

THE DREAM OF SUMMER.

by Paul Tyree.

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ACT ONE SCENE ONE.

Lights up slowly. A living room - Run down.

Faded curtains, carpets, upholstery and dusk creeping through the window (stage right), next to which is a door to the outside.

Stage left - two doors. One to a kitchen. One to a bedroom. A television sits at the front of the stage facing away from the audience.

An armchair, battered and drab, holes in both arms, sits facing the t.v.. In it sits PAUL, mid 50's, overweight, dark hair, wearing a tattered light brown cardigan, white (but going yellow) shirt, dicky bow, black trousers and carpet slippers.

At his side is a coffee table, chipped mahogany, on which sits a bottle of vodka, two glasses, an ashtray and a stuffed Persian Rex cat in a seated pose. The cats back is almost hairless because of constant petting, and it looks more moth eaten and decrepit than even a dead cat should.

Paul pours himself vodka, lights a cigarette and strokes the cat.

PAUL: You know one day Lucy we'll have enough money to have that television fixed. When our ship comes in I'll have all this place revamped. New curtains for you to scratch. New carpets for you to shed your fur on and a new bloody television set, eh? I'll even have a cat flap put in the door. How about that eh? You'll like that wont you? Then you can go and play with all the other puss-cats, can't you? Instead of being stuck in a place like this with someone like me.

Paul looks around the room.

PAUL: When our ship comes in, eh?... 'Course it might be a while yet Luce. I mean it might be a while yet. Me and you against the world. That's what it is isn't it, you and me. And has been for quite some time hasn't it? Quite a change it's been over the past few years, eh? Wasn't always like this was it, back then? You used to move around a lot more back then, didn't you?

PAUL:(cont.) 'Course you're getting old. I mean we can't all be as agile as we once were. It isn't your fault Luce. I mean it happens to us all in the end. You shouldn't feel bad about it. I felt bad about it. But then I would, I mean I'm the type. Too bloody sensitive that's my trouble. Take things to heart. It's a bad trait Luce. Never take things too much to heart. I mean no one will when I stop moving around so much. I mean no one will then. 'Course I'm not sure I'd want them too. Take it to heart I mean, like me. I mean I wouldn't wish that on anybody...And I'm sure you wouldn't either. I mean you're not the type.

A knock is heard on the door. Quiet at first, then insistent.

PAUL: GO AWAY!!!

The door opens.

MARY peers in. She is older by ten years than Paul, and has a hearing aid.

MARY: Paul?

PAUL: What?

MARY: Are you in?

Paul raises his eyes to the heavens.

PAUL: (To himself) I haven't been in for years and neither have you.

MARY: Can I come in?

PAUL: No!!

MARY: Don't be like that.

Mary walks in. She is conservatively dressed. White cardigan over a blue dress. She is overweight, white hair and looks her age.

MARY: I haven't seen you for days already.

PAUL: GO AWAY!!!

MARY: We shouldn't have argued. I'm sorry. Well no I'm not actually.

Don't let's fight though.

PAUL: We didn't fight.

MARY: Yes we did. That's why you're angry, remember?

PAUL: (Angry) I'm not angry!!

MARY: No?..Good. I hate it when you're angry. You should calm down when you're angry.

PAUL: I'm not angry Mary!....Yes I am.

MARY: Why?

PAUL: You.

MARY: Me? What have I done? That's nice isn't it? Me? Making you angry.

Here to see if you're alright and it makes you angry.

PAUL: You know I'm alright. You're just a bloody busybody sometimes, that's all.

MARY: Don't swear. Remember your blood pressure.

PAUL: Swearing has nothing to do with my blood pressure.

MARY: Yes it does. I can always tell if you're tense. You talk like you're in a sewer. I've told you I don't like it. You just swear to annoy me.

Mary is now at Paul's side.

PAUL: Not true. I swear when I'm on my own, don't I Luce? (He pats the cat).

Sometimes I spend entire days just swearing, don't I my precious?

Contemplating the thousands of different ways to say....

MARY: Don't! You know Lucy can't hear you. You'd only be doing it to get me to turn my hearing aid down, as usual.

PAUL: Lucy hears every word I say and you can turn it off for all I care.

MARY: Don't say it if you don't mean it. You know my philosophy.

PAUL: I do mean it. You could be bloody deaf for all I care.

MARY: You do care. If I were deaf I'd never be able to hear all your precious drivels.

All that spit and blood you're so fond of. I'm the only one that does listen.

Although God only knows why I do?

PAUL: I'm the man in your life Mary. You've got no option.

Mary gives him a cold hard stare.

MARY: Talk to your cat!!

Mary begins to walk off as though to go.

PAUL: Just going to leave me then?

MARY: It's traditional. Women always walk out on you, or hadn't you noticed.

PAUL: I never take notice of women. That's why I'm such a happy man.

So what did you come for then?

Mary turns and stands looking at the back of his chair.

PAUL: I mean on the off chance you came for something other than just to insult me...Although you had more fire in you the last time you were here.

MARY: I was angrier with you then.

PAUL: Rubbish. You're angry with me now. (Without turning to look) I can tell by the way you're looking at me. Those little red eyes of yours burning their way into the back of my skull. You're just more controlled than usual because you want something. You get red in the face if you don't need anything but I bet right now you're only a slight pink....What is it?

MARY: Nothing from you!!

PAUL: Supermarket?

MARY: No!

PAUL: (Smiling) Dentist?

MARY: You know I've got false teeth.

PAUL: (Slightly concerned)...Doctor?

MARY: I'll make my own way. I wouldn't want to bother you.

PAUL: (More concerned) What's wrong?

MARY: Nothing's wrong.

PAUL: Then why are you going to the doctors?

MARY: To make sure nothing's wrong. I'll get a taxi or something. Its not really that far on a bus, actually.

PAUL: What time's the appointment?

MARY: None of your business. What do you care anyway?

PAUL: (Angrily) What time's the bloody appointment Mary??

MARY: Calm down.

Mary walks back to the chair.

MARY: There's no need to go upsetting yourself. It's at two o'clock tomorrow. You can come with me if you like, if it will ease your mind.

PAUL: I'll take you in the car.

MARY: That old thing. There's really no need Paul. I'm quite capable of getting there.

PAUL: I'll take you in the car and that's the end of it.

MARY: Alright I won't argue if it'll make you feel better.

Mary puts her hand on Paul's shoulder. He places his hand on hers and looks up at her.

PAUL: What's wrong?

MARY: Nothing. At least nothing until tomorrow, so relax. It's probably nothing. Nothing at all. Silly even to check, but you know me. Better safe than sorry.

PAUL: Right. But you will tell me what the doctor says?

MARY: I will. Whatever she says I'll tell you.

PAUL: Good. Good. Probably nothing though. I wouldn't worry Mary.

MARY: I'm not.

PAUL: Good.

MARY: Good. I'm glad we've got that settled. I'll go and make us a nice cup of tea shall I? (She picks up the vodka bottle and looks at it). Nice cup of tea, eh?

PAUL: Do what you like. I don't care.

She puts down the bottle angrily.
Paul smiles to himself.

MARY: Fine I will...And I could have another man in my life if I wanted to. They're pretty easy to come by you know.

Mary exits.

PAUL: Not like me they're not. Not like me, eh Lucy? No-one like her either come to that. (Looking up to God) But you try not to repeat your mistakes don't you?
EH? YOU TRY NOT TO REPEAT YOUR MISTAKES. (To himself) You're happy enough making different ones.

MARY: (Off-stage) You shouting at God again?

PAUL; (Shouting) I DON'T THINK HIS HEARING AID'S WORKING. Needs new batteries probably.

MARY: (Off-stage) What? I had new in last week.

PAUL: Never mind!

MARY: (Off-stage) What?

PAUL: NEVER MIND!! (Looking up to God again) You haven't had new in for a while, have you mate?....But who needs him eh Luce, when we've got us? You, me and a scantily clad, large breasted, nymphomaniac Belgian truffle making a cup of tea in the kitchen.....Well there's you and me isn't there. There's you and me. We've got each other and who could ask for more? Even if I were rich I couldn't have a better friend. Friends make a difference to a man like me, so I'll thank you for that. I know I've thanked you before but I'll thank you again. Its made a difference having someone to talk to. Between the sod upstairs, the deaf widow and the local shopkeeper, you're the only one I get a decent conversation with. Doesn't matter that I'm poor.

Mary enters with two cups of tea.

PAUL: (cont.) I've got as good a friend as any rich man.

MARY: You talking about me?

PAUL: No!

MARY: (Slightly crestfallen) Oh.

PAUL: Those batteries are working remarkably well. Did you make me one?

MARY: Yes of course. I wouldn't just come into your flat and make myself a cup of tea. I'm not a scrounger. You know that. Here you are. How you like it.

She hands him the tea.

PAUL: And why do you think I'd talk about you. I don't gossip do I?

MARY: No. No you don't. But only because you've got no one to gossip to, or about.

And you don't pay compliments either but a thank-you would be nice.

PAUL: What for?

MARY: For making you a....never mind.

PAUL: Besides you have to do something interesting before someone can gossip about you.

MARY: No wonder no one knows you. Have you been out today?

PAUL: What if I have?

MARY: Have you?

PAUL: I might have, I don't remember...Oh yes I do. I went out and bought some cat food.

MARY: No you didn't.

PAUL: Yes I did. Man can't live on bread alone, eh Luce?

MARY: No you didn't. Besides I would have heard you go out. I can always tell when you walk across that landing. Even the air tries to get out of your way. Sends a chill down my spine.

PAUL: So what if I haven't been out? You shouldn't ask something if you already know the answer. Very sneaky that is. Trying to catch somebody out like that. All you're asking people to do is lie to you, so you can catch them out and feel better about yourself. Not nice that Mary. Not nice at all.

MARY: Well I don't lie.

Paul snorts in laughter.

MARY: And you wouldn't notice someone trying to catch you out if you didn't lie, but you insist on making things up.

PAUL: I do not make things up or tell lies. Poets just see things differently. Remember differently, that's all.

MARY: Paul! You're not a poet. You made that up too.

PAUL: I think like a poet. I've always thought like a poet. I just never took the time to write it all down that's all. Just because I don't write it down, doesn't mean I'm not a poet.

MARY: Yes it does.

PAUL: No it doesn't.

MARY: Technically speaking it does.

PAUL: Ah well. That's where you and I part company, and where I begin to see things differently....You take the fact that I don't write things down to mean I'm not a poet. But I know that even if I never write a word I may have the heart of a poet. A poet without a pen is still a poet, and that's poetic, don't you think?

MARY: No.

PAUL: If you had the heart of a poet, you would.

Mary stares at him long and hard.

MARY: You still make things up. It's when you start believing them that worries me.

PAUL: I did write a poem once you know. I've still got it somewhere I think. In a drawer somewhere. I could find it and read it to you sometime. You'd like that wouldn't you Mary?

MARY: No.

PAUL: (As though he didn't hear) Bit of culture. Always good for the soul or something. Something. Something to do anyway. Pass the time on.

MARY: Are you ever going to get that television fixed? I mean you sit in front of it all day long.

PAUL: Don't you like poetry?

MARY: If it's good...Not that I'm a big fan of television. I never was, you know that. But if you're going to sit in front of it all day long.

PAUL: (Stroking Lucy) Stroking my pussy.

MARY: (Bristling) Comments like that were only funny in the 1970's. And then only to people without wit enough to laugh at anything better.

PAUL: You're a prude Mary. You know I loathe that in women.

MARY: I'm not a prude. And the only thing I find funny is that she's the only one you've stroked in quite some time.

PAUL: (Darkening) And she doesn't feel anything either.

MARY: (Brought up sharp by this).....Have you taken your medication?

PAUL:There was never much worth watching on the bloody thing anyway.

MARY: No.

During Paul's next speech Mary slips away, goes to the sideboard and pulls down a pill box. She then takes out two white pills, sighs, and goes back to Paul's side.

PAUL: The odd documentary perhaps. Lives of the famous and dead condensed into fifty digestible minutes of fawning and back slapping. Minor celebrities desperately searching for something profound to say about someone they barely knew.....I even, and you must not breathe a word of this to anyone, used to watch the odd football match. Very odd they were. Twenty-two sweaty men kicking a ball about badly for ninety increasingly pointless minutes. I would even watch that if there wasn't a nature programme showing giraffes shagging or something. Although why they bother is beyond me. Footballers I mean, not the giraffes. They don't have a choice I suppose, like the rest of us. But most footballers I've seen should be shot at birth for humane reasons, thereby increasing the average intelligence of everyone else in the country by at least ten per cent. They drag us down you see.....If only the ball would go in the general direction they wanted it to go, but it never seemed to when I was watching.....I used to think bad football was an insult to the poor bastards paying to watch it, but now I think it's more than that. Strange as it may be, bad football could be an artistic statement or possibly even a metaphor for art itself. You have to ask yourself why most footballers miss the goal. Do they mean to? Art being an attempt to shake our fist at God, are footballers shaking their fist at football fans in the same way. I mean we'd expect them to aim on goal, but that's no good. No. They look

PAUL: (cont.) like they're aiming on goal and then kick it near the corner flag. Always expect the unexpected from people like that. Every time it happens I swear I can see the next Picasso or Van Gogh.....Although maybe Picasso would have aimed for the corner flag. Intent is everything I suppose....But I think we should give footballers the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps they aim for the corner flag too and all wish they'd gone to art school.

**Mary is at his side proffering
the two tablets.**

MARY: You're rambling again.

PAUL: Am I?

MARY: Here. And remember to take tomorrows before we go out in the car. I don't want you keeling over at the wheel.

PAUL: You can drive.

MARY: Not from the passenger seat.

**Paul takes the tablets with his
tea.**

MARY: Promise?

PAUL: Promise....Stop fussing over me anyway. I can manage well enough woman.....(Suddenly frightened) You won't leave me though, will you Mary? You Won't leave me?

MARY: No. No I wont.

PAUL: No..No..Good...You're a good friend when all's said and done. Thankyou...Thankyou.

MARY: Besides, where would I go?

Pause.

PAUL: What do you mean I make things up?

MARY: Never mind. Have you got enough food in? Fruit and vegetables
for the morning.

PAUL: Yes.

MARY: Are you sure? You know you've got to keep up your diet.

PAUL: YES I TOLD YOU...I went to Mamoods yesterday, if you must know.

Although Christ alone knows why I do. I mean he overcharges you for everything
and you can never get exactly what you want anyway.

MARY: As long as you did.

PAUL: I did. Though you can never get exactly what you want. He knows I have
things I need special. I mean I told him. 'Course if he ever gets what I ask him for
he just thinks he can charge what he likes for it. I know what things cost...He just
takes advantage of me.

MARY: He takes advantage of everybody. But apart from that he's a nice man. He
always asks how I am and smiles at me. I like that. A smile never costs you
anything.

PAUL: It does in his shop. He smiles and we pay extra for it on a tin of beans or
something. And a packet of fags will cost you thirty pence more than anywhere else.

MARY: You know he doesn't like cigarettes.

PAUL: Against his religion, is it?

MARY: I think he only stocks them for you...Besides you shouldn't even be smoking.
You know what the doctors said.

PAUL: Most the doctors I know smoke. If it's good enough for them..

MARY: That's a silly argument and you know it.

PAUL: No it's not. NO IT'S NOT!! I've got little enough as it is.

They can't take everything away I won't let them. You hear me

I won't let them.

MARY: Calm down.

PAUL: We don't have much do we? I mean we don't ask for much. Little

pleasures. Something to look forward to. I mean we get dealt a raw bloody deal

by the bastard upstairs in the first place and now they want to take the rest away.

MARY: Calm down.

PAUL: (Still full of it) I mean everything else's gone. If they

said take Lucy away should I let them just because they're

bloody doctors? They're not bloody Gods Mary. I mean we've

got to make our own way don't we? We don't have to hang on

PAUL: (cont.) to their every word like they're farting a proclamation

from the almighty. We all deserve to stand up and be counted

don't we? Even if we're bloody wrong most of the time. You've

got to go your own way Mary. Go your own way. Picasso Mary.

Bloody Picasso. See what I mean?

MARY: Finished.

PAUL: Not by a long chalk!

MARY: You're a very silly man Paul. A very silly man.

PAUL: We all have our ways Mary. We all have our ways don't we?

MARY: (Sighing) I suppose...Though sometimes I wish you'd learn

to bend in the wind a little.

PAUL: (Sarcastically) Well blow me down Mary, what do you mean?

MARY:I'll come around about one tomorrow. Try and be dressed wont you.

Mary exits.

PAUL: Doctor wouldn't mind me showing up naked....Bring a smile to her face, and to her receptionist's too. Although I'm sure that shirt-lifter's always had a thing for me. Buggers still have refreshingly low standards, no matter what they say in 'The Guardian'.

Paul, for the first time, and with great effort rises from his chair, holding onto the sides for support.

PAUL: If only women were the same, I swear to God I'd still be a thin man. But that's the problem, eh Luce. We taught them to expect too much of us, eh? Too much of me anyway.

He walks to the chest of drawers in the corner of the room.

PAUL: I wonder what I ever did with that poem? I should find it. Should be able to find it. I mean I know I've still got it. That poem. Know I've still got it somewhere, if only I could put my hands on it.

He opens several drawers, rummaging through. They are all filled with paper.

PAUL: Never put your hands on something when you want to. Or someone. Never put your hands on someone when you want to. I mean it's always too bloody late or too early. I mean the intent's alright. The intent's fine. They never mind the intent. Never minded the intent. It was just my timing. Timing was always off. Right intent. Wrong time. Never suited them. The timing...So I always felt guilty for asking or they felt guilty for saying yes,..or no. Didn't matter how they answered. I mean they still felt guilty. Always the wrong time Luce..Like we were running ahead or behind each other. Living in different time zones you see. Men and women. That's the problem. Always living in different time zones....Blast it Lucy!! Can never find anything now. Makes you bloody tired just looking. Where is it? Where is it? Come on now. Come on. Where are you?...

He turns, leaving the drawers open and slowly walks back to the chair.

PAUL: Best stop looking, eh? For today. Stop looking for today Paul. Stop looking for today. I'll look again tomorrow, eh Luce? Look again tomorrow.

He sits.

Lights down.

ACT ONE SCENE TWO.

Same setting - Next day.

Lights up.

Muffled dialogue is heard off stage.

(Made up. "I'm alright. Don't fuss Mary. I don't want a bloody quack" etc.)

Paul stumbles in. He is supported by Mary and YULIYA TSVETAYEVA, early 30's, smartly but casually dressed, blue jeans, dark roll neck sweater etc. She is very thin, dark short curly hair, dark skin and exotically beautiful. She speaks English with a pronounced Russian accent.

Paul is obviously dazed.

PAUL: I said I'm fine, really.

YULIYA: I'm so sorry.

MARY: I think he hit his head on the steering wheel.

YULIYA: It was my fault I think. Perhaps I should telephone for an ambulance or a doctor.

PAUL: No. No. No doctors. I've said no doctors. Just sit me down and I'll be fine.

YULIYA: I would feel better if you saw a doctor.

PAUL: I don't bloody care how you feel.

MARY: PAUL!!

PAUL: You don't need to feel better. I'm the one that needs to feel better.

YULIYA: I'm sorry.

PAUL: Sit me down.

They sit Paul in his chair. He grabs his bottle of vodka and begins to pour.

YULIYA: Perhaps some ice.

PAUL: Never have it.

YULIYA: For your head.

PAUL: My head's fine. Stop fussing Mary.

Mary and Yuliya look at each other
as Paul drinks his vodka, then
pours another.

YULIYA: I am sorry.

MARY: I'm sure the car will be fine.

YULIYA: I don't think there was too much damage. My insurance. I'll give details, yes?

MARY: Best give them to me.

YULIYA: Then it is your car?

PAUL: No it bloody isn't.

MARY: No..it isn't. But best give them to me anyway.

Yuliya sits down, takes out a pen
and paper and begins writing.
Paul watches her.

MARY: I'll make us a cup of tea shall I?

YULIYA: No thank you.

PAUL: Vodka?

MARY: Not when she's driving Paul.

PAUL: Never stopped me. (To Yuliya) Mary thinks you can cure anything with tea,
don't you Mary? Nice cup of tea will

PAUL: (cont.) make anything better. Like concussion or bad driving. Any
old problem. Make a cup of tea. It's a British thing.

MARY: I'm sure the Russian people drink tea as well.

Yuliya hands Mary the piece of paper.

MARY: Isn't that right (looking at the paper) Juli...Yuli...

YULIYA: Yuliya!

MARY: Yuliya. Russians are renowned for drinking tea.

YULIYA: Only in Checkov actually. I prefer coffee.

Paul laughs.

MARY: (Slightly annoyed) Coffee it is then!

Mary turns and storms into the kitchen.

YULIYA: Actually.....I didn't mean...

PAUL: Let her do it. It makes her feel like she has a purpose in life.

YULIYA: Yes I see. I'll sit here then.

Awkwardly Yuliya sits back down and looks around the room.

PAUL: Palatial isn't it?

YULIYA: Er....yes.

PAUL: (Smiling) A grand design modelled after Battersea dogs home so I'm told.

Comes complete with an old dog waiting to be buried..but don't tell her I said that.

YULIYA: (Smiling) I've heard how charming British men can be about their wives.

Paul nearly chokes on his vodka.

PAUL: Wife??

YULIYA: I'm sorry. I thought.

PAUL: WIFE???

YULIYA: Lover?

Paul stares in amazement.

YULIYA: Sister?

PAUL: Try old bat that lives across the hall.

YULIYA: Sorry..Old bat. Right. Yes. Again I'm sorry for back ending you. I was late for an appointment. Are you sure you are quite fine?

PAUL: Quite fine?..Quite fine.....My head has stopped spinning for the moment. I have a drink and Lucy and beautiful company and the old bat making coffee in the kitchen. And I have to say that's about as good as it ever gets around here, so I suppose I am quite fine.

YULIYA: Who is Lucy? Daughter?

PAUL: Never liked kids. Who is Lucy? Lucy is a companion. A companion through the night. Confidant. Confessor.

Mary enters with three cups of coffee on a tray.

MARY: And dead cat.

YULIYA: Dead cat?

MARY: Next to the fat lump in the armchair.

Paul glares at Mary.

YULIYA: Oh I see.

Yuliya stands, takes a coffee
from the tray and walks to the
side of the table where Lucy sits.

YULIYA: This is Lucy?

MARY: That's her. (To Paul) I brought you a coffee as well.

PAUL: Vodka and coffee don't mix. Anything made with beans gives me wind.

MARY: Suit yourself. I should have known.

YULIYA: She is lovely.

PAUL: Hear that Mary? Lovely. Lovely she said. Lovely.

MARY: She is not lovely. She is more decrepit and moth eaten than even a dead cat
should be.

YULIYA: A Persian Rex I think.

PAUL: (Warming to this woman) That's right a Persian Rex.

MARY: If you ask me he strokes it too much.

PAUL: Lucy has a name and no one asked you.

Yuliya strokes the cat.

YULIYA: Cats were put here for us to stroke.

PAUL: (Laughs) That's right. That's right. I told you Mary. I told you. She
understands. She gets it.

Yuliya smiles at Paul. Mary eyes
her suspiciously before sitting
down on the sofa, the tray at
her side.

MARY: Yes well. If you ask me he should get rid of it. A grown man talking to a cat. It isn't healthy.

YULIYA: (Winking at Paul) Oh I wouldn't say that. Men have to get their frustration out somehow.

PAUL: (Smiling) And I haven't heard a word of complaint out of Lucy.

Mary looks perplexed as though she's missed the joke.

PAUL: It's nice to have company that understands. What's your name again?

YULIYA: Yuliya.

PAUL: Yuliya. Beautiful!

YULIYA: Thankyou. And you are Paul I think.

PAUL: I think so too.

MARY: Although he's not often sure.

PAUL: Mary!

YULIYA: And you are the lady that lives down the hall, yes?

MARY: When I'm not here. As I often am. Looking after....

PAUL: MARY!!!

MARY: Er...talking with Paul....Wouldn't know what to do without me sometimes, I'm sure.

PAUL: I'm not.

YULIYA: At first I thought you were husband and wife.

PAUL: (Forcing a laugh) Did you hear that Mary? Did you hear that?

Thought we were married. Us!! Married! Imagine that. Married.

MARY: Yes Paul. Ridiculous.

PAUL: But married Mary. Us!

MARY: (Embarrassed) Silly girl.

PAUL: I mean I'm nearer her age than yours.

MARY: Yes Paul. Alright now. Alright. (Realising what he just said) **YOU LIER!!**

PAUL: Mary always gets a little tetchy when you mention age.

MARY: (Tetchy) I do not get tetchy. And if Yul...Jul...if she thought we were married it just goes to show how well I look for my age and that you look like....like an overweight pig. And when you consider how fat pigs are naturally, being overweight takes some doing, Mr "I'm nearer her age than yours".

**Mary takes the tray and goes
back to the kitchen.**

YULIYA: I think you upset your lady friend.

PAUL: Tetchy. It's her nature. She'll never change. Like a white haired old wasp buzzing around the place. One day I'm going to get a rolled up newspaper and swat her and that'll be that.

YULIYA: Perhaps she is tetchy because of sexual frustration.

Paul looks shocked.

PAUL: Sexual frustration? Couldn't be. Mary had all those bits removed years ago.
Along with her teeth.

**Yuliya smiles and sits down.
She drinks her coffee as Paul
stares at her.**

PAUL: So.....a long way from home?

YULIYA: Only five minutes, by car.

PAUL: I meant Mother Russia.

YULIYA: Oh.....

PAUL: Been here long?

YULIYA: Not long...about a year. How long have you been here?

PAUL: Too long. But then staring at the walls takes on its own kind of comfort after a while....They never surprise you.

YULIYA: Don't you like surprises?

PAUL: Not if they involve whiplash.

Paul rubs his neck.

YULIYA: Sorry..Again.

PAUL: Not your fault...well it was, but still. At least this surprise is turning into a pleasant one. (He raises his glass) They're not usually.

YULIYA: Which is why you don't like surprises...They upset your routine?

PAUL: Precisely. My routine of sitting down, drinking vodka, smoking cigarettes and stroking Lucy. As routines go....

YULIYA:It sounds almost Russian.

PAUL: Failed dreamers dead in the snow.

He raises his glass again.

PAUL: Are you sure I can't tempt you?

Yuliya looks around.

YULIYA: I don't think your friend would approve.

PAUL: Don't let that stop you. She'd find fault with the Virgin Mary.

YULIYA: Then perhaps one. I am late already.

PAUL: (Smiling) That's the spirit. We in Shang Ri La don't acknowledge the passing of time anyway. Consider it a temporary respite from the human race.

Paul pours another vodka and holds it out. Yuliya stands and takes it from him. They exchange a glance.

YULIYA: Do you always keep a glass spare on the table.

PAUL: Always. Just in case Lucy feels like a drink. Unfortunately I'm slowly getting the impression that Lucy's a tea totaller. Surprised Mary doesn't like her more....So you're late?

YULIYA: What?

PAUL: For your appointment.

YULIYA: Oh yes....very late. Never mind.

PAUL: Was it important?

YULIYA: Yes...but never mind.

PAUL: I remember when I had appointments..Used to work for the council I did.

YULIYA: Council?

PAUL: Local government. Hah. Government. We governed alright. Like the commanders of the first world war. We governed. Most of the poor bastards never stood a chance. We still herded them like sheep. Out of one pen. Into another. Streams of people wanting this, wanting that. Never ending lines we would move to form other lines. And the pain and the suffering and the children with snotty noses crying and holding onto their mothers for support they would never get. Like trying to govern a swarm of bees. Impossible and pointless. Especially when they're angry. And they were always angry when I saw them.

YULIYA: Why?

PAUL: What?

YULIYA: Why were they angry?

**PAUL: Oh! I don't know. They were usually screaming when they got
to me. Couldn't get a word of sense out of most of them.**

YULIYA: So why don't you work there now?

PAUL: I retired....Bad back. All that sitting down, did for it.

YULIYA: I thought you sat down all the time now.

PAUL: Comfier chair here. I'm recuperating.

YULIYA: You do this all day?

PAUL: Do what all day?

YULIYA: Sitting down. With the vodka.

**PAUL: Sitting down with the vodka. What a lovely way of putting it. Makes it sound
like the actions of a gentleman. Refined. So from one gentleman to another, yes,
sitting down with the vodka is my current occupation. Before it was just a hobby.**

YULIYA: From one gentleman to another?.....

PAUL: What?

YULIYA: You said from one gentleman to another.

PAUL: Did I? Well we don't recognise gender in Shang Ri La either.

YULIYA: You think I could be a man?

**PAUL: Very difficult to tell these days. Men act and sound like women. Women act
and sound like men. Even the pooftas are confused, but not about being pooftas.
That they're very certain about. Comes to something when pooftas are the most
secure gender about....But if it makes you feel any better, you drive like a woman.**

(He smirks)

YULIYA: I'm not sure that's a compliment.

PAUL: Let's pretend it is. Let's pretend I just paid you the best compliment you could ever receive and have another drink.

YULIYA: I think I should leave.

PAUL: Just one more drink. One for the road.

YULIYA: You shouldn't drink and drive.

PAUL: I wont.

YULIYA: Ok. But just one more and then I go to my appointment. I have something very important to do.

PAUL: What?

Yuliya remains silent.

PAUL: Never mind.

Yuliya stands and holds out her glass as Paul pours a large one.

YULIYA: You are a generous man.

PAUL: Thankyou.

YULIYA: You remind me of...never mind.

PAUL: Remind you of...?

YULIYA: Someone else. But you are you. You are Paul. The generous one.

PAUL: Funny. You remind me of someone too.

YULIYA: Your friend is a long time in the kitchen.

PAUL: My friend likes pressing her ear to the door. You'll notice the one on the right side is as flat as a pancake.

YULIYA: Why does she listen?

PAUL: Because she has nothing else to do and she's convinced that one-day I'll kill myself. I think she'd like to watch.

YULIYA: Would you ever kill yourself?

PAUL: Only if she were watching. I wouldn't want to disappoint. And worrying about me gives her something to do. Without that she might kill herself. Keeping each other alive is the only thing we live for.

YULIYA: Now you sound even more like...a friend of mine.

PAUL: A Russian friend?

YULIYA: He was very kind.

PAUL: Don't tell me you had a soviet sugar daddy.

Yuliya laughs.

YULIYA: I wish. Things would have been easier then. We were kind to each other I think. It was a reason...the only reason sometimes.

PAUL: So where is your kind man now?

YULIYA: (Smiling) Well he's not in the kitchen.

PAUL: Then he should think himself lucky. Mary would make him tea and bore him to death.

YULIYA: I think I will go now. Thankyou for....everything. Sorry again.

PAUL: Is it so important?

YULIYA: What?

PAUL: Your appointment. Is it so important? I mean vitally important.

YULIYA: I don't.....

PAUL: Here's a thought.....stay. Stay for a while..Talk. Once I get going I can be quite the conversationalist. Even though later on I won't be able to say conversalani...conversatonal...bugger!

He smiles as Yuliya giggles.

PAUL: Stay. Talk. Talk about yourself. I'll talk about myself. That's what most people call a conversation these days anyway. I'll try and remind you of your friend again.

YULIYA: I'm not sure I should be reminded of him.

PAUL: Then I wont. Stay. Talk. Let me listen. Or you listen. Either way and we'll forget the damage to the car. I'll pay for it so your insurance need never know. What have you got to lose? I'll even let you stroke Lucy some more.

YULIYA: That's very generous but....

PAUL: I'm not capable of.....you know...there's no need to be scared...I don't get around as quickly as I used to. Ask Luce if you don't believe me. She'll tell you. Or Mary. No not her.....One day....just the two of us.

Paul stands up slowly and awkwardly.

PAUL: Away from it all.

Paul and Yuliya stand looking at each other.

Lights down.

Lights up.

Mary is standing in the place and position Yuliya just occupied, bathed in green light. Paul looks through her as though she wasn't there, and in truth she isn't.

MARY: What do you think you're doing?

PAUL: Nothing to be ashamed of.

MARY: A young girl. Can't be more than twenty-five. She won't see anything in you you know.

PAUL: She says I remind her of someone. Seemed important to her.

MARY: She was being nice. You know that.

PAUL: Perhaps she is nice.

MARY: You don't believe that.

PAUL: No.

MARY: So why?

PAUL: Perhaps my own voice has begun to bore me.

MARY: Join the club.....You'll just hurt yourself again.

PAUL: Perhaps I miss being hurt.

MARY: You don't have the energy for this.

PAUL: I'll survive.

MARY: Perhaps.....There's nothing to be done then?

PAUL: No.

MARY: Nothing to be said?

PAUL: No.

Lights down.

Lights up.

Yuliya is back where she stood
before looking at Paul staring
off into space.

PAUL: I may have lost faith in language, but I still like listening.

YULIYA: Then I'll stay.

Paul breaks out of his daze.

PAUL: Oh..... Thankyou.

YULIYA: I'll go and park my car next to yours, yes?

Paul nods and watches her go.
Yuliya exits. As soon as she
does Mary enters from the
kitchen.

MARY: Is she going at last? I thought you'd never get rid of her.

PAUL: She's staying.

MARY: What?

PAUL: For a drink or two. And maybe something to eat later on.

MARY: Oh.

PAUL: I thought that would please you.

MARY: Have you got anything to give her?

PAUL: Well that's a question and a half.

MARY: To eat. Have you got anything to give her to eat?

PAUL: What do you care? You didn't want her to stay a minute ago.

MARY: What?

PAUL: Telling me I'm too old for her. I know that. I don't need telling by you.

MARY: What are you talking about?

PAUL: Never mind.

MARY: (Concerned) Do you want me to stay?

PAUL: Do what you like....This girl interests me.

MARY: You've been interested before.

PAUL: I knew you'd say that. Just like you to say that. Dragging up the past. Holding onto it. You shouldn't you know. You shouldn't. Not when there's not much future left.

MARY: Speak for yourself.

PAUL: I will.

MARY: Don't blame me if you make a fool of yourself all over again. She's not Annerley and neither was the last one.

Yuliya enters again.

MARY: I'm staying!!

YULIYA: Good.

PAUL: Good.

MARY: Good.

Lights down.

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

Same setting. Later.

Lights up.

Mary is clearing away three dinner plates, stacking them one on top of each other and then placing the knives and forks on top. Paul and Yuliya eye her intently.

YULIYA: Can I help you in the kitchen?

MARY: No, I'm fine.

YULIYA: It was lovely.

PAUL: Better than could be expected anyway.

YULIYA: Thankyou.

MARY: You're welcome.

Mary stands and looks at Paul also expecting thanks. Paul simply grins at her as she turns and bustles into the kitchen.

PAUL: She's a wizz with a microwave that woman.

YULIYA: It was certainly better than I could have done, but then I rarely cook.

PAUL: I thought you people were renowned for your cooking. Your genius with a potato.

YULIYA: Not all of us are the same you know. My sister was a good cook. She married quickly. Some men don't want a woman to cook though. Am I right?

PAUL: Certainly. Women have a lot of other uses, er..talents!

YULIYA: Yes.

Pause.

PAUL: So what other family do you have?

YULIYA: Just a sister. My parents died and so I came to here. People have helped. I survive.

PAUL: So what exactly do you do?

Yuliya pauses, biting her lip
and looking nervous.

Mary enters.

MARY: Well the washing up is done, Paul.....I said the washing up is done!

PAUL: Yes I heard you the first time. I'm not the one going deaf, you know.

YULIYA: Thankyou again, Mary.

MARY: You're welcome again, Yuliya. You're welcome.

Mary glares intently at Paul.

PAUL: (To Yuliya) Mary thinks that being thanked is up there with a multiple orgasm or a cocaine high. But I have a policy of saying thankyou only when she does something I couldn't do myself, or I really mean it. But, just this once, if it'll really make you happy, even though you were eating my food and drinking my tea, thankyou Mary! Thankyou.

MARY: Well if you're going to make it such a big deal, don't bother.

PAUL: Ok. I wont.

Mary goes and sits down next to
Yuliya on the couch.

MARY: Well isn't this nice.

PAUL: Mary, why do you bother?

MARY: What do you mean?

PAUL: You know exactly what I mean. When have you ever been interested in my conversation? The ramblings of an old drunk are hardly going to fit in with your view of the world.

MARY: Well if you ever said anything interesting, perhaps they would. Besides what makes you think Yuliya would be interested.

PAUL: Because I'm plying her with alcohol until her judgement goes.

YULIYA: So that's your plan, you naughty old Englishman.

Yuliya giggles, then self-consciously covers her mouth. Paul proffers the bottle of vodka and fills Yuliya's drink.

MARY: Why she's bothering to stay here and listen to your drivel is beyond me. Beautiful young woman like you should be out with people of your own age.

YULIYA: You think I'm beautiful?

PAUL: You're very beautiful.

Yuliya looks to the ground timidly.

YULIYA: Thankyou.

She carries on drinking, as both her and Paul do throughout the rest of the scene.

PAUL: So what is it that you do exactly?

YULIYA: Oh I'm sure that wouldn't interest you. (Quickly changing the subject) Mary...Do you have family?

MARY: No.

YULIYA: Paul?

PAUL: No.

YULIYA: Oh.

Pause. Yuliya drinks again.

MARY: No, Paul and I have no family.

PAUL: No children.

MARY: No wife.

Paul looks at Mary.

PAUL: No. But then we didn't want them did we Mary? Best on our own, Lucy keeping us company. Isn't that right?

MARY: Yes....Best on our own.

PAUL: Families just drag you back you see. All that responsibility. All that pain. Just to watch them leave you for no good reason. We get to be so much happier without them. Don't you agree?

YULIYA: Do you not have parents alive?

MARY: No one lives that long.

PAUL: Well, well. Aren't we being honest. I would imagine the only living relative between the three of us would be your sister, Yuliya. Your, cooking potatoes as we speak, sister.

MARY: Do you hear from her much?

YULIYA: Not much.

PAUL: Too busy cooking I would imagine.

Yuliya smiles.

MARY: So why here?

PAUL: Why not?

MARY: Paul, let the girl answer herself.

YULIYA: I study, as well as work.

PAUL: Study what?

YULIYA: English. English language. It is fascinating.

PAUL: Rubbish. Language is dead, we all know that.

YULIYA: Language is....?

PAUL: Dead. Deceased.. Totally useless anyway. Never worked. Any language, not just poor old English, they're all dead. Communication never really worked did it, let's be honest. It just helps mess things up.

YULIYA: We're communicating.

PAUL: Are we? Then perhaps we're lucky. Perhaps for the first and only time in history we fully understand each other, but I doubt it. I doubt it very much. Language is useless, but it is all we have.

MARY: And sex.

Paul splutters into his drink.

PAUL: MARY!

MARY: What? (To Yuliya) I think he's surprised I know the word. Paul has this view that I'm only a woman when I'm making tea or bending over the kitchen sink.

PAUL: I never think you're a woman when you're bending over. It puts me off my vodka.

MARY: Thank God for that.

Paul and Mary look at each other and laugh.

YULIYA: But if you don't believe in language and you don't have sex,
what do you have left?

PAUL: Friendship!

MARY: Friendship!....Although he'd prefer sex....And so would I!

PAUL: But not with each other.

MARY: Certainly not...Tyrone Power was always my favourite..and Ronald Coleman.

PAUL: I keep telling you they were both gay.

MARY: They were not!

PAUL: (To Yuliya) Mary sent them both letters when she was young, with a full
length picture enclosed. I swear that was what turned them.

MARY: I did not!....The pictures were from the waist up.

PAUL: You wouldn't have had any more luck if they were from the waist down.

MARY: I remember I was sixteen and my Father paid for them to be taken for my
birthday. All dressed in my Sunday best with a red rose in my hair, like I was
some kind of Italian woman or something. He was awfully upset when I sent
them away. Hardly spoke to me for a week afterwards. Said the red in my hair
made me look different, special almost...He always liked to dress me in red.

YULIYA: I just think if you don't talk or you don't have sex then what's the point?

PAUL: Ask God. Apparently he knows.

MARY: And you're young. Those things seem important when you're young.

PAUL: Those things seem important when you're old. Just obviously not
when you're as old as Mary.

MARY: Are you deliberately trying to get a rise out of me?

PAUL: No. I'm just good at it.

MARY: (To Yuliya) And his wife said that was all he was good at.

PAUL: MARY!!

YULIYA: So you were married!

**Paul is angry now and doesn't
want to talk but feels compelled to.**

PAUL: Only for about ten years...Not long.

YULIYA: That seems a long time.

PAUL: Not when you're sitting here.

MARY: She left him because...

Paul turns and stares at her.

MARY: because.....well perhaps now isn't the time...Would anyone like
another cup of tea?

PAUL: NO!

YULIYA: No..thankyou.

PAUL: Perhaps you'd care for some vodka Mary? Although your tongue
seems to be loosening up nicely already.

MARY: No...No thankyou. I think I'll just go into the kitchen and make myself that
cup of tea. (To everyone) Are you sure I can't tempt you?

**Paul keeps silent, not looking
at Mary as Yuliya just shakes
her head. Mary nods sadly.**

MARY: Well...ok then, just me.

She turns and exits to the kitchen. For a moment or two Paul and Yuliya are silent.

PAUL: You should ignore Mary. She isn't used to meeting other people.

It obviously disagrees with her.

YULIYA: So you were married?

PAUL: Yes.

YULIYA: Was she pretty?

PAUL: For about three years. Then she seemed to get bored of me. Bored of me.

Ironic that people do that, but I could see the shift in her eyes when she looked at me. Something changed. It was like I wasn't the person she'd married, although obviously I was. I just think she actually began to see me for who I was, rather than who she wanted me to be.

YULIYA: Who did she want you to be?

PAUL: Someone else. Someone....else. I didn't change you see. She didn't like me when I stopped lying to her.

YULIYA: You lied to her?

PAUL: Of course. Why do you think she married me. Men don't believe in change,...well I don't anyway. Of course we tell women that we do because that's what they want to hear. A settled life, a house, luxuries and anything else they can think of we will provide,...even if we wont.

YULIYA: I wanted that once....a long time ago.

PAUL: Did you get it?

YULIYA: No.

PAUL: There you are.

YULIYA: He was.....never mind.

Paul looks at her.

PAUL: Go on. I'm listening.

YULIYA: Never mind....Maybe later...May I have another drink?

Yuliya stands and holds out her glass.

PAUL: Of course. You know it's funny. I can't remember the last time I poured a woman a drink....but then I can't remember the last time I refused a woman one either.

Paul pours Yuliya a large drink. She begins to walk around the room.

YULIYA: Most of my family used to live in a room like this....I was seven.

They were happy times... My Mother would sing and I would dance for them all in the middle of the room. They would laugh. And I would dance faster and faster and they would laugh harder and harder and the more I danced the more they would laugh, until I could no longer dance or they could no longer.....they were happy times.

PAUL: Happier than this?

YULIYA: I suppose.

PAUL: Well I'm not surprised.....by the sound of things you travelled half way around the world to end up in exactly the same room..It would depress the hell out of me too.

YULIYA: But you are always in the same room.

PAUL: No I'm not.

YULIYA: Yes youwhat do you mean?

PAUL: Never mind. I'm just being deliberately vague to interest you. There are no secrets when you're old..even from yourself. Sometimes there seems to be little point in continuing...I never danced for my family.

YULIYA: Perhaps I never did either.

PAUL: What?

YULIYA: Now I'm being vague to interest you.

PAUL: Oh.

YULIYA: Did you never dance for anybody?

PAUL: Certainly not...I once tried dancing with my wife, but she never seemed to enjoy close physical contact.

YULIYA: Not even in the bedroom?

PAUL: Especially not the bedroom.

YULIYA: Poor you.

PAUL: Oh it wasn't so bad...Sometimes she would allow me a sympathetic entrance, if my mood was especially tetchy or if lines had been permanently etched in my forehead for a week...Sometimes I would deliberately start a fight just to let her know how much I wanted it.

YULIYA: Perhaps you weren't doing the right things to her.

PAUL: Undoubtedly. But then I didn't want to do the right things to her. I wanted to do all the wrong things,..she just wouldn't let me. So she would relieve my tension and I would relieve her guilt and everything would be alright, even though it wasn't.

YULIYA: Her guilt?

**PAUL: For being...never mind. You know after our divorce I went to one of these
discotheques looking for a little, well, looking for something.**

YULIYA: Sex?

**PAUL: Someone to dance with...It was full of very young people jigging their bits up
and down to some kind of jungle rhythm, desperately trying to attract someone
of the opposite sex and wearing clothes that some Homo erectus loving
fashion merchant had no doubt told them were fashionable and were no doubt
guaranteed to pull in. I very quickly went off the idea all together and came
home for a drink.**

YULIYA: And you've been here ever since.

PAUL: At least I'm not desperate.

YULIYA: What a shame.

**Paul looks at Yuliya who keeps her
head bowed.**

PAUL: You know if I'm not very much mistaken I'd say that you were flirting with me.

YULIYA: And what would you do if I were?

PAUL: Have a heart attack probably.

Yuliya laughs.

YULIYA: You are a funny old Englishman, aren't you!

**PAUL: Indeed, I am. And you're a beautiful young woman, who hasn't got a clue
what she'd be getting herself into. Have you?**

YULIYA: You'd be surprised.

They pause for a moment staring at each other.

Mary enters.

MARY: I...oh.

Paul and Yuliya stop looking at each other, but not before Mary has noticed what passed between them.

PAUL: I what? Spit it out Mary.

MARY: I...er..I...Perhaps it was time that I was going. I'll show myself out.

She makes as though to go.

YULIYA: No. Wait! Before you go, may I say thankyou again for being so kind. The meal was....how do you say it?

PAUL: From a tin?

YULIYA: No. Delicious Mary.. It was delicious.

MARY: Well. I'm glad you enjoyed it.

PAUL: Mary!! Before you go, perhaps you could make yourself useful and show Yuliya where she'll be sleeping.

MARY: And where might I ask will that be?

PAUL: In my room of course. (To Yuliya) Don't worry, my dear, I'll take the chaise longue. Ok Mary? Ok?

MARY: Alright Paul. Alright. Follow me Yuliya. And brace yourself for the smell.

PAUL: My room does not smell.

MARY: And lock the door after you.

YULIYA: I'm sure Paul is the perfect gentleman.

MARY: That's because you don't know him.

Mary exits followed by Yuliya.

PAUL: And neither do you, you old bat, although you've wanted to for years. Eh Luce? (Stroking the cat) We've seen how she looks at us sometimes haven't we? We're not blind altogether. And I see how she looks at that sweet young girl as well. Envy is never attractive,...especially in the old. Still, Luce, this day has been as surprising to me as to that old bat. And it's not finished yet, is it? It's not finished yet.

Yuliya enters followed by Mary.

MARY: What's not finished?

PAUL: The vodka. I'm disappointed in us Yuliya, we must try harder.

Paul pours them both another drink.

PAUL: Although the night is still, young, isn't it my dear?

MARY: He's usually asleep by this time, snoring loudly.

PAUL: Purring like a kitten.

MARY: A kitten I can sometimes hear three doors away. The neighbours have all complained.

PAUL: No they have not. Well not to me at least.

MARY: No they complain to me. As though I'm his keeper. Well I'm not you know, I'm not.

PAUL: We all have our crosses to bear.

MARY: I see how they look at me sometimes. People have filthy minds,
they really do.

PAUL: They're probably composing a mental shopping list, or thinking about their
faded lives. It's you that has the filthy mind, and don't think I don't know it.

MARY: Well. I can see how that's upsetting you, so I'll take my leave.
Goodnight Yuliya.

YULIYA: Goodnight Mary.

MARY: And good luck!

Mary exits.

PAUL: Goodnight.

**Yuliya walks over to Paul's side
and takes up her drink.**

YULIYA: You know you treat her very badly.

PAUL: That's because she reminds me of Stalin. It's the moustache
that does it.

YULIYA: She is your friend. And there is no moustache.

PAUL: Then she must have bought herself a razor. I thought she looked
different.

Yuliya giggles.

YULIYA: You know I think this vodka is getting me a little drunk.

PAUL: Thank God for that. I can tell you're Russian by the way you drink. Most
women I've ever known would have been under the table by now.

YULIYA: And what would you do with them under the table? As if I didn't know. Besides we drink it from birth to keep warm.

PAUL: Lucky you.

YULIYA: Yes...lucky me.

Yuliya pauses, lost in thought, staring into the distance.

PAUL: Yuliya.

YULIYA: It was so cold, sometimes. So cold. And you'd do anything to keep warm.

People died from it, lots of times. When you started to be numb all over, when you were numb all over and couldn't feel the pain anymore, that's when you were in trouble, that's when you had to do something, anything, to keep warm. You had to do anything to keep warm, or you'd die. So you did. Did whatever was necessary.

Yuliya starts weeping slowly, her head down, slowly swaying from side to side.

PAUL: Hey..Hey..What's the.....MARY!! MARY!!...Dammit. Come on now, don't cry.

We're supposed to be having a good time, you and I. A good time.

Suddenly Yuliya flings herself down at Paul's feet and grabs hold of him.

YULIYA: You won't let me get cold, will you? You won't let me get cold.

Paul holds her.

PAUL: No, of course not. Of course not. Central heating and everything look.

Mary enters.

MARY: Did you shou.....What in heaven's name have you done to her??

PAUL: Nothing. Don't be so silly, Mary. I never even left my chair.

MARY: Well you've obviously done something to her. What did you suggest?

PAUL: Not what your furtive little mind is thinking. I just gave her a
drink that's all and she came over all funny.

**Yuliya pulls away and begins wiping
her eyes.**

YULIYA: I'm sorry. Sorry. Really I'm sorry. I think perhaps the vodka.

PAUL: Made you emotional.

YULIYA: Made me emotional. I'm sorry.

MARY: Perhaps you should have had that cup of tea.

PAUL: MARY!!!!

MARY: Well.

YULIYA: Perhaps I should go to bed now.

PAUL: But the evenings just getting started.

MARY: Paul, it's obvious that she's tired and upset and needs sleep. Come with me
Yuliya. I'll put you to bed.

YULIYA: I am sorry Paul.

MARY: Don't you worry about him. You'll not be missing much in the way of
interesting conversation anyway, so come on.

Yuliya slowly walks towards Mary.

MARY: That's it. I'll take care of you. Say goodnight to Mr Disappointed over there.

PAUL: Ha Ha.

Yuliya looks back as Paul stares forward.

YULIYA: Goodnight.

Paul grunts unenthusiastically.

MARY: Goodnight.

Yuliya exits, her head down as Mary follows smiling broadly.

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT TWO SCENE TWO.

Same setting.

Everything is in darkness. Paul can be heard tossing and turning on the sofa, moaning disgruntledly.

PAUL: Dammit!!

Paul switches on a table lamp at the side of the couch, and begins rubbing the sleep out of his eyes.

Slowly he rises to a sitting position, throwing a blanket off of him. He is wearing red and white striped flannelette pyjamas with string around the middle.

With great effort he stands up turning the table lamp towards his armchair and Lucy.

PAUL: I don't suppose you can sleep either, can you Luce? Becoming quite a habit isn't it. Awake in the middle of the night like some bloody vampire.

Slowly he walks over to the armchair table and pours himself another drink. Draped over the chair is a fawn brown dressing gown with dark brown highlights which he drags on.

PAUL: Although how a man is supposed to sleep knowing that there's a young, attractive and probably sleeping naked female not ten yards away, is beyond me. It's certainly been eventful. And tomorrow she'll be gone. Gone. Gone. Just like all the rest, eh Luce? Just like all the rest. Where did they go? Where did she go? (Turning towards the bedroom door). Where will she go? Tomorrow....

PAUL: (cont.) Well, wherever it is, it's no concern of ours is it Luce? Coming here, drinking our vodka, and then having the indecency to get drunk and all female on us. And not in a good way either. Blast it. Never did work out. Never once. No matter what, you would have thought just once, but no...Not ever. Not ever.....I don't suppose you remember Annerley, do you? Before your time. You came along with the marriage, didn't you? The only worthwhile thing we ever had was you.

At the other side of the chair bathed in blue light appears ELIZABETH, Paul's wife. She is dressed in a tight and unerotic black suit.

She appears to be very real, but is no less imagined for that.

LIZ: We had a lot of worthwhile things together.

PAUL: Most of which you got to keep I remember.

LIZ: Don't be bitter.

PAUL: Why? You were....Until you died. Your parents never even invited me to the funeral you know, as though I'd had something to do with it.

LIZ: I'm happier now.

PAUL: I'll bet. You'd had the maths teacher from Stoke and the accountant from....where was he from again?

LIZ: Reading.

PAUL: That's it...BLOODY ACCOUNTANTS!!!

LIZ: He wasn't to blame.

PAUL: I know. I just don't like accountants. So why did you do it? Your parents blamed me nevertheless.

LIZ: I know.

PAUL: I did try you know. Tried all the bloody time.

LIZ: Not hard enough...If you'd loved me like you said you would,
you'd have accepted what happened. I'd have been enough for you.

PAUL: You were enough for me.

LIZ: No I wasn't. You still blame me for how you ended up. Alone.

PAUL: And you still blame me?

LIZ: Of course.

PAUL: What???

LIZ: Well it was your fault, you know.

PAUL: Everyone's responsible for his or her own actions. You can't blame me.

LIZ: I just did. Do you think just because I couldn't have children that I deserved to
end up with my head in an oven. I wasn't Sylvia Plath you know. You were the
one with poetry in your soul, if not in your pen.

PAUL: You slept with someone else.

LIZ: It was called a cry for attention.

PAUL: Rubbish. You wanted out of the marriage and you knew for a
fact that I wouldn't stand for that.

LIZ: Well what if it was. You no longer wanted me. Who can blame me for getting a
little comfort before going the way of all flesh. I wasn't your precious Annerley
and I couldn't give you children. Guilt. What was it you said to that poor young
thing asleep on your bed? I let you in so that you could relieve my guilt. At first
I was guilty, yes. At first, for a year or two, when you still seemed like the man I
married, then I was guilty. But the more and more you closed off, the more and

more you turned away, the more I felt glad. Glad that I couldn't. Glad that you wouldn't go on. You sat in that chair for years like you some Rodan sculpture, draining the will to live out of me. You didn't even screw me. As though I was that unattractive. Well look at yourself, some fat old....

PAUL: SHUT UP!!!!

Liz pauses, stunned.

PAUL: And go away.

Liz vanishes.

PAUL: We don't have to listen to that, now do we Luce? No point in dragging up the past now. Not that it matters any more. She's gone..All gone. All gone and nothing to show except...I wonder what I did with that poem...do you remember? I don't. I should. But I don't...It used to be important to us didn't it? All I had left from.....anyway. That's lost too no doubt. Doesn't matter anymore.

ANNERLEY, Paul's first love appears where Liz had been in a blaze of red light. She is dressed in a cabaret artist's outfit, all glitter and gold and is reminiscent of Yuliya.

ANN: Doesn't it?

Paul is obviously shaken at first but quickly regains his composure.

PAUL: No.

ANN: That's not what you used to say to me. Sitting there in your armchair. I remember you used to recite that poem to me, even after your wife had left you. And after you'd read through it some twenty or so times, just so that the inflection in your voice was just right and suitably tragic, then you'd weep. Weep for me. Like a child. A forty-five year old child.

PAUL: Yes, well.

ANN: And then you'd squeeze Lucy tight to your breast as though she were me. I always thought that's what killed her.

PAUL: At least she stayed with me.

ANN: Did she have much choice? Did I? Stuck here in this room, with you for nearly thirty years. No voice of my own. No real opinions of my own, no life of my own, only that which you would provide me. Trapped here. I wasn't even allowed to age, now was I. I look the same now as I did all those years ago. You just wouldn't let me go, would you. Wouldn't let go of something, of someone who after all, let you go long ago.

PAUL: Couldn't.

ANN: Wouldn't. Loving me ruined your marriage, you know that. After all, how could the poor thing compete with someone who didn't age and a memory you would never let fade? Most people would have had more sense.

PAUL: Most people would have forgotten what it was like. I didn't.

ANN: What was it like?

PAUL: Perfect.

ANN: For you?

PAUL: FOR US!!

ANN: For you. We had fun yes. We were good, yes. But we were never perfect. You were just too young to know of anything different. I was two years older than you then, and I knew different. Why do you think I left?

PAUL: Because you wanted to sing. I remember.

ANN: Because I wanted a life. I found a life that I liked without you.

PAUL: You've told me that before.

ANN: Then why don't you believe me?

PAUL: BECAUSE I JUST DON'T WANT TO!! O.K!! I JUST DON'T WANT TO. CAN'T. WONT. Can't...Can't...It was perfect..You, me, the sunsets we saw fall as we lay in each other's arms. Nothing could touch us. You and me.

ANN: You and I.

PAUL: You and I..

Paul sits in the armchair, drink in hand, looking up to her, adoringly.

PAUL: Do you remember the first time we....?

ANN: Shagged!

PAUL: WHY DO YOU ALWAYS HAVE TO BE SO BLOODY VULGAR?

ANN: You are about most other things.

PAUL: Not about this.

ANN: Yes. I remember.

PAUL: And do you remember how long it lasted?

ANN: Three seconds.

PAUL: Three seconds. (Smiling) Three and a half to be exact, but why quibble. And then you came to me the following day.

ANN: "Was that your first time?"

PAUL: "You noticed then?...What gave me away?"

ANN: "The fact that you were crap!"

Paul laughs.

PAUL: Good times.

ANN: You were though.

PAUL: (Not listening) And do you remember when I asked you to marry me?

ANN: You were drunk.

PAUL: Eight double whiskeys would have made you drunk at seventeen.

At least I was sincere.

ANN: And I said...?

PAUL: You said yes....in ten years. You'd marry me in ten years.

Ten years....and I waited.

ANN: And I never showed.

PAUL: Never showed...Why not?

ANN: I was dead, remember? "Girl of 29, dies horribly in car crash." Where was it?

PAUL: Tuscany.

ANN: That's right, Tuscany. Beautiful place to die, if you have to. But I wouldn't have come back even so. You know that don't you.

PAUL: I know. I knew I'd lost you the last time we made love. Everything about you was different. The way you moved. The way you smelt, the way you breathed. The way you looked at me. Everything was different.

ANN: I'd found a life without you and it made me happy.

PAUL: I remember getting up after we'd finished and walking out onto the balcony we had. I felt numb. Like I was dying and there was nothing I could do. The stars were out. The sky was a dark blue, not black, I remember that, just blue. It didn't seem real. That everything I believed in, everything I used to be because of you had died. I had died and you weren't there to.....you weren't there to save me.

ANN: All I saw was your big white arse shining in the moonlight.

PAUL: You used to love me, I remember that. You used to love me.

ANN: And then I was gone.

Annerley vanishes. Paul remains seated in the armchair, not noticing that he's now alone.

PAUL: And then you were gone. And so was everything that I had been. Young, virile, hopeful and better than this. My body feels like an old sock that I've worn too many times. It lost its shape somewhere along the line and now I'm tired of wearing it, tired of seeing it. Dragging it from place to place, one home then the next, until now it stinks of too many memories to move any more. And then of course, there's the girl...she reminds me of...

Paul looks around to see that Annerley has gone.

PAUL: Damn it.(Stroking Lucy)..Never mind, eh Lucy. You and me, eh? You and me.....

Behind Paul the door to the bedroom opens. Light shines through brightly and Yuliya's shadow walks before her as she comes and stands in the doorway, dressed in a satin slip. She may or may not be real. Paul is oblivious to her entrance.

PAUL: No-one wants an old sock these days, not any more anyway. Not any more.

YULIYA: Now you really remind me of back home.

Paul jumps slightly, turning, but not rising from his seat.

PAUL: I thought you were unconscious?

YULIYA: I was, for a while, but I heard shouting, talking. I couldn't make out what you were saying. At first I thought your lady friend had come back.

PAUL: Why? Do you want a cup of tea?

Yuliya slowly walks over to Paul's armchair and kneels at his feet.

YULIYA: Don't be mad with me, please. I have sobered up now. I didn't want to leave, but.....may I have another?

Paul laughs and pours another drink, passing it to Yuliya.

YULIYA: Forgiven?

PAUL: Forgiven....Not that there's anything to forgive.

YULIYA: There's always something to forgive...Who were you talking to?

PAUL: Dead friends.

YULIYA: Lovers?

PAUL: Some of them. (He strokes Lucy)

YULIYA: What did they say?

PAUL: What I wanted them to say,...well usually..But not tonight. Don't you find it odd that I talk to myself?

YULIYA: No, I do it all the time. How else do you talk to the dead?

PAUL: Good point.

YULIYA: Not tonight?

PAUL: What?

YULIYA: You said, not tonight.

PAUL: No. Not tonight..Tonight they seemed to have a little more honesty than I usually give them. In fact the conversations usually go far more my way. Tonight, I seemed less in control.

YULIYA: Then they must have been really talking to you.

PAUL: Rubbish. Must be the alcohol or the lack of sleep, or delayed shock after the accident.

YULIYA: Wouldn't you feel better if you thought they were actually talking to you?

PAUL: No, I'd feel like a man that had just seen the last ship sail away. Stuck here and no hope of rescue. I know for a fact that they weren't actually talking from beyond the grave because..well, because, well,...look, you come in here, parading around in your underwear, drinking my vodka, talking nonsense. No wonder I'm confused. They weren't really here and that's all there is. I may be old and....what do you mean you do it all the time?

YULIYA: Dead friends. We all talk to dead friends.

PAUL: Do you? You don't look old enough.

YULIYA: It doesn't matter how old you are where I come from. Another?

Yuliya drains her glass and raises it up to be filled.

PAUL: As we're alone...with the dead.

Paul fills her glass.

PAUL: Go on.

YULIYA: I shouldn't really.

PAUL: Is he the one I reminded you of?

YULIYA: (Nodding) So kind. So gentle.

PAUL: Go on. There are no secrets in Shang Ri La.

YULIYA: I've never talked about this....I don't suppose it matters now. But I think, very much, that it will shock you. It may make you not like me.

PAUL: What were you, politicians?

Yuliya giggles.

YULIYA: My funny old Englishman...Promise, you'll still like me.

PAUL: Promise.

YULIYA: And think I'm beautiful?

PAUL: More than you'll ever realise.

YULIYA: (Nods) He was Pietor. Pietor. And he was beautiful. Beautiful. Big and strong. Dark, handsome features. Black eyes and fierce like a man should be...I remember. I remember how alive he seemed when he talked, as though that were the only thing that mattered, the talking, and how all his emotions seemed to pour out of his face, bursting through to show you how much he felt, how much was inside. He could never hold anything back. It was as though he had stored every story, every moment from his life and somehow turned it all into conversation, turned it into something that would make the time pass easier. A

YULIYA: (cont.) comment here, a moment of life there that would always, somehow make the now, the now more bearable. It was the moments of silence that were the worse, you see, the moments without his gruff voice shattering the silence. The moments where all you had was this.

Yuliya points to the room around them.

YULIYA: This is slightly more than I remember....The walls were always bare, after my parents died. My Mother used to insist on wallpaper, even if it didn't match. She thought a little decadence necessary to lift our spirits. But after she....after she'd gone, well my Father took to....well took to whatever he could get his hands on. No one stopped him. We knew when my Mother left that the reason for him to stay had gone. My sister and I were mostly grown and could take care of ourselves. I tried to keep him comfortable but.... Well the end came quickly one night. And he looked almost happy.

PAUL: Pietor. What about him?

YULYIA: He came later. After my sister married. She moved away. Far away. And I understood. And I was happy with Pietor, for a while. For a year it was like I'd found heaven. Can you imagine?

PAUL: Just about.

YULIYA: It was not as though we needed things. We managed to find enough to live. We had....we had...we had it all for a while.

PAUL: As though everything that had been you before was reborn into something fresh. Not you or me but we. Complete and.....well...I understand. I've not always been here you know.

YULIYA: I have.....so it seems. A room, a chair, a fire without wood or coal.

PAUL: Oh. Are you cold?

YULIYA: No. Not here.....We could have made it. I know we could have made it..But
then, slowly, almost as though it hadn't happened, he began to grow restless.
As though being happy was no longer enough.

PAUL: Men do that.

YULIYA: Why?

PAUL: Because we're unlike you. Women have the luxury of being beautiful. Of
being desired. So they can be happy with their existence, can't they. They can
rest in the knowledge that somewhere, no matter how old or tired or barren
they get, there will always be some man, penis in hand, dreaming of better
days. Dreaming of them. Dreaming up some new way to touch them and make
them feel special. Women are always going to be special, because we make
them that way...Men, on the other hand, have never been and will never be. Our
destiny is to look, to dream and ultimately to fail in our search for perfection.
Even when we find it, we pick at it and moan about it until everything beautiful
is gone...We're the ones that will find fault with the Virgin Mary one day.

YULIYA: I never claimed to be perfect.

PAUL: But you thought the relationship was...He didn't understand reality. He didn't
get any of it, so eventually he destroyed it. Men destroy beauty and that which
we don't understand. Which are often the same things. Happiness isn't enough
for a man. Although it seems to be for women.

YULIYA: Even though you don't make us happy.

PAUL: No...We can.....Though not often.

YULIYA: No.

PAUL: So....?

YULIYA: So.....Are you sure?

Paul nods, filling Yuliya's drink.

YULIYA: When he would get restless he would start filling the time with drugs. Just small time at first. Nothing he couldn't handle. They passed the time, you didn't notice the time, at all. Didn't notice where you were. Time passed and you forgot. So the drugs did work for a while. And at first, even with the drugs, his eyes would still burn and his mouth became alive with words and before you knew it, dawn would overtake all the candles that we had lit, and it would be time to hold each other again....To hold each other again.

Yuliya's arms slowly entwine Paul's legs and grasp them tightly.

YULIYA: But slowly..very slowly... his sleep seemed to bring demons. Demons that shook him again and again, no matter how tightly I clung on...Towards the end, the end,...towards the end he didn't sleep at all...and even though he would still talk it was as though there was no fire left in him....Unless he burned for the drugs...We...We burned for the drugs towards the end.

PAUL: You?

Yuliya nods.

YULIYA: I wanted to get into his world..To try and understand..Even though they make you incapable of understanding anything. I wanted to share everything with him, even if it was only a needle.

PAUL: Dangerous business, so I here.

YULIYA: It all was.....I remember we used to go south in the summer. Take a train together and work. Work in fields, work wherever we could, and if we were lucky, very lucky, we could save enough, buy enough, a big enough, what you call it, stash, to last us through the winter. Three summers. Of course with every passing year what we'd saved seemed to be used so much quicker than the year before. And you had to be careful. Careful of the authorities. Careful of everybody.

PAUL: So what happened?

YULIYA: I left him.

PAUL: But I thought you said?....

YULIYA: I LEFT HIM!....We had finished working for the summer and were on a train home....He had been taking some concoction that he'd made most of the day, and had made friends with two other men. He let me.....well.. suddenly everybody was having the most marvellous time. He was laughing, they were laughing and I was laughing....although if you asked me why, I wouldn't know. Then Pietor went to the toilet. I knew why....He wasn't going to share too much with strangers when winter was coming....Slowly, after perhaps twenty minutes, he hadn't returned and I became worried, paranoid...So we all went to the toilet together.

PAUL: He was dead?

YULIYA: No.....Nearly....The needle was on the floor, vomit, blood. The Pietor I knew was gone.

PAUL: So what happened?

YULIYA: At the next stop, with his breathing slowly fading, we left him sitting on the platform and got back on the train....If we'd been discovered with him it would have meant jail for all of us..... As I said...I left him.....Do you still like me now, my funny old Englishman??

PAUL: I'm sure I'd have done the same in your position.

YULIYA: Left the only love you'd ever had to die alone.

PAUL: The only love I've ever had did die alone.....Of course she left me, but....but as you said the person you loved died on that train....No point sacrificing yourself as well.

YULIYA: Perhaps.

PAUL: And so you talk to him? When you're alone.

YULIYA: (Nodding) All the time I'm alone, he's there, still there, with me..And I still here his voice burning bright some nights. As though I know exactly what he'd be saying at any given moment...My Pietor.

PAUL: Annerley.

YULIYA: What?

PAUL: Nothing....Nothing...They're gone you know...No matter how much you hold on to them...they're gone.

Yuliya starts crying.

YULIYA: And now....

Paul bends down and takes Yuliya's face in his hands.

PAUL: And now...

Paul draws closer and kisses her.
For a moment Yuliya responds before
violently pulling away.

PAUL: What is it?...I'm sorry....God, I'm sorry.

YULIYA: NO!

PAUL: I know. Silly. Stupid fool. Too old...Should know better. Damn.

YULIYA: NO..no...That's not it.

Yuliya draws closer to Paul.

YULIYA: Please...You don't understand..I can't. Not with you.

PAUL: DAMMIT ALL TO HELL, I KNOW. I KNOW...I KNOW....I'm sorry. Forgetting
myself....Men do that, you know. Forget how we look sometimes. Forget that
we're old. Forget everything in the face of someone beautiful....

YULIYA: Beautiful?...Not beautiful.

PAUL: Attractive?

YULIYA: Not anything like that...You don't want, won't want me. Please.

You've been so kind..So generous...You understand so much.. I'm not..I'm not
what you want.

PAUL: Are you sure?

YULIYA: Yes. I'm not beautiful...I'm not...Ugly..I'm ugly..Please. Please don't look at
me. Please.

PAUL: What are you talking about?

YULIYA: They've made me ugly,....so ugly, over the years. With their grubby hands
and dirty money. Ugly.

PAUL: What are you?....

YULIYA: I'm filthy..Only Pietor saw me as beautiful. Only him. He made me feel beautiful for a time, but now is gone. All gone. Please.

PAUL: What do you mean dirty money?

Yuliya looks at him, but remains silent...Slowly it dawns on Paul what she means.

PAUL: Grubby hands and dirty money....And they made you ugly..

Yuliya sobs.

PAUL: But you have to survive somehow, don't you?.....Now I understand. You silly girl...Now I get it...You do what you have to do to survive,...as you've always done...as you have to do.....And you think I'm going to blame you for that?

Yuliya wipes her eyes, looking at him.

PAUL: We all do what we have to do to survive...

YULIYA: Not...

PAUL: All of us....And most do a lot worse, believe me. I have, and so have most out there, not that they'd admit it, of course. People screw each other over every day and call it business. I find you as attractive now as the moment you hit me with your car.

Yuliya giggles, wiping her eyes.

YULIYA: Is that a compliment?

PAUL: It is now.....But as always, the question is not whether I find you attractive,
but whether.....?

**Yuliya puts her finger to her lips
to shush him and then draws closer
and closer until they kiss.**

LIGHTS DOWN.

THE HALF.

ACT THREE SCENE ONE

SAME SETTING.

THE MORNING.

Paul is asleep on the couch snoring extremely loudly. This continues for several seconds before a loud knocking comes at the door. This also continues for several seconds before it rouses him from his slumber.

He falls off the couch.

PAUL: Bastard of a thing....

He stands dazed, looking around.

PAUL: Yuliya?...YULIYA!!!...YULIYA!! Where are you, girl??

He goes, still in his dressing gown to the door and opens it.

Mary enters.

PAUL: What do you want?

MARY: Charming.

PAUL: Yuliya!!

MARY: She's gone.

PAUL: What?

MARY: Over an hour ago. I saw her leaving. She didn't want to disturb you she said.

Said you were happily purring away like a jackhammer.

PAUL: Did she say when she was coming back?

MARY: Coming back?

PAUL: Yes, dammit,...coming back.

MARY: Why should she come back?

PAUL: Because we.....Did you say anything to her?

MARY: Goodbye...Because you what?

PAUL: Never you mind. She must be coming back. She must be.

**Paul begins shuffling slowly around
the room.**

**PAUL: Perhaps she left a note. Look around for a note, Mary. She couldn't have just
up and left like that, not after..... She wouldn't have just left.**

MARY: Have you taken your tablets this morning?

**PAUL: Of course not, I've only just got up. Besides, damn the tablets for today. I feel
on top of the world, this morning...Amazing what a pretty face and easy manner
can do for a man....She must have left a note....You sure she didn't mention
coming back?**

**MARY: Perfectly sure. And no matter how good you feel the tablets are
there for a reason, so take them.**

**Paul has very quickly lost all breath
from his body and is wheezing
heavily from the exertion. He sits in
his chair.**

PAUL: Alright...No arguments on a day like today..Funny.

MARY: What is?

PAUL: I didn't lose my breath once last night.

MARY: I don't suppose you did if you were asleep....You were asleep I take it.

PAUL: Sleep. Hah. Hardly slept a wink

MARY: Why?

PAUL: Yuliya, of course. A marvellous woman. Bit high strung, admittedly but then
so would you be if you'd been through what she has.

MARY: What has she been through. Apart from an evening of you.

PAUL: Never you mind.

MARY: Although I could see how that would make someone highly strung.
I don't know how I manage.

PAUL: BECAUSE YOU'RE A SAINT, OBVIOUSLY!! You've told me often enough.

MARY: Don't shout. And don't go upsetting yourself.

Mary goes to the sideboard and fetches
two tablets to Paul. He takes them.

MARY: If she said she'd be back, I'm sure she will be...Did she say to
you she was coming back?

PAUL: I can't remember. It's all a bit of a blur after...well...well I certainly remember
that clearly enough, but after that I'm a bit vague. It'll come back to me in a
minute. My God, you old bastard. What a night. You should have been there
Mary...Well perhaps not. I haven't felt so alive in years, and all because of a slip
of girl. And she liked me Mary. She really liked me.

MARY: Yes, well, she was very nice and polite, I'll give her that.

PAUL: Oh damn polite, she liked me. Don't you get it. She liked me.
Like women are supposed to like men.

Mary snorts.

MARY: Yes, well, I wouldn't go that far Paul.

PAUL: But, that's just it Mary. I did go that far. As far as it's possible to go. To be honest I didn't think I had it in me anymore.

MARY: What are you talking about?

PAUL: Don't be naive Mary. Don't you get it? She and I. Last night. Entwined as one. Naked. Moving like a damn steam train. Whooo whooooo. Whooo whoooo. By Christ I felt like I was seventeen again. Like everything was possible.

MARY: Are you sure?

PAUL: Of course I'm sure. You probably noticed a little redness in her cheeks this morning. Who do you think put that there?

MARY: I didn't notice anything of the sort. She did mention that she'd heard you talking to yourself for most of the night.

PAUL: Yes, well, she was probably embarrassed. So would you be if you'd done what we did last night. Hardly something you share with strangers, now is it.

MARY: Paul. When she drove off I didn't get the impression that she was coming back. Are you sure about this?

PAUL: Of course I'm sure. Dammit Mary, how many times do I have to tell you. She came in from the bedroom, we talked, we kissed, and then..what do you want, a diagram?

MARY: She came in from the bedroom?

PAUL: Yes...I'd been talking to Liz and Annerley and then there she was.

MARY: Liz and Annerley?

PAUL: Yes. Don't you ever chat to dead friends? I'm sure you do. You're old enough to have plenty.

MARY: Dead friends?

PAUL: Yes. And then she came in and sat by my feet. Liked that. Looking up into my face. So tender. So innocent...even though she isn't. Together, last night, we felt innocent again. Beautiful. Perfect.

MARY: Liz and Annerley aren't dead.

PAUL: What?

MARY: Liz still lives in Reading with that accountant and Annerley has three children and lives in Italy.

PAUL: I know....Blast it, I know. So?

MARY: So they're not dead are they? Liz never put her head in an oven and Annerley never got decapitated in a car crash. That was Jane Mansfield.

PAUL: I know that. I don't need telling by you.

MARY: So they're not dead.

PAUL: They are to me...Just because I prefer to think of them that way, is really none of your business is it? I can remember them how I like. And she understood.

MARY: You told her they were alive?

PAUL: WELL NO. BUT WHAT BLOODY DIFFERENCE DOES THAT MAKE? The important thing is that she's probably on her way back as we speak, you'll see. Probably went to fetch the morning paper, or something.

MARY: Yes, well..perhaps. How about I put the kettle on and then we can talk about it.

PAUL: There's nothing to talk about, don't you understand. We spent the most perfect night together, she and I. We. We. Together. Get it?

MARY: Got it.

Mary looks concerned.

MARY: I still think I'll make that cup of tea, if you don't mind?

PAUL: Do what you like, you always do.

MARY: Right.

Mary exits into the kitchen.

PAUL: Bloody busybody. That shocked her, didn't it Luce? That shocked her. Didn't believe me, you know. I saw the look in that tired old face of hers. Thinks I'm making it up. Well I'll show her. Just wait until that young girl comes back with the morning news. That'll shock her. Who knows what this might mean for you and me, eh? A fresh start, or perhaps a twilight romance to see me safely settled into that rest home over the way there. Everything is possible with a woman like that. 'Course, she is young. Old head on her lovely young shoulders, but still young. Still. Safety. Maturity. Central heating. Seems to want that from a man. Might even have to get a house, Luce. Women like houses, don't they? Men are happy with holes, but women seem to like houses. Then they can buy stuff, lots of stuff and put it in the house. And look at it. Women like that. My Mother liked that. House. And then she'd go and buy stuff and cats. Loved cats my Mother. Then she'd get the stuff and cats and put it in our house. And look at them. Whatever makes you happy, I suppose. But this time I swear it'll be perfect.

Mary enters with two mugs of tea.

MARY: Here we are, Paul. Nice cup of tea.

PAUL: Get out!! I'm thinking!

MARY: OK then.

Mary exits to the kitchen.

PAUL: Must have time to think this through, eh Luce. Time to think this through. You saw us didn't you. She and I. Here in front of you. In front of you....Just like the rest, eh. Seen a few come and go in your time. Come and then go. But not this one. She's different. Needs different things. Isn't as though I lied to her. She saw the real me last night. Her funny old Englishman. Ranting and raving. Beautiful though wasn't she Luce. Beaten down by life. Scared and feeling just a tiny bit monstrous. Well we all have reasons to feel monstrous don't we. Every one of us. Nice to feel part of a crowd, I say. What did she say? Don't let her get cold. We all get cold. That's why she'll be back, Luce, that's why she'll be back.

Mary enters.

MARY: Alright, that's enough. I'm not some skivvy that you can order around. Do you want this tea or not?

PAUL: Well of course I do. Vodka would be wasted on this time of day.

MARY: Alright then.

Mary hands Paul his cup of tea.

PAUL: Are you sure she didn't say anything?

MARY: No. Nothing at all. And certainly didn't mention spending a night, wrapped in carnal passion.

PAUL: Well, would you?

MARY: Not if it had been with you, no.

PAUL: Well there you are then. But if you don't believe me you can check the bedroom for evidence.

MARY: I'd rather poke my eyes out first.

PAUL: She had a half-moon shaped birthmark on her....

MARY: I don't want to know. Nor do I want any more of the lurid details thankyou very much. You should be ashamed of yourself. Young girl like that with someone of your age. Disgusting. If it really happened.

PAUL: Oh it happened, alright. You'll see when she comes walking back through that door, you'll see. And there was nothing disgusting in it. Well....that depends on your tastes I suppose. I've always been pretty liberal that way.

MARY: Perverted, you mean.

PAUL: Same thing these days. Oh Mary, if only you'd been a man then you'd understand. The excitement. The heat. The imagination of the young. And their flesh...

MARY: She'd have to have a good imagination with you on top of her. I've no doubt even if it did happen that she was drunk and probably thinking of someone else.

PAUL: We were both thinking of someone else. That was the beauty of it. We burned in the heat of the past. A necessary respite from the present, if you like. But the future beckons Mary. The future beckons, you mark my words.

MARY: Yes, well. I'll believe it if I see it.

PAUL: You're a cynic, Mary. You don't have the right eyes to see it.

MARY: I'm a realist. And I know what your imagination is capable of.

PAUL: My imagination has nothing to do with this. She was as real last night as you are now. Clinging onto me. Trying to get out of the cold. All they need is a little kindness Mary. Women are remarkably simple creatures that way.

MARY: So how come you've lost so many?

PAUL: Because it's been a long time since I've been kind to one. Satisfied?

MARY: Not for a long time.

PAUL: No. Well. I thought it was too late too, Mary. I thought it was much too late.

But some women. Some relationships make you forget that time even exists.

We get old when we don't have women like that around, you know. Nothing to stay young for most of the time.

MARY: No.

Pause.

PAUL: She is coming back you know....Even if it isn't today. It can get very cold out there you know.

MARY: I know.

PAUL: She is coming back.....Isn't she?

MARY: I'm sure she is Paul. I'm sure she is.

Mary puts her hand on Paul's shoulder
and stands for a moment.

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT THREE SCENE TWO.

TWO WEEKS LATER. SAME SETTING.

Paul's flat is now in disarray. Everything has quickly gone downhill. Papers are strewn everywhere. Clothes lay where they've been taken off the night before. Ashtrays and waste bins are full, drawers are open.

Paul slowly walks in from the bedroom. He is unshaven and wears a stained white shirt that he's obviously been wearing for days. He carries a vodka bottle which he periodically drinks from.

He looks at a piece of paper on top of the dresser.

PAUL: Well that's not it eh Luce? One day I'll write another poem and surprise everybody. Byron. Shelley. I could have told them they were wasting their time. Where did it ever get them, eh? A lifetime of luxury, sex, money, summers spent by Lake Geneva. Who'd have it eh? When you could have this. (Points the room around him). The Dylan Thomas school of life management. (Drinks) Poetry in motion. You and me, Luce. Poetry in motion.

Pause. Stillness.

PAUL: No offence, Luce, but you're beginning to bore me. I'm beginning to bore me...You should have left like the rest of them Luce, eh? Would have been much better for you. No woman I know would have hugged you to death.

There is a knock on the door. Timid at first. Paul ignores it. The knock comes again, this time louder.

PAUL: If you're a Jehova's Witness you can sod off!!!

MARY: (Off-stage) Not dead yet, then?

PAUL: Your name's not on the insurance anyway. I left it all to the cat. Didn't I Luce?

Didn't I, my precious?

MARY: (Off-stage) Are you going to let me in this time?

PAUL: If Yuliya arrives, she can come in. You can make tea elsewhere!

MARY: (Off-stage) Paul. Don't be silly. Open this door at once!

PAUL: Why should I? Faithless old bat. Two weeks go by and you lose faith. Well

not me. She's coming back and that's the end of it. And I did not damn well
imagine it!!

MARY: (Off-stage) Have you taken your tablets?

PAUL: Tablets be damned! You don't need tablets with a woman like that
around. She makes me feel young again and that's the end of it.

MARY: (Off-stage) Paul.

PAUL: What?

MARY: (Off-stage) Perhaps the doctor?

PAUL: No bloody doctors! Bastards the lot of them. Never trusted any of them. Said

I was ill once, you know Luce. Said I was ill. What the hell would they know?

MARY: (Off-stage) OPEN THIS DOOR RIGHT NOW OR I'M FETCHING A DOCTOR!!

PAUL: Alright, alright...Keep your hair on woman. What you've got left.

Paul slowly goes and opens the door.

PAUL: Are you prepared for your entry into paradise?

Mary slowly peers into Paul's flat
and walks in open mouthed.

MARY: If this is paradise, I'm glad I'm an atheist.

PAUL: God is all around Mary.

MARY: He doesn't clean then?

PAUL: God never cleans up the mess he makes Mary. Apparently that's our job. What do you want anyway?

MARY: I came to see if you're alright.

PAUL: Came to nose around you mean. Came to gloat.

Paul sits down in his armchair.

MARY: I didn't come for anything of the sort. I came to see if you're alright, and by the state of this place I can see that you're not are you?

PAUL: I'm....I'm....Just go. I'm alive, I'm fine and I didn't want you here in the first place so just go. Looking at you makes me tired.

MARY: Charming.

PAUL: Well, what would you say in my place?

MARY: I'd certainly be more polite.

PAUL: OH FUCK POLITE!!

MARY: PAUL!!!

PAUL: Well.....sorry.

MARY: I should think so. I wasn't the one that invited her in. The one that plied her with alcohol and made a fool of myself.

PAUL: I did not make a fool of myself.

MARY: What do you call this?

PAUL: Therapy.

MARY: Therapy for not making a fool of yourself?

PAUL: She's coming back, you know. SHE'S COMING BACK.

MARY: Like the others.

PAUL: Yes like....don't tempt me to mention Simon.

Mary is brought up sharp by this.

PAUL: We all have our insane hopes don't we Mary?

MARY: You leave him out of this.

PAUL: Why? You seem ready enough to criticise. Ready enough to tell me "I told you so". All very happy to look at other people's lives and find them wanting. Easy, I suppose to see me as some old fool that wants what he can't have. But I'm not the only one am I Mary. Am I??

MARY: No Paul, you're not. But this is hardly the same.

PAUL: Isn't it?

MARY: No it isn't. You only knew this girl one night, and look at you.

PAUL: Look at me. She looked at me. Reminded her of someone. Someone she needed. And we don't need anymore do we Mary? You and I. What's the point if you close down? No matter the bloody heartache. What's the point if you don't keep trying? At least I was trying.

MARY: Men are renowned for their optimism.

PAUL: And women for their cynicism....and politeness.

MARY: Well no matter how much you're hurting over this, it doesn't compare, and I'll thank you not to mention Simon again.

PAUL: (Sighing) Ok Mary. Ok. Whatever you say. There's milk in the fridge if you want to make anything. It's only three days old. Should be still alright.

MARY: No. I'm fine. Unless you want...

Paul shakes his head, smiling.

PAUL: You know in all the years you've been coming here, I think that's the first time you've refused a cup of tea.

MARY: Refused to go and make us both one myself, you mean.

PAUL: That's it Mary. You stand up for yourself. Don't let anyone put you down. Not even me.

MARY: I can be quite the tough cookie when I get going you know.

PAUL: I know. Middle-weight champion of the world '45 - '53.

MARY: You better believe it.

PAUL: 'Course the war had taken out most of the major contenders. You had an easy ride in my opinion.

MARY: (Smiling) Now that's more like the Paul I know and love.

PAUL: What?

MARY: That's more like the you I know. We'll have you back ranting and raving in no time. Put all this behind us.

PAUL: You know Annerley once said that to me.

MARY: Said what to you.

PAUL: "That's more like the Paul I know and love". She said it when I was trying to get her back.

MARY: When you'd followed her to Italy.

PAUL: That's right. And when it had become apparent that she had found a life without me...

MARY: Which she liked.

PAUL: Which she liked, and I'd tried all the manly things to get her back.

MARY: Begging, crying, moaning, bribing...you told me.

PAUL: Bribing. That was a good one. And the guilt trips. Liked all those. Then one day we were having a pizza and some wine.

MARY: Original in Italy.

PAUL: And we were sitting outside at this little piazza and after having tried everything else, almost by accident, and because I was so utterly worn out with grieving, I made her laugh. Laugh. And how we used to laugh. I think at first she was shocked. But that's when, for the first time some warmth came into her eyes and she said "That's more like the Paul I know and love". We had sex for the last time after that. All those years ago. Funny what you remember.

MARY: Yes. Funny. But perhaps it's time you forgot, eh?

PAUL: What do you mean?

MARY: You know exactly what I mean. How many times have we done this? You and I, in this room. Listening to you moan about the latest one to remind you of the past. Yuliya was just the last of a long line, wasn't she?

PAUL: There haven't been many.

MARY: Really?

PAUL: Really. Most of them, I knew I was kidding myself. There was always something about them. The tilt of their nose, the shape of their breasts, the way they used to break wind in public.

MARY: Oh, I remember her.

PAUL: She swore to God it was a feminist thing.

MARY: Challenging the received stereotype of the feminine image.

PAUL: She challenged it alright.

MARY: When she did it, it made you feel all queer.

PAUL: In more ways than one. There was always something wrong. With them. With me. But Yuliya was different. Perfect. I thought..I thought I could save her.

MARY: Mmm. Your knight in shining armour routine.

PAUL: Armour's not so shiny these days, but still, still I thought this time.

Everything felt so right. Like we were part of a bigger picture. Somehow more than we were alone. I thought she saw that too.

MARY: Well obviously not. Women don't need saving these days Paul. They're more than capable of looking after themselves without you, me or anyone else.

PAUL: Are they?

MARY: Yes.

PAUL: Yes..Yes...I suppose you're right. I just thought she wouldn't feel the cold here so much, you know. Wouldn't feel the cold. Perhaps it's not so cold out there after all. I looked for that poem, you know. Looked for it again, but still no use. Thought I might read it to Yuliya, you know. Try and make her understand. See it from my point of view. Promised to read it to her that night, but couldn't put my blasted hands on it. Thought that maybe if I could find it, then somehow that might make her come back. Silly idea. Bloody silly idea, I know.

MARY: Time to put it behind you and get over it.

Paul looks at Mary and begins to giggle insanely. She smiles, but unsure about what.

PAUL: You know sometimes you can be the most stupid woman I've ever met.

MARY: PAUL!!!

**PAUL: GET OVER IT? GET OVER IT? YOU NEVER BLOODY WELL GET OVER IT.
LOVE IS LIKE HERPES. YOU CARRY IT WITH YOU WHEREVER YOU GO.
YOU DO NOT, REPEAT, NOT, GET OVER IT!**

MARY: Alright Paul. Alright.

**PAUL: Heaven help us all. She was the one. We could have made it. We could have
made.....**

**Paul begins to clutch at his throat,
fighting for breath.**

PAUL: We could have.....Mary. Help me.

**Mary dashes to the sideboard for
Paul's pills and brings two.**

MARY: Here...here. God. Oh God.

**Paul swallows them without water
as Mary begins to rub his hand.**

MARY: Come on. Calm down now.

PAUL: Too late. Too late.

MARY: No it isn't. Come on now. Calm down. Let them take effect.

You'll be alright Paul. You'll be alright.

PAUL: Too late Mary. Too late after all.

**Paul begins to calm and breathe
more easily. Mary is by now knelt
at his side.**

MARY: You'll be alright. You'll be alright. Plenty of fight in you yet, eh? Can't give up now. Can't break up the friendship now, we've only just got started. Only been a decade or so. Mustn't give up now boy. Mustn't give up now. Mary will look after you, just like always.

PAUL: It's no good Mary. No good. Keep trying but...no good. Never been any good. Leave me alone, now. Leave me alone.

MARY: Leave you alone? Wouldn't dream of it. Come on now. Time to rally one last time. Just for my sake, eh. One last time for Mary. I won't leave like the rest.

PAUL: I can't....without...I can't. Please go. Please go. I haven't the energy for you today. Can't keep fighting like this. Can't keep on failing.

MARY: Paul....Paul.

PAUL: Yes?

MARY: It'll be alright. I'll see that everything will be alright. Trust me. Trust Mary. Oh God.

PAUL: I didn't think you believed.

MARY: I'll make everything alright. Just like before. Just like always.

PAUL: Although if I go, I suppose he's all you'd have left. And Mamood the smiling thief.

MARY: Just stay there.

Mary stands up.

MARY: You're going to be alright. Just stay there. And don't do anything stupid. At least not until I get back.

PAUL: Where are you going?

MARY: NEVER YOU MIND. I'll be back soon.

PAUL: No doctors Mary. Promise, me no doctors.

MARY: Yes Paul, I know. No doctors. No bloody doctors.

Mary exits.

Paul's breathing has returned to normal. He massages his chest slightly feeling where the pain had been.

PAUL: Bastards. Bunch of useless.....Two years Luce. Two bloody years they sat around and twiddled their thumbs while my Mother died. Cancer! Incurable they said. Best take her home, eh. Best take her home where she can spend two bloody years dying in agony. And you're her son so you better watch her. Can't put her out of her misery. Oh no. Not even when she was bloody screaming to be put out of her misery. When we were both screaming to be put out of our misery. All we can do is give her some pretty damn ineffective pain killers. Anything stronger could kill her, and we wouldn't want to be accused of that now do we. You might sue us and then where would we be. So why don't you take her home where her screaming wont bother us. She can call for her dead husband all she likes then can't she. (Strokes Lucy) Poor dad. Thirty-five years of marriage. Never an argument. Then he dies of a heart attack whilst being whipped by a prostitute. Kinky old sod. Wouldn't have dreamed of asking his wife to do it, oh no. Didn't want to shatter her dreams about him with baser things. She never found out of course. How can you tell someone her perfect marriage had whip marks all over it. No-one should have to put up with that kind of pain. Not even you, eh? Couldn't let you suffer now could we? Not like her Luce. Couldn't let you suffer like her. No animal should have to.

Paul sighs and pours himself a vodka. He drinks and lights a cigarette.

PAUL: We're not going to suffer like that, are we? We're not going to suffer like that.

LIGHTS DOWN

ACT FOUR SCENE ONE.

SAME SETTING

LATER.

Spotlight.

Paul is asleep in his chair. For a moment we aren't sure if he is dead or not.

Suddenly he lets out the most enormous snore, before settling back into sleep for a few seconds.

His sleep begins to seem troubled. He is obviously in the middle of a dream which eventually wakes him up.

PAUL: Yuliya? Oh,..... alone again. Always the same when I wake up these days.

Alone. And in the dark. Not that I mind that. The dark. It always seemed so comforting. So strong. So inevitable. Never was afraid of it like some people, you know. Never saw that boogy man in the corner waiting to jump out and rip me to shreds like most people. All there is, all the peace there is, you can find in the dark....Was just the light I could never bloody stand. Seeing what surrounds you. There's the fear of the world, Luce. In the light. Showing up all the flaws of existence, of man,...of woman,..of me.

Paul rubs the sleep out of his eyes.

PAUL: Especially me, eh. Especially me. I know what they'd say, with their disappointed eyes. Why was the heaven you promised me, denied? Look at me, they'd say. Am I not as beautiful as the next? Am I not the one for you, forever? Why wasn't it me? The one who loved you, the one who cared for you

PAUL: (cont.) as you slowly turned into stone, losing faith, losing hope. Or are you like most men, boys, fools who only love that which they can't have?

Slowly a blue spotlight illuminates
Elizabeth standing behind Paul.

PAUL: Amateur bloody psychology night, most relationships these days. Can't be them, can it? We can't have the certainty of saying it was them, they that were at fault. Not because of their nature. Not because they weren't nice, but because of their face, or because of how they walked, or the accent of their voices. And every flaw, every little idiocy of their character serves as one more nail in the coffin.

LIZ: Because their faults reminded you of you.

PAUL: Precisely. Not that I would have ever admitted it to you, but I remember well enough how you used to look at me in the mornings.

LIZ: Like death on a bad hair day.

PAUL: Or how your eyes would bore into me as I was eating.

LIZ: Mouth always open.

PAUL: And I could see how your stomach would turn when you saw what you had settled for.

LIZ: Someone as imperfect and miserable as I was.

PAUL: You've got it. Someone who had only been seen as perfect once. Who felt perfect once. I never had the strength to be perfect for you.

LIZ: Because I was barren?

PAUL: Because you were you. Uninspiring.

LIZ: You have an awfully old fashioned idea of women.

PAUL: Then you must have some terribly naive ideas about men.

LIZ: If no-one inspires you to greatness, then reality is all you have. And that's no fun. No inspiration. No greatness. Except possibly from women.

PAUL: And men are hardly going to inspire you.

LIZ: Good point. Though luckily we inspire each other. We've had to over the years. Trouble is, you were never great were you? Never had it in you, even with the luscious Annerley there.

Elizabeth points to the other side
of the stage where Annerley is
bathed in a red spotlight.

LIZ: The one. The only one. The greatest love of your life. And what did she inspire you to? One bloody poem. If that's the quality of love, it was definitely strained, I say.

ANN: That's what I told him.

LIZ: Was it worth it? Clinging onto some childlike fantasy of heaven.

PAUL: It wasn't a fantasy. (To Annerley) Tell her.

LIZ: Well it has been for the past thirty-five years. Was it worth ruining our marriage, just because I didn't live up to expectations? Just because I didn't inspire you enough for one bloody poem. You couldn't be an adult? You couldn't grow up? You couldn't see what it would do to you?

PAUL: You know I've always said the long walk to the high moral ground isn't worth it.

LIZ: You couldn't see this coming?

PAUL: You couldn't see what I was hoping for,...primarily because you weren't it. With your middle-class bunch of friends.

PAUL: (cont.) Always hugging and kissing each other on both cheeks like you were bloody French. And then going round and making sure you had the latest clothes. Had to have the latest fashions and be seen in the right car or at the right party. Giving yourselves airs and graces you weren't born with and keeping up with each other. A bunch of more morally vacuous, uninspired, characterless, emotionally superficial, tedious, social climbing pile of horse manure I've never met in my life.

LIZ: They have lives to be proud of.

PAUL: For God's sake you married an accountant.

LIZ: They have more than you. They made something of themselves.

Paul slowly rises from his chair
to confront her.

PAUL: YES, WELL YOU WOULD SAY THAT. This was never enough for you was it? Not enough to have heat, running water or a roof over your head. Even if I had been in love with you, it wouldn't have been enough, would it? Elizabeth had to have her fancy things to make her feel worthwhile. Let's face it heaven will have to have a dishwasher or you'll refuse to go.

LIZ: A washer dryer, certainly. Are you telling me the one on the pedestal didn't want the high life?

PAUL: At least she had a career. A dream of something. To create something beautiful at least.

LIZ: And I couldn't even create children, is that it?

PAUL: You couldn't create a decent omelette, never mind life itself.

ANN: You didn't miss anything.

PAUL: What?

ANN: Three of the little bastards, running around my feet all day. She missed nothing. Snotty noses. Shitty diapers. Crying and crying until you feel ready to put your hands around their throats and squeeze all that loud air out of them. And even when they grow up, the money they cost squeezes all the life out of you. Working in dives. Singing 'till your voice gives out. Breathing in all the smoke and watching all the men. The greasy men, who later, later are going to pay for you to sit with them. Hands all over you, even though you're married. Even though they're married. What kind of dream is that?

PAUL: I told you to come back.

ANN: What for?

Elizabeth laughs.

PAUL: Shut it, you.

ANN: What for? This. A life with you, here, in this place. It would remind me too much of home.

PAUL: I could have made it nice for us. My life might have turned out differently with you. I might have....I might have been inspired to get you those things, nice things. House. Car. Whatever you wanted.

LIZ: I thought you just said our marriage failed because I wanted those things...Isn't love supposed to be enough?

PAUL: Yes. No. Yes...Yes of course it is. But...

ANN: But what? I wanted more than you. And that would have ruined it. Just like it ruined your marriage. People expect certain things. Like comfort. Like not having to struggle, or worry where their next pair of shoes is coming from.

PAUL: We wouldn't have worried. If we were together, we always managed somehow.

ANN: We managed because you were seventeen and I was nineteen. What did we need but sex and alcohol? You just couldn't see it, could you? Just couldn't see that growing up meant realising that you alone would never be enough. Not for me. Not for her. Not for anyone.

PAUL: We were perfect. It is possible for it to be perfect.

ANN: If it was perfect, how come I ended up leaving you for someone who you said was the Italian version of Charlie Chaplin? Without the moustache or funny walk.

LIZ: No wonder you always said you preferred Buster Keaton.

PAUL: Shut-up.

LIZ: I didn't think Keaton would have been sentimental enough for you.

PAUL: Well how the hell could I ever watch a Chaplin film again?

ANN: You poor sod.

PAUL: Now you shut it! I wasn't the one who left. The one who gave up on us. We could have made the dream real. But you had to have your career, didn't you? And where did that get you? You had a nice little voice, but that's all it was. Your bloody ambition was what did for us. I'd have still had you back, even after that Chaplin spic bastard.

ANN: Pitiful.

LIZ: Reality always gets him a little riled. Poor boy.

ANN: A poem never paid the mortgage, now did it?

PAUL: Why are you saying this?

LIZ: I always got the impression that reality was a little too big for him.

ANN: As though if it were smaller, he'd have had less trouble dealing with it.

LIZ: But in an ever expanding universe...

ANN: You're screwed.

PAUL: Shut-up. SHUT-UP!!

LIZ: Let's face it. Most men have the decency to buy a flash car.

PAUL: Phallic extensions of small minds.

ANN: Or a nice house.

PAUL: Bricks and mortar for their ego.

LIZ: Or dress in reasonably fashionable clothes.

PAUL: Anybody that believes in fashion is fascist to the core.

ANN: And most men would except defeat gracefully.

Slowly throughout this Mary has
become visible, bathed in green
light, between Liz and Annerley.

PAUL: I am not defeated. Not. You just don't get it do you? With your small minds
and your little hearts. Tell them Mary. Tell them what I believe. The possibility
of something that lasts, something that's perfect. Something more than the
individual, more than you or me, something that's going to make everything
alright. Where they can't hurt you. Can't touch you.

MARY: And you don't feel like the monster you are.

PAUL: She knows. She can tell you. A place....

MARY: A place. A palace where everyone is a king or a queen. Where children play
and laugh. Where cynicism is outlawed and nowhere do we need to prove
ourselves or massage our egos to feel worthy. Where no-one needs new
clothes or hairdos or new breasts. Where no man worries if he's big enough, or

MARY: (cont.) rich enough, because in the eyes of those who love us, truly love us,
we are perfect.....

PAUL: God's children.

MARY: Where the days and nights are warm and we are enough for each other.....

PAUL: That's it. She's got it.

MARY: Although I always said he talked to that cat too much.

Mary begins laughing, quickly followed by Liz and Annerley who all point and giggle at Paul.

PAUL: NO...NO!....NO!!!

LIZ: SIMPLETON!

ANN: DREAMER!

MARY: MONSTER!!

PAUL: No....no.

Paul timidly begins to walk to his chair and sit down as the women slowly, throughout the rest of the scene crowd around the back of the chair.

PAUL: No...no...not again...You don't understand. Even you Mary, even you...I thought..but no, no-one understands.

MARY: Child mentioner.

PAUL: It's not a dream. It's not...Not if you have faith in it.

LIZ: Sometimes even God fails to inspire faith.

MARY: So what hope did you have?

ANN: Dreams are just that.

PAUL: You had faith, Mary. I thought you would understand.

MARY: Where did faith ever get me?...Clinging on for years and years. For what?

PAUL: For him to come back.

MARY: He's never coming back.

ANN: Your son?

Mary nods.

ANN: Just like me. Never came back.

PAUL: We all have our insane dreams, don't we Mary? We all have insane dreams.

MARY: Not any more.....Simon and his girlfriend disappeared exploring a Borneo jungle. They were there for one moment. And then they were gone.

PAUL: They might still...

MARY: NO! My son is dead. My son went searching for something to make his life worthwhile and it killed him. His dreams took away his life,....and mine.

PAUL: He was a good son.

MARY: He was supposed to look after me. He was tall and strong and as handsome as any boy I'd ever seen in my life. More beautiful than even his Father and he was supposed to look after me like a good son should. That's all I wanted...my good son. Returned to me, safe and sound. But they never even found his body. My son. My only son. Disappeared like dreamers often do. For what? What did he expect to find out there?

PAUL: His dream.

MARY: Then I should never have told him to follow his dreams.

PAUL: People need to.

ANN: Even if it kills them?

PAUL: Yes...Whose to say he didn't find what he was looking for. Whose to say he didn't die a happy man...Oh god, Mary I'm sorry, I didn't mean....

MARY: Yes you did. Even you know he's gone. Gone forever. All for a dream, and only memories of him left. A photograph that after seven years gets put in a drawer and eventually forgotten. And when I go, so will he....as though he'd never even been here in the first place.

LIZ: Dreamers make rotten sons.

PAUL: NO THEY DON'T.

LIZ: Didn't even have the courage to let her go. To put an end to her suffering like she asked you to.

PAUL: She didn't know what she was saying.

ANN: Her son dreamed of a miracle cure...that never came.

PAUL: She was in pain. It was the pain talking.

MARY: She cursed you before she died, didn't she?

PAUL: NO!

MARY: You can't lie to us.

LIZ: She spat on you for letting her suffer and cursed the day she had you.

ANN: A dreamer for a son....who never did anything but dream.

PAUL: I am not. I AM NOT! I was her son. Her only son and she loved me. She knew. She knew deep down, what I wanted. What I'd asked for. Was it so much to ask? But you never saw it, did you? Didn't have the heart for it. You couldn't see how beautiful it could have been. How perfect. How everything would have turned out alright if just one of you had felt, what I felt. What I can feel.

ANN: But no-one ever did.

MARY: Not one.

LIZ: Not one in your whole wretched life.

PAUL:Why?

LIZ: Do you want to know?

PAUL: YES!

ANN: Are you sure?

PAUL: YES!

MARY: Absolutely sure?

PAUL: YES DAMMIT! YES!

ANN: Because....

LIZ: You're....

MARY: You!

Paul sit stunned for a moment before letting out a long and painful cry, like an animal in pain.

PAUL: NOOOOOOoooooooooooooooooooooooooooo....

All the women behind him laugh at the same time.

MARY: We thought you knew, didn't we?

Liz and Annerley both nod their agreement.

MARY: Let's face it. Who'd have you?

Paul's face suddenly lights up.

Awkwardly he stands.

PAUL: Yuliya. She was real. She knew. She understood perfectly. And she's coming back. I know she's coming back.

All three women burst out laughing.

PAUL: STOP IT! SHE'S COMING BACK I TELL YOU! She's coming back to me. Me. ME! We're going to make it, she and I. You'll see. We're going to make it, and I'll feel young again, like before. Ready. Able. She'll make all you old hags go away. Clear my mind of you, make me forget, like love should. Forget the past. Forget careers I could have had, but didn't want. Forget that life has passed by and make me innocent again. Like I used to be. Like I should be, until that one got her claws into me. (Pointing at Annerley). I don't need you anymore. Wont need any of you anymore. You'll see. Not a dream. Not. Real. Breathing. Perfect. She and I.

MARY: I told you once that you wouldn't have the energy for this.

PAUL: And I seem to remember telling you to sod off!

MARY: Very well.

LIZ: Then perhaps you're ready.

PAUL: What for?

ANN: For you're dream to arrive.

Slowly the women part, arms lifted pointing towards the back of the stage and Paul's bedroom. All three slowly move out of their spotlights and disappear, (exit) into darkness.

Paul's bedroom slowly swings open, a shaft of brilliant white light hitting the stage as Yuliya slowly appears, as before, in the doorway.

PAUL: Yuliya? Yuliya? Is that you?

YULIYA: Would my funny old Englishman want anyone else?

PAUL: No....No-one else...just you. Just like before. Perfect.

YULIYA: Then sit down. We don't want you tiring yourself out.

Paul sits back down, smiling.

PAUL: I knew you'd be back.

YULIYA: Did you?

PAUL: Had to. Had to come back. There had to be one, amongst the many, amongst the faithless. There had to be one. You. I knew it as soon as I saw you.

YULIYA: What did you see?

PAUL: Someone who still believed. Who had faith. Someone who could take all the pain. All the rotten, loveless, hurtful nights alone and turn them into....turn them into something beautiful. Make this place a palace.

YULIYA: Together.

PAUL: Together.

Yuliya walks slowly to Paul's chair.

YULIYA: Where we'd be warm?

PAUL: Yes...I knew.

YULIYA: That I'd be back.

PAUL: Yes.

YULIYA: That the cold would drive me into your arms again?

PAUL: Yes. I knew. Knew that if I had faith. Have to keep believing. That's what I told Mary. Got to keep on. He might come back Mary. Just keep on, hold on...hold on, and he might come back.

YULIYA: Did she?

PAUL: No. Silly old bat. Silly. Gave up on him. Gave up...Lost sight of the poor boy and gave up..How can you expect them to return if you give up on them. What would they have to return to? I knew. I said to her. Mustn't give up hope Mary. Mustn't lose faith. They know if you lose faith. Somehow they know when you've given up on them....But she wouldn't listen. Couldn't make her listen...mind you she was always deaf as a post, but couldn't make her listen. Poor boy. Poor poor boy. Mothers aren't supposed to give up on their sons now are they?

YULIYA: What did she have to hold onto?

PAUL: The same as the rest of us. That one day everything's going to be o.k....And now it is. Now you're here.

YULIYA: Here?

PAUL: With me....Her son...Her only son. And she gave up. Poor boy. But I knew one day you'd be back.

YULIYA: Back?

PAUL: Like a dream.

YULIYA: We dreams have a lot to live up to...Would you like me to sit at your feet again?

PAUL: Would you?

YULIYA: Of course.

Yuliya sits at Paul's feet.

YULIYA: And would you like me to cling onto you again, like a frightened child?

Yuliya puts her arms around his legs.

PAUL: There's no need to be frightened anymore.

YULIYA: And would you like me to look up into your eyes, like before?

PAUL: If you like.

Yuliya looks up at him.

PAUL: You are so beautiful. So perfect.

YULIYA: Dreams often are.

PAUL: What?

**YULIYA: SSshhhh...We mustn't spoil it now. Mustn't spoil it. My funny
old Englishman. We must keep the faith now, mustn't we. We
can't let tonight be spoiled. Tonight must be perfect, yes?**

PAUL: Yes. Yes. Perfect.

**YULIYA: So talk to me, like before. Remind me of my Pietor again. Talk, and talk and
talk and talk. And when the night fades I'll lead you into the bedroom and we'll
lie down together entwined as one, moving like a steam train.**

Paul begins to look confused.

PAUL: Yes...er,..yes.

YULIYA: It will be perfect.

PAUL: What?

YULIYA: We will inspire each other to be perfect. I will see only the man of my dreams, and it will be you. Only you. And some nights we'll sit like this, cold and hungry and you'll tell me stories of your childhood to keep me warm, about how your Mother never really talked to you. Never really talked.

PAUL: Wait.

YULIYA: And because she never really talked to you, you would have to fill the air with words, just like Pietor. Just to stop yourself going insane...and how some days she would catch you talking to yourself, and you could see by the look in her eyes that she thought you were...insane.

Paul's eyes are wide with horror.

PAUL: How?.....

YULIYA: And how you knew, deep down that she couldn't love you, like you wanted her to. Oh she loved you well enough. Enough for most children to be happy. To be satisfied, but not you, oh no. You needed more. More than she could give, more than she wanted to give. Demanding. Spiteful. Spoilt. The only one. The one that robbed her....

PAUL: Wait!

YULIYA: The one that robbed her of the ability to have more children.

PAUL: WAIT!!!

YULIYA: Like your wife....You seem to rob all women of their ability to have children..Will you make me infertile too, my funny old Englishman?

PAUL: HOW CAN YOU KNOW THIS?

YULIYA: There are no secrets in here, are there? You told me that once remember.

When you're old you have no secrets from yourself.

PAUL: But...

YULIYA: But.....I know. Why don't I play that prostitute with the heart of gold again.

The one that will fall for the little kindness. The little kindness to make me bloom again.

PAUL: Wait!

YULIYA: Or perhaps I can tell you again all about my troubles in Mother Russia. For prostitutes always take drugs as well, now don't they?

PAUL: (Like a scream) WHAT'S HAPPENING?

YULIYA: Don't you know? Your dreams are coming true. All coming home to roost.

Perhaps this time I could be a doctor. A female doctor, that just happened to fall for your quaint British charm. You'd like that. Or perhaps a nurse? All dressed up in those nurses uniforms that you like so much.

PAUL: YULIYA?

YULIYA: British men are so predictable. Or perhaps I could be domineering in black leather, whipping you around the room so that you feel like your father.

PAUL: WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?

Paul is obviously getting more and more stressed. His hand clutches at his heart, as the pain inside increases.

YULIYA: I'm saying what you want me to say. What I have to say.

PAUL: NO!

YULIYA: Like a child again. Innocent of himself. Dreaming of the perfect life that you...

PAUL: STOP IT!

YULIYA: The night holds all the peace in the world, remember?

PAUL: NO!

YULIYA: No time to be afraid now. No time. No time left.

PAUL: PLEASE!

YULIYA: And I'll hold you like before,...like a dream.

PAUL: NO! NO! YOU WERE REAL. YOU WERE.

YULIYA: And then in the morning, I'll disappear again. Ethereal. Like a dream. Perfect.

The wanting. The waiting. The hoping. Perfect. And you can go on punishing yourself.

PAUL: STOP IT!

YULIYA: And screaming at God.

PAUL: STOP IT!

YULIYA: And the local shopkeeper.

PAUL: STOP NOW.

YULIYA: Happy in the knowledge that you're alone, you've always been alone, how you like it. Your dream.

PAUL: PLEASE!!!

YULIYA: Perfect.

Suddenly the green spotlight shines on Mary once again. She stands holding a tray with a teapot and cups on it.

MARY: Would anyone like a cup of tea?

PAUL: NOOOOOooooooooooooooooooooo!!!!!!!

**Paul shrieks, holding his chest in extreme pain.
His arms flail out knocking over Lucy onto the floor.**

LIGHTS DOWN.

ACT FOUR SCENE TWO

SAME SETTING

THE NEXT MORNING.

Lights up.

Paul is sitting in his armchair looking ashen and near death. His hand is once more clutching his heart.

Lucy still lies on the floor at his feet.

PAUL: (Croaking) Lucy?...Lucy? (Looks around for a second) Where are you girl? Puss, puss. Puss, puss.

He giggles faintly before trying to pick up Lucy from the floor. Not being able to bend down he collapses back into his chair.

PAUL: Puss, puss. Where are you puss?.....What have we come to Luce? You and me...Will I get stuffed and put on display do you think? Will Mary be sitting here talking to me in years to come? She'd like that, wouldn't she. No-one to have a different point of view...She always did like the sound of her own voice.....Just like me...She'll like me not being able to argue. Suit her just fine that, wont it....'Course it'll be hell for me....I'll be glad I'm dead.....I never did get that television fixed, did I? Though there was never anything much to watch. They recreate our lives on television and call it culture....I've seen more culture down a microscope, than on that bloody thing.....No new curtains for you to scratch. No new carpet to shed your fur on.....

PAUL: (cont.) And no bloody cat flap in the door, eh.....Sorry Luce. Sorry old girl....Only one to never leave and I let you down. Feel.....Feel all numb, Luce. Don't know why...although I can guess.....Almost pleasant it is...being all numb. All numb.

A timid knock comes on the door.
Slowly it opens and Mary enters.

MARY: Paul? Paul?

PAUL: (Softly) Yes?

MARY: How are you feeling?

PAUL: Feeling? How am I feeling?

MARY: Yes.

PAUL: I feel no pain, Mary, if that's what you mean. No pain at all.

MARY: Good. Good. Do you need anything?

PAUL: No.

MARY: Good. Good.....Are you up to visitors, do you think?

PAUL: Visitors? What visitors?

MARY: Someone very special has come to see you.

PAUL: It's not the queen, is it? If it is, tell her I'm a Cromwellite.

MARY: No. No, not the queen. But someone who's been wanting to see you again. Make sure you're ok.

PAUL: I don't want to see anyone today Mary. Not even you. You should go.

MARY: Don't be like that.

PAUL: Why? I never wanted you here in the first place, you know. You know that don't you?

MARY: I know, Paul. I know.

PAUL: Couldn't take the place of your son, Mary. I was never going to be able to look after you, and looking after me was only convenient because it gave you something to do. What was I, some bloody charity case? **GO AWAY!!**

MARY: Don't go upsetting yourself.

PAUL: **YOU SHOULDN'T BE HERE.** Don't want you here now. Not now. I'll just go upsetting you, and then where would we be.

MARY: Back to normal, I'd say.

PAUL: I don't want to upset you Mary. Didn't want to all those times. And don't want to today, so go. Go before I forget myself.

MARY: I'll go in a minute, when you've agreed to see your visitor. She's come to see you, so be polite. Be polite for me...one last time.

Mary opens the door and Yuliya walks in. This time she is real enough.

PAUL: **I DON'T WANT ANYONE SEEING ME TODAY!**

YULIYA: (To Mary) Perhaps I should come back another day?

PAUL: Yuliya?

MARY: I think today's the day.

PAUL: Yuliya?

YULIYA: Yes, Paul.

Yuliya walks over to Paul's chair and puts her hand on his shoulder.

YULIYA: I'm here.

PAUL: (Shocked) You came back?

YULIYA: Look what you've done to poor Lucy.

Yuliya bends and picks Lucy up, gently, and places her back on the table.

PAUL: You came back!

YULIYA: Of course, I did.

PAUL: Just like you said you would?

YULIYA: Just like I said I would.

PAUL: Mary! Mary!

MARY: Yes Paul.

Mary draws near.

PAUL: Look Mary. She came back.

MARY: I can see that Paul. Looks like you were right all along.

YULIYA: Of course, he was.

PAUL: Just like I said. Just like I said. It was true, Mary. All along, it was true.

MARY: I must admit I had my doubts at first. I was even going to fetch a doctor this morning, and just as I was leaving, who should pull up but Yuliya. Come to visit.

PAUL: Like I said, she was. Come to see her funny old englishman and get out of the cold, right?

YULIYA: Right. Coming back.

PAUL: Told you! Didn't I Mary? I told you. Just had to have a little faith, that's all. A little faith...in women. I knew I'd find the right one, one day. Didn't I say, Mary. Didn't I say?

MARY: He did, he really did....

Yuliya kneels down at the side of Paul, staring into his eyes.

MARY: Well, perhaps I'll leave you two alone for a while. I'll see you later.

PAUL: Mary.

MARY: Yes.

PAUL: Thankyou, Mary....for everything.

MARY: Don't mention it.....I wont.

Mary exits.

YULIYA: How are you?

PAUL: Better now. Much better.

YULIYA: What about the doctor she mentioned?

PAUL: She's always mentioning them. The woman's a bloody hypochondriac on top of everything else.

YULIYA: Really?

PAUL: And thank God she is or we'd have never met. We were on our way back from the doctors when you hit us.

YULIYA: Was she ill?

PAUL: Only in her head.....You came back.

YULIYA; Yes. Feel.

Yuliya takes Paul's hand and places it on her face.

PAUL: You're so warm.

YULIYA: Yes. With you....But I think you must hate me for not coming
back sooner, yes?

PAUL: No. I knew you'd come. Somehow I knew you would. There was
something about you, and I knew.

YULIYA: I can stay the whole night if you like.

PAUL: And then you'll be gone, like before?

YULIYA: (Nodding) But I'll always come back,...if you want me too.

PAUL: Of course. And on those nights we can share everything. Everything that we
never had the courage to share before. We'll light candles and talk until dawn.
And whenever you come it will be as though you had never left.

YULIYA: Time doesn't pass in Shang ri La.

PAUL: You've got it.

YULIYA: Paul...?

PAUL: Yes?

YULIYA: Most men.....I mean, well most men wouldn't, not with...are
you sure it's me that you want?

PAUL: (Smiling).....I've been waiting for you my entire life.

**Paul slowly pulls Yuliya towards
him as though to kiss her. She
resists.**

PAUL: Please.....please.

**Eventually Yuliya bends and their
mouths meet, softly and for a long
time they kiss.**

PAUL: Thankyou....thankyou.

YULIYA: You like?

PAUL: I like you....Let's celebrate your return, shall we?

YULIYA: Why not? We seemed to celebrate all the time, last time I was here. But you must promise not to get me too drunk, like before.

PAUL: I wont...In the kitchen, on top of the cupboard there's an old bottle of brandy that I've been saving for a special occasion. Why don't you fetch it? And two glasses.

YULIYA: Anything, my love. Anything.

Yuliya gets up and starts quickly walking away before Paul catches her arm and looks at her.

YULIYA: What?

PAUL: I want you to know that I forgive you, for what you've done to me.

Paul smiles as Yuliya smiles back and blows him a kiss.

YULIYA: You're welcome.

Yuliya exits to the kitchen as Paul settles back into his chair and strokes Lucy.

PAUL: I told you she'd be back, didn't I Luce? Didn't I? I told you she'd be back. I knew one day I'd find someone.

Slowly, almost lazily Paul's hand slips off the back of Lucy's fur, as with a smile his eyes close and he slumps to one side. His death is very quiet.

After several seconds Yuliya enters holding a tray with a bottle and two glasses on it.

As she draws near to Paul she realises what has happened. There are no tears. No shock, just mild sympathy.

YULIYA: Shit....Poor man.

She lays down the tray, pours herself a drink and gulps it down in one.

YULIYA: Mmm. Good. Very good. My funny old Englishman.

She puts down the glass and exits.

Several seconds pass before she and Mary re-enter. Mary goes and takes Paul's wrist checking for a pulse. After finding nothing she gently puts it back down.

YULIYA: He is dead, yes?

MARY: (Nodding) Yes. Poor boy.

YULIYA: Was he ill for a long time?

MARY: A very long time....Longer than you'd think, or at least it seemed longer...Here.

Mary produces around £80.00 in ten pound notes and hands them to Yuliya who stuffs them down the front of her blouse, into her bra.

YULIYA: I think he liked my performance?

MARY: Yes, yes, very convincing.

YULIYA: He looked happy. Was planning our future together.

MARY: Good. Good.

YULIYA: Do you want me to do anything?

MARY: No. No, you better go before I call the doctor.

YULIYA: Wouldn't want to ruin his good name?

MARY: No...Knowing him, he'd love the idea of being found dead with a prostitute.

Always said if he couldn't find love, that's how he'd like to go out.

YULIYA: His wish came true then, I think?

MARY: In a way, yes..... In a way.

YULIYA: He did get to kiss me, which wasn't part of the bargain.

MARY: Did he? Well sometimes he could be very persuasive.

YULIYA: So, do you think I could?.....

Yuliya points at the bottle of brandy.

MARY: What? Oh, by all means, take it. It's of no use to me.

Yuliya picks up the bottle.

YULIYA: Thankyou Mary. Thankyou. I'll go now, yes?

MARY: Yes.....

Yuliya begins to exit.

MARY: Yuliya!

YULIYA: Yes?

MARY: I've got something else for you.

Yuliya goes back to Mary.

YULIYA: What?

MARY: It's a poem....He wrote it, a long time ago.

Mary pulls out an old and battered piece of paper from her cardigan and hands it to Yuliya.

MARY; It's called 'The Dream of Summer'...I think he would have wanted you to have it.

YULIYA: Oh. That is nice. Thankyou....Are you sure you don't want it?

MARY: No. Besides, he must have read it to me a thousand times.

Mary turns away from Yuliya and stands facing the audience. She takes Paul's hand and strokes it.

MARY: I just never had much time for poetry.....or poets.

Yuliya stands watching her.

LIGHTS DOWN.

THE END.