friends meets for a quick drink in a busy bar. So how to spend this shrinking time? Let's invent a love affair! But whose? Our own! We'll plan it here, begin it there on the windy hill. A slow stroll on the seafront. Back here for a shag on the floor of the bar. And downhill from the slimax, all the way to the timelock

1. A BAR.

SHE POURS CIDER IN THE LOCAL WAY.

HER Nobody ever pours their own drink.

HIM It's obviously a very economical custom.

HER Don't be small-minded.

HIM Have you been here before?

HER Oh yes, it's my favourite.

HIM I hope nobody thinks I am your lover.

HER You mean another of them.

HIM Yes, something like that.

HER We could pretend.

HIM Aren't we already?

HER What?

HIM In love.

HER At a distance.

HIM Naturally.

HER Anyway, you would only two-time me.

HIM I would never two-time a married woman!

HER Wives excepted?

HIM Don't change the subject!

A BEAT

HER So why are you here anyway?

HIM By accident, I suppose. I am on my way home. But I never forgot the name of your town.

HER How kind!

HIM Or you, of course. I was passing. So I decided to find you.

HER How, exactly?

HIM I guessed where you might be. Looked in the phone book. Tried the press office.

HER You were always persuasive.

HIM I must be. They even offered me your home number. But I did not suppose that that would be - appropriate.

HER How very - understanding - of you.

HIM So I got your secretary. Told her to tell you I would be here tonight.

HER And here I am.

HIM Perhaps it was luck. Or fate.

HER How long do you have?

HIM A late flight tonight. And you?

HER I couldn't bring the car. You'll guess why. I took the bus. I haven't been on one for years! I have till ten.

HIM Isn't there a later one?

HER That's the latest.

HIM Well, I am glad you came. Even for an hour or two.

HER Yes.

THEY PASS THE BOTTLE BACK AND FORE

HIM You're still married?

HER Not much.

HIM Do you know anyone who is?

HER What?

HIM Much.

HER Anyway, it's meaningless.

HIM In one door.

HER And out the other.

HIM An interlude.

HER Between affairs.

HIM If you are lucky enough.

HER Thank God for friends.

HIM And affairs?

HER Any anyway, I am not unhappy.

HIM And is that the equivalent of being happy?

HER I don't think so.

HIM I hope not.

HER But I wouldn't know.

HIM Nor would I. Can we have more of that cider?

HER I don't want any more.

HIM Don't worry, I'll drink it for you.

SHE POURS THE LAST OF THE CIDER

HER So what do you want to do? We really don't have long.

HIM Any ideas?

HER Eat?

HIM Not hungry.

HER Walk on the hill for an hour, then?

HIM Watch the tide thrash the rocks below?

HER Come back here for a quick drink before I have to go?

HIM Or we could stay here till then.

HER And get to your flight banjaxed?

HIM Why don't we have a love affair, then?

HER With whom, and when, exactly?

HIM With each other, of course, and now.

A BEAT

HER Precisely what sort of love affair did you have in mind?

HIM Oh, nothing dirty.

HER Well, that's a relief.

HIM I mean, an invented one. An imaginary one.

HER Is this an original idea?

HIM I've never done it with anyone else.

HER And if it doesn't work out?

HIM Same as usual, we can always stop-off in another boozier.

HER Well, an imaginary one certainly couldn't be worse than a real-life one.

HIM Of course not. Everyone knows that invention improves on real life.

HER I suppose that's what it's for.

HIM And we don't have time for a real one.

HER Well, time is a bit short, don't you think?

HIM Even if we were very quick.

HER And where would we go?

HIM So. We can't have a real affair.

HER In the real world.

HIM All right, Let's imagine it.

HER Invent it.

HIM We can do anything with it, you see.

HER Both of us.

HIM Well, of course, it needs both of us.

HER Oh yes. A proper love affair does need two people.

HIM And they have to love each other.

HER It's an important convention.

HIM Of love?

HER And of story.

HIM Every love story must have two lovers.

HER One's no use.

HIM I know.

HER Me too.

HIM There's not much point otherwise.

HIM I know that too.

HER So do I.

HIM And anyway, you are married.

HER So are you!

HIM But not to each other.

HER Don't worry.

HIM It won't stop us now.

HER Our love affair will be in the realms of the higher imagination.

HIM A full relationship.

HER As opposed to what?

HIM Not this one! And it's even going to have a happy ending.

HER That is certainly an unusual end to a love affair!

THEY BEGIN TO STRIDE ABOUT THE STAGE

HER What about our ages?

HIM Keep them as they are?

HER Unless you would prefer an affair more dignified than passionate?

HIM We could have it in our 'sixties, if you like.

HER I would rather be me.

HIM Now?

HER Now.

HIM I don't suppose we could wait that long anyway.

HER The terrible tension.

HIM Sexual or dramatic?

BOTH Oh, both!

HER What about sex?

HIM Yes, yes, but later, let's sort the story first of all.

HER How does it look?

HIM It's looking great.

HER Desire denied - that's the motive conflict of the piece.

HIM I would never have guessed!

HER Strong arc of story. Beginning, middle, end.

HIM End?

HER Don't rush, it'll work out fine.

HIM Good locations conveniently to hand.

HER This bar.

HIM A windy hill above the sea. I want to assault you lightly there.

HER Can't we have that bit earlier?

HIM Not if you're fully dressed.

HER Then the evening seafront as a cool breeze strokes at an encampment of saracen tents.

HIM Grim and dark canyons where the lovers walk in silent shadow.

HER Then back to the bar, for the sex scene.

HIM The climax.

HER Exactly.

HIM And directly afterwards to the bus station.

HER The timelock.

HIM For ten.

HER A parting kiss.

HIM An innocent embrace redolent of the most terrible longing.

HER The timelock, at ten.

A BEAT

HIM Now, time of action.

HER I propose this century.

HIM How about the seventeenth?

HER How would the timelock sit in the seventeenth century?

HIM I am sure we could plot our way round it.

HER No, it doesn't matter.

HIM Can't have everything.

HER So: time of action - now.

HIM Right now.

HER This very evening.

HIM I must say, this is wonderful.

HER Storyline drafted, cast aboard, action underway already!

HIM We're falling in love!

HER Such a lovely start to the story!

HIM But we can't delay.

HER There's a lot to get through.

HIM And we're already hurtling inexorably towards the
inexpressible sorrow -

HER And joy.

HIM Of the timelock. What did you say?

HER And joy.

HIM Yes of course, that's very clever.

HER The sadness of parting.

HIM The joy of ending.

HER The resolution of the dramatic conflict.

HIM The end of a well-turned story.

HER Oh, inexpressible sorrow!

HIM Oh, inexpressible joy!

HER Just one more thing.

HIM The climax.

HER The slimax.

HIM The sex scene.

HER Exactly.

HIM Our perfectly crafted climax.

HER Our act of open sexual congress.

HIM Alone?

HER Together.

HIM Together, then.

HER In public.

HIM Wild and savage sex.

HER Booted and bridled.

HIM Unbooted.

HER Unbridled.

HIM If the evening be cool it will occur, this sacred conjugation, within these very premises.

HER But if continuing balmy, on the pavement without.

HIM Our savage public union will inaugurate itself in the opening moments of the third act.

HER Sex savage.

HIM Sex tender.

HER I can hardly wait.

HIM Nor me.

HER Let's rush on!

HIM Oh, let's rush on to our windy hill!

2. ON THE WINDY HILL ABOVE THE SEA

HER Do you ever feel like running away from everything?

HIM That's what I have been doing for the last year.

HER And now you are running back.

HIM I have no money to run any more.

HER Nor do I.

HIM Surely you have a running-away fund?

HER I don't even know what that is.

HIM Every married woman should have at least one.

HER I must have been an idealist.

HIM Idiot sounds better. Didn't you mother tell you anything useful at all?

HER Running-away wasn't part of life when I was young.

HIM What was, exactly?

HER Virgins. And eternal chastity as the supreme ideal of the human condition.

HIM Christ!

HER Yes, that was what what they told us. And Saint Eulalia. She was a favourite for a while.

HIM Strapped so dramatically to her chariot wheel.

HER Didn't you get this sort of thing?

HIM We haven't had saints at home for centuries. Foreign devils!

HER I meant - well, sex, I suppose.

HIM We didn't have girls in our family.

HER Does that make a difference?

HIM Well, I think it might. All we were ever told was that a good class of lassie went in for the nursing. I suppose that is a bit - elliptical - but there you are.

HER Was that it?

HIM Yes, that was it all.

HER And you ignored it!

HIM Act in haste, repent at leisure.

HER Choose your brides in the mornings, boys.

HIM I have heard that before.

HER But you didn't wait until the morning?

HIM I don't know. Anyway, I suppose she chose me.

HER Where?

HIM In the pub I imagine, like everything else. And you?

HER Same sort of thing, I suppose. We will put up with most things not to be - alone.

HIM No wonder we make such arses of it.

HER Yes.

HIM No wonder.

THEY DISAPPER OVER THE EDGE OF THE HILL AND WE HEAR
THEM OFF

HER I have forgotten what I was going to say.

HIM How about: we can't come too close or we won't be parted.

HER I don't think that is very original.

HIM Like tearing one body in two?

HER That would certainly be unpleasant.

HIM Don't you like that line?

HER No, I can't say it is one of your best.

HIM Where are the fucking buttons?

HER There won't be any.

HIM Why not!?

HER It's a tee-shirt, you fool.

HIM Oh, shit!

THEY COME BACK INTO VISION

HER For the first time in years, I am happy.

HIM You don't know if it's summer or winter when you're happy.

HER That is not original!

HIM Yes and no.

HER It was when it was written.

HIM So it can't be now.

HER But it will never be matched for beauty.

HIM And in that sense it will be original until the end of time.

HER You didn't tickle it up a little?

HIM Not a bit, I don't think it needs it.

HE MINCES ON A WALL ABOVE THE SEA

HER You won't remember this.

HIM Try me.

HER We slept together once.

HIM So it was you!

HER You do remember then?

HIM I think I know what you mean. But sleeping together does sound something of an exaggeration.

HER Oh no, it is a very precise description.

HIM Why did you ask, anyway?

HER I have always wondered if you knew about it.

HIM Oh, I see.

HER So - were you drunk?

HIM Drunk! And by God I know what I am talking about when it comes to drunk!

HER Yes, I did notice. But I want to ask you another question, if I may.

HIM If you absolutely insist.

HER Well, I will then. I mean, I can understand you going to sleep at once because you were drunk. But why did you wear your clothes? And stop mincing on that wall.

HIM Why don't you join me?

HER I don't need the practice. I was a gymnast once.

HIM No wonder you're so articulate.

HER Come down from there.

HIM I don't want to fall into the sea.

HER Well, you might have to take your clothes off then!

HIM You're trying to provoke me, aren't you!

HER Tell me why.

HIM Well, why not. I can think of dozens of good reasons. Any man could give you dozens. You've probably had dozens by now anyway.

HER Please?

HIM You were foreign. I didn't want to treat you any differently to the way we treat our own women.

HER You're not serious?

HIM Oh, I don't know. I mean - I wanted to honour you as a foreign guest with all the courtesy we normally reserve for our own countrywomen.

HER In my own bed?

HIM How was I to know whose bed it was?

HER You did fall into it!

HE COMES DOWN FROM THE WALL

HIM You're making fun of me.

HER No, no, not at all! Are there any more reasons?

HIM Oh yes, there are lots more. Maybe you wanted to get pregnant and entrap me. That used to be quite common, you know!

HER Well, it wasn't likely in the circumstances, was it?

HIM Okay, perhaps I had a dose of something and didn't want to pass it on to you. Or maybe you did!

HER I had never realised you were so kindly in these matters. Or so practical.

HIM Or maybe a frenzy of creativity.

HER But you were unconscious!

HIM Okay, an unconscious frenzy then.

HER It certainly wasn't any other kind!

HIM Well, that's unconscious frenzy for you.

HER And next?

HIM Perhaps you were only sleeping with me because you knew I wanted to sleep with you and it was just an act of kindness on your part. One should never take advantage of a friend's act of kindness. It is not polite. It is not friendly! I mean - if I hadn't cared about you, it wouldn't have mattered at all.

HER How very considerate of you. Are there any more reasons?

HIM Yes, of course. How could I sleep with you and still have a clear political conscience? You were a comrade. To sleep with you was therefore an act of treachery to our class. To the movement. To the future of mankind!

HER Yes, it was exactly the same where I came from. But everyone still managed to make exceptions.

HIM You could have told me - things could have been so different!

HER Well, that's a comforting thought.

HIM And it is an old national custom. Almost a convention. People are always drunk the first time. That is why the first time is so often the only time.

HER Yes, I had noticed that too.

HIM Perhaps you would have thought that I was being forward. Perhaps I thought it was a tradition of your country. Perhaps I was cold. Perhaps I thought it proper to preserve whatever by then remained of your virtue.

HER Don't you think I was entitled to a view on the matter?

HIM No, you were quite possibly under the influence of alcohol and your better judgement impaired. And perhaps you weren't used to being in bed with unclothed men, anyway.

HER Did you really think that was likely?

HIM Well, who knows. Perhaps it was just a gesture of international comradeship on your part. Perhaps you would have been surprised and hurt if I had taken my clothes off. And how was I supposed to know that you were going to get into the bed with me anyway?

HER It was my bed. And it was a very large double bed too.

HIM So you say now. But that's proof of nothing whatsoever.

HER Where was I going to sleep?

HIM The floor, perhaps.

HER Why, exactly, should I sleep on the floor beside my own bed?

HIM To be polite. Your bed for me, the adjacent floor for you. It's so obvious - there was only one bed, so you put me in it. The imperatives of hospitality are very important conventions. In that sense, taking my clothes off might have been construed by you as an improper suggestion. I mean - if you were a guest in my house, and there was only one bed, then you would have it. Entirely alone. Unless, of course, you invited me to join you. In the bed. And even then. I would not assault a female guest in my own bed unless she specifically incited me to so do. Of course, it would be different if I didn't know her. But I knew you!

HER Well, things are certainly becoming clearer! Do you have any other reasons?

HIM Oh yes. Maybe in retrospect it would turn out to have been a mistake for you - and I wanted to shield you in advance from the regret consequent on that mistake. Anyway, how could I possibly have known for certain that we were going to sleep together? Not until you specifically got into the bed. With me. In your bed. You and me. And by then I imagine I was unconscious.

HER You certainly were.

HIM And how was I to know in advance that you weren't going to sleep with someone else in the flat?

HER Couldn't you have guessed?

HIM Guessing is often presumptuous. And wrong too. Dangerous, even. And anyway, you can't blame me if you can drink me under the table and stay on your own feet. That is really typical of women! Fill me up and fire me into your sack banjaxed on red wine and whisky! And expect me to be anything other than unconscious! You've only got yourself to blame for what happened.

HER I'm sorry?

HIM Or for what didn't.

HER That's not an excuse.

HIM Maybe not, but it's a fucking good reason.

HER Any more?

HIM Yes, still a few. There were other people involved.

HER There certainly were not!

HIM There certainly were! It's just that they didn't know about it.

HER I didn't know that men whose existence can only be suspected by each other have that sort of mutual loyalty.

HIM Oh we don't, not for a second. Except when we're afraid of being caught, of course. It's our sense of honour. But it's the woman I was thinking about. She was your friend.

HER And since when did we let considerations like that get in the way?

HIM I know that now. But I didn't know it then. And so - you are loyal to your friends. And therefore, in sleeping with you, I occasioned you to commit an act of gross disloyalty to your friend.

HER Your girlfriend.

HIM And I was thereby guilty of an act of gross disloyalty to you. As my friend.

HER Except when unconscious.

HIM Precisely. And that is why I fell into a bed, which I have always strongly suspected of being your bed, fully dressed.

HER And unconscious.

HIM Yes, totally unconscious.

HER Would you like to hear what happened afterwards?

HIM No thank you. This conversation is verging on the indecent.

HER I insist that you know.

HIM All right, tell me what happened next.

HER Are you quite sure?

HIM Oh yes, I would love to know.

HER Well, I did think that fully dressed was a bit - unconventional.

HIM There you are, convention is a decoration to our culture.

HER So I got into bed too.

HIM The same bed as me?

HER Yes.

HIM In other words, your own bed.

HER Yes.

HIM Stark naked?

HER No. Fully clothed.

HIM Why, exactly?

HER It seemed more - conformist.

HIM To be polite, I imagine.

HER You're making fun of me.

HIM It seems a reasonable point to make. What did you imagine might happen next?

HER I really had no idea.

HIM And what did happen next?

HER Well, I took my clothes off.

HIM Why, please?

HER I was - determined.

HIM In what sense, exactly?

HER To - provoke you.

HIM And did you provoke me?

HER No.

HIM And next?

HER Well - I woke you up.

HIM Congratulations

.

HER And took your clothes off.

HIM How revoltingly promiscuous of you.

HER I knew you would say that.

HIM The perfect hostess! Exactly what I would have done myself, had our circumstances been reversed!

HER I couldn't think of anything else.

HIM With a view to what, precisely?

HER Of - attracting your attention.

HIM And was my attention attracted?

HER Not much. In your few moments of bare lucidity you called me by someone else's name and went straight back to unconsciousness.

HIM And did anything happen later?

HER With you unconscious?

HIM I see what you mean. Well, you can't expect miracles.

HER I know that now. But I was younger then.

HIM So that's your side of the story.

HER Well, you did ask.

HIM Well, that's your story. I imagine it is accurate. Women's stories usually are. If incomplete. So here's mine. I woke up. I couldn't exactly remember being in a bed. With you. Or otherwise. That's the sort of thing people are supposed to remember. In the short term anyway. Very occasionally in the long. But it's rare. So, I woke up and I am in a bed. That's the first mystery. Where am I? Definitely a bed - but where? Second mystery - whose bed? Well, I had reason to believe it was a bed in your flat. I had never been in your flat. But I was accustomed to the concept of historical inevitability. So I guessed it was your flat, because it certainly was not my flat. And you yourself were in the flat. I had therefore, a very strong suspicion indeed that it was your bed I was in. No complete evidence - but still. I also had an extremely strong suspicion that you had been in the bed. At the same time as me! That is the third mystery. I am in your bed. Alone! You are not in the bed. With me. Why? Now the fourth mystery. You are not in any other bed either. No. You are ambulant. Walking about brazenly. Rushing about! Hoovering the hall. Fully dressed! Refusing to speak to me. Quite

blatantly refusing even to catch my eye! What do you expect any man to make of that?

HER I really don't know, I really have no idea at all.

HIM And the fifth mystery. The mystery of my clothes. Why am I not wearing them? The clothes that I had been, to the best of my knowledge and belief, wearing the previous evening. And had also been wearing throughout the course of an all-day drinking session. With you. I couldn't remember taking them off. Nothing new in that, of course. So, mystery five - how do I come to be naked, and alone, in your bed? Sixth mystery - where are my clothes? I will tell you exactly where they are. Scattered across the floor as if they had been subject to a low-level bombing attack. Under what circumstances, exactly, had they come to be off in the first place? And, in the second place, hurled all over your bedroom floor? In other words - what had happened? I will tell you exactly what had happened. Ask any man in the world. Absolutely crystal clear. I had seduced you. You had fallen into bed with me against your will. Blind drunk. You woke up first - women always do that - and you realised your terrible mistake. You thought - Oh Christ! - and you raced out of bed. That is why when I awoke - naked and alone - you were not there. The signal could not be more eloquent. Ask any man in the world! You had changed your mind! I was spurned. Rejected. Well, it was an accident. You had made a mistake. Well, that's okay. You were a friend. Friends forgive friends. I forgave you. And we were friends again. That is what friends are for.

HER Are you finished?

HIM Yes, I am.

HER Well. I had never thought of looking at it like that.

HIM Thought what? We were both shackled up with people a hundred yards from each other. Nothing happened. I mean, even if it had. It hadn't.

HER Yes, but couldn't you have guessed? You were older.

HIM That never makes any difference.

HER No, it doesn't. I know that now.

HIM Pity.

HER Yes, it is a pity.

HIM But we can still be friends.

HER Yes, we are still friends.

HIM And we had better watch the time.

HER Oh Christ, the timelock.

3. THE SEAFRONT

HER Can I ask a question.

HIM Not again!

HER How are we going to get out of the sex scene?

HIM I don't know. What about an earlier bus?

HER There isn't one.

HIM If we close our eyes we won't even notice!

HER I've tried that before.

HIM Haven't we all.

A BEAT

HER This is a bit gloomy.

HIM We are supposed to be falling in love.

HER Some lyricism?

HIM A pastoral sequence.

HER Isn't it a bit urban for that?

HIM Oh I don't know.

HER Rolling meadowlands, then.

HIM Peasant girls in laughing frocks.

HER A countryside for us alone.

HIM Birdsong and wildflowers.

HER Long thighs and gracious limbs.

HIM Buttercups?

HER Dancing through.

HIM Laughter innocent.

HER Brooks and rills.

HIM Larks and nightingales.

HER A gallant breeze.

HIM You'll never make that shite work!

HER Just try me!

HIM And I will call you Isabelita, Isabelita.

HER Why, exactly?

HIM It's a graffito at the end of the sea wall, don't you like it?

HER Well, it's not my name.

HIM Maybe not, but least I am conscious this time.

HER Oh yes, I can see that. Do you need a drink?

AN ELDERLY COUPLE ARE GLIMPSED IN EMBRACE

HIM Goodness gracious!

HER How extraordinarily disgusting!

HIM Married?

HER A formless procession of mere event.

HIM No respect for the unities.

HER But not married to each other!

HIM Magnificent!

HER Adultery!

HIM What's that?

HER I'll tell you later.

HIM The best love of all.

HER Dramatic possibility.

HIM The return of their spouses.

HER The timelock!

HIM Oh yes, the timelock.

HER We better keep moving.

THEY MARCH BACK FOR THE BAR

HIM Why are your arms crossed like that?

HER It's getting a little cold.

HIM Is the temperature of your breasts all right?

HER Shouldn't that be temperatures?

HIM If there is a problem I am sure I can help.

HER No thank you, there is no problem at present.

HIM Quite warm? Quite cool?

HER No, they are quite warm, thank you, but not improperly so.

HIM My hands are cold. Could I warm them on your breasts?

HER This is probably not the best place to warm your hands.

HIM I think it is a very good place.

HER I mean it is not the best time.

HIM What about one of them, then? One at a time. I promise - absolutely no favouritism.

HER No!

HIM But my hands so warm, so warm!

HER Then put them in the sea!

HIM Oh please!

HER There isn't time.

HIM We are approaching the climax.

HER So you say, anyway.

3. BACK IN THE BAR

HIM What is it?

HER A local arts magazine. Let's see how much you have learned.
Translate this.

HIM I am cold, I am cold,
And I have such fear
My soul is empty
Any my telephone so still
I seem to feel the time and fear it too.
There is a private landscape of the past
An invitation to your funeral
The absence of your absences
The details of a friendship in the memory:
I have a lover's nervousness,
More cold than fear
More fear than cold
An absurd heart
Mood swings
Intensity
A kitten kind that strokes my nights of wakefulness
A library of dust and powder
Two white socks at the side of my lonely bed
More errors than mistakes

Empty victories
And silence in the nights
A sadness in the heart
Your profile in my photographs
Mementoes where I see your eyes
Skin like yours
A happy name and lips with which to kiss it:
And yet so cold, so cold
And yet such fear:
I have such fear.

HER Very good. Except for the white socks. It does say black gloves.

HIM Much the same when you take them off, don't you think?

HER You prefer socks?

HIM With an ÒxÓ.

HER Oral sox.

HIM Or aural sox, if you insist.

HER I wasn't insisting on anything, as it happens.

HIM Who wrote it?

HER It doesn't say.

THEY PLAY PASS THE BOTTLE AGAIN

HIM You may recall that at this point in our short but passionate love affair, there is to be an important development.

HER Yes, sordid.

HIM And savage.

HER Buckled.

HIM And buttoned.

HER Unbuckled.

HIM But a moment. Will we take our clothes off?

HER It would certainly make a change!

HIM What do you think?

HER On?

HIM Off!

HER It's much nicer, isn't it?

HIM Not too erotic?

HER Not in the circumstances.

HIM But decorous withal.

HER Everything off?

HIM Except our socks.

HER That's much more comfortable!

HIM And indoors?

HER If the evening be cool.

HIM But out, should the evening continue balmy.

HER It will in any case be in public.

HIM Let's be brazen!

HER Quite uncraven!

HIM I adore publicity!

HER And so does me!

HIM Just us.

HER Together.

HIM At last.

HER Alone.

HIM But inside or out?

HER Inside, then.

HIM Inside it is.

HER Let's show them just what we can do.

HIM As lovers.

HER And friends.

HIM The possible.

HER The impossible.

HIM So simply.

HER Just pretending.

HIM It's possible.

HER And simple.

HIM For friends.

HER And lovers.

BOTH As good as me.

HIM So how about there?

HER That's fine by me.

THEY MAY SIT ATHWARTSHIP ON A BENCH

HIM Ready?

HER Ready.

HIM The cue is Go.

HER I'm standing by.

HIM Go!

HER I love you.

HIM And you love me.

HER That means we must.

HIM Love each other.

HER But that's not.

HIM A true love affair.

HER Each has to know.

HIM That he.

HER Or she.

HIM Is loved.

HER By the other.

HIM You have to know.

HER I love you.

HIM And I have to know.

HER You love me.

HIM But how can we.

HER Know these things.

HIM If we don't.

HER Tell each other.

HIM So how's about.

HER Telling each other.

HIM How?

HER What about words?

HIM It's a strong convention.

HER Let's try it then.

HIM Ready?

HER Ready!

HIM I love you.

HER I love you.

HIM And you love me.

HER And you love me.

HIM Can this be believable?

HER It must, it must!

HIM From a technical point of view.

HER It is absolutely essential.

HIM To the story.

HER And us.

HIM And us too!

BOTH So we must be in love!

HER We've done it!

HIM At last!

HER How long to the timelock?

HIM Not long now.

HER And going down.

HIM That's us.

HER Into the third act.

HIM This is no act.

HER And time.

HIM How much?

HER Less and less.

HIM Never stops.

HER Just keeps going.

HIM Tick tock.

HER Tock tick.

HIM All the time.

HER Down and down.

HIM The timelock.

HER Oh, inexpressible sorrow!

HIM Oh, inexpressible joy!

HER When is the climax?

HIM We're past it already.

HER Oh, are we?

HIM Yes, yes, that was it there.

HER I thought it was a crisis.

HIM No, no, no problem at all.

HER You just plot your way over it.

HIM And we've got another one coming.

HER I know.

HIM So do I.

HER In public.

HIM Nothing to hide now.

HER At last.

HIM Wild, passionate, post-climactic love.

HER For no other kind is possible.

HIM In a happy story.

HER The greatest love of all.

HIM And don't worry about morality.

HER Or your marriage.

HIM Or even mine.

HER We are now a-love in transcendental chastity!

HIM Lovemaking of the most exalted kind!

HER Not the squalid coupling of lesser breeds!

HIM High, sacred love.

HER In the lush, passionate groves of the mind.

HIM Thriller.

HER Schiller.

HIM Gonhorrea.

HER Ludwig's.

HIM Choral.

HER Sinfon'a.

HIM I think I am going to scream.

HER Me too.

HIM Just clench your teeth firmly into my corporeal flesh.

HER It won't hurt a tiny bit.

HIM Nor me!

HER Nor me too!

FROM EACH A STRANGLER SCREAM. AS THEY SCREAM,
THEY STAND UP AND CLASP HANDS.

HIM Can we have something on the screen?

HER If we simply close our eyes.

HIM We can imagine anything.

THEY CLOSE THEIR EYES

BACK PROJECTION (SCROLLED AS SURTITLE).

She screams and hurls her teeth into his corporeal flesh. Her body remains attached to her teeth as she does so. He reciprocates in identical fashion. Their expressions of joyful ecstasy do not, however, alter in any way whatsoever. Although there are

numerous people in the close vicinity, they do not appear to notice anything. Perhaps they are all blind as well as deaf. Or they may, of course, just be cynical.

THEY OPEN THEIR EYES. THEY UNCLASP THEIR HANDS AND RECLASP THEM CROSSWISE FOR A TIME.

HIM Pass the bottle.

HER Oh, pass the bottle.

HIM Let's get out of here.

HER We really don't have much time left now.

HIM Yes, let's go.

4. ON THE WAY TO THE TIMELOCK

A STREET SCULPTURE OF INTERLOCKING TRIANGLES

HIM It is an interesting shape, the triangle.

HER A straight line is certainly less complicated.

HIM And a lot simpler.

HER Isn't that the same thing?

HIM I don't know, I amn't a geometrician, but I can count.

HER It connects two points.

HIM Rather than three.

HER Or four.

HIM I much prefer a straight line.

HER Between two points.

HIM Yes, so do I.

HER If you see what I mean.

HIM Oh yes, I see perfectly what you mean.

HIM A question of geography.

HER Yes.

HIM And - physical culture.

HER Go ahead.

HIM France, Greece, and Cuba. What do they have in common?

HER I really don't know.

HIM Neither do I.

HER Why did you ask?

HM I was reading the contact ads in a newspaper this morning, they seem to be very popular.

HER Perhaps you should have telephoned and asked.

HIM I hadn't thought of that. Anyway, another geographical point. If we wanted to meet again. I can't help noticing you will be in one country and I will be in another.

HER Perhaps we could time-travel.

HIM That's not geography, that's physics.

HER Space-travel, then.

HIM An airport motel?

HER That would do at first.

HIM Until we had.

HER More conventional arrangements in place.

HIM Yes, something like that.

HER If we wanted to meet again.

A BEAT

HIM Did you enjoy our love affair?

HER It was wonderful.

HIM And for me too.

HER That is precisely the way love affairs should be.

HIM I suppose that is why we have them.

HER Except they don't usually work out that way.

HIM In real life, no.

HER I suppose that's why we all keep trying.

AND NOW AT LAST WE SEE THE BUS STATION

HIM Behold!

HER The timelock!

HIM So sad.

HER And yet so happy.

HIM What a triumph of the creative imagination.

HER And yet such tragedy.

BOTH The timelock!

HIM How inexpressibly sad.

HER How inexpressibly happy.

HIM A perfect approach to the end of the dramatic action.

HER Nothing to go wrong now.

HIM How far, would you say?

HER A hundred yards at the most.

HIM The end of the story draws nigh and nigh.

HER An inescapable convention.

HIM What do we do next?

HER What do you think?

HIM I've forgotten.

HER Make it up then, and be quick.

HIM Any ideas?

HER You've been alone too long.

HIM That's not in the story!

HER Well, we can't stand here all night!

HIM There's so little time left.

HER That's the very essence of timelock.

HIM Any fool can plot their way into it.

HER But it's not so easy to plot your way back out of it.

HIM We really must move on.

HER Do we absolutely have to?

HIM Oh yes, movement is the very essence of story.

HER Yes, so it is.

THEY WALK FOR THE BUS STATION.

HIM This is tremendously sad.

HER We need some light.

HIM Less shade.

HER What about the pastoral bit?

HIM You may have the honour of orating it.

HER A moment.

HIM Yes?

HER A tiny query. In the very beautiful line, 'We dance and lie your legs entwined'.

HIM Yes?

HER Is that with mine, or in mine?

HIM I thought with mine.

HER I prefer in mine.

HIM It's not too erotic?

HER Not in the circumstances.

HIM Allright. In mine. The word Go is your cue. Stand by - and, Go!

HER I will invent a countryside for us alone, or richly rolling meadowland, wild flowers ablaze in spring, a peasant lass a-churning milk, larks at dawn and nightingales at dusk, rippling brooks and rills, a gingham frock afloat in an innocent breeze, laughter gallant just and free, and through long grass and buttercups we dance and lie your legs entwined are brown and bare and free in mine; and I will call you sweet, sweet Isabelita, Isabelita, for all your kindness then and now, and to enjoy once more that sweet, sweet diminutive - and ending.

HIM Most beautifully performed, if I may say so.

HER I hate this ending.

HIM So do I, believe me.

HER Its terrible inevitability.

HIM The holy seed at the heart of any good story.

HER We must go on.

HIM We must.

HER Or no!

HIM A creative solution!

HER Abolish ourselves!

HIM Escape from the story!

HER Check into that hotel.

HIM For the night.

HER Let us dematerialise.

HIM And fornicate.

BOTH What's that?

BOTH Don't worry.

BOTH I'll show you.

HER With furious passion.

HIM Into the moonlight.

HER And beyond the dawn.

HIM But no.

HER It would ruin the story.

HIM And I want to be with you.

HER Right to the very end.

HIM The end?

HER Fifty yards or less, now.

HIM The end of the story.

HER I've made it!

HIM So have I!

HER And so: forward.

HIM Death or victory.

HER Victory or death.

HIM Out over the firing step.

HER Deadly combat.

HIM The final fifty yards!

HER Death or glory.

HIM Onwards to victory!

BOTH The timelock beckons!

TO THE VERY GATES OF THE TIMELOCK.

HER Oh, inexpressible sorrow!

HIM Oh, inexpressible joy!

HER The summit of love!

HIM The tragedy of parting!

HER The joy of ending.

HIM This is the end now.

HER Very nearly now.

HIM Do we have to go on?

HER Yes.

HIM Yes, I know.

HER This is the end.

HIM I though we were to be masters of our own story.

HER It's too late to rewrite it now.

HIM The end.

HER At last.

HIM The end of the action.

HER The end of the story.

HIM Perhaps we will meet again someday.

HER Did you ever test the theory about nurses?

HIM Yes, I am afraid so.

HER And?

HIM Inconclusive.

HER I suppose most things are.

HIM Do we meet again?

HER Why not?

HIM Why?

HER At least we can find each other now.

HIM Yes.

A MEMENTO IS EXCHANGED

HER I took this for you. It is the greatest poem ever written about parting.

HIM Parting for ever? Or for just a little time?

HER I have enclosed my direct line number. At the office.

HIM I see that, yes. Your office.

HER I will be in London in a fortnight.

HIM For a conference?

HER Does it matter?

HIM So will I.

HER Perhaps it is a coincidence. Or fate.

HIM Yes, it must be.

HER An airport motel.

HIM Does it matter?

HER Not at first.

HIM No, not at first.

HER A fortnight.

HIM Two weeks.

HER Till then.

HIM Yes, till then.

HER Defeat is temporary.

HIM And vengeance lives forever.

HER Vengeance on what?

HIM The past.

HER We still have time.

HIM Yes, now we do.

HER Pass the bottle.

HIM Pass the bottle too.

THEY EMBRACE AS LIGHTS GO DOWN
SLOW CURTAIN.