

(An atrium. A window upstage. A door to the outside left and a door to a room right. A writing desk. The furniture is charred from having come through a fire. Several burnt paintings canvas frames are leaning against a wall. An electric fan. A sound amplifier. Hats are hanging from hooks on the back wall. A rope is hanging upstage outside of the room seen through the window.)

Lights flicker briefly. Hump appears upstage looking in through the window. He disappears. Marou enters carrying a sledgehammer. He turns on the lights, plays with the light switch. Turns the lights on and off several times. Leaves the lights off. He knocks a hole in the upstage wall five feet from the ground. Exits with the sledgehammer. Hump's head appears in the hole. He surveys the room. Removes his head from the hole. A male voice gently hums a melody in the distance. Hump looks in through the window. Enter Nathalie dressed in underclothing. She looks out the window. Listens to the voice. Voice stops. Nathalie sees Hump. They stare at each other for a moment. She quickly moves away from the window and exits. Enter Marou. Hump moves to the hole, sticks his head into the room through the hole. The men notice each other. Pause. Hump holds a piece of the knocked out wall in through the hole.)

HUMP:

This hit me.

(Hump drops the piece of wall inside. Pause.)

I wasn't hurt fortunately.

(pause)

This going to be a window? But I see there is a window already, with a view.

(Hump looks about the room.)

And what a view! The woman in your window is your wife? This is a picture?

(Hump fingers a picture frame hanging on the wall next to the hole.)

MAROU:

Yes.

(Hump disappears. Marou moves towards the hole. Hump reappears.)

HUMP:

You haven't been here long.

MAROU:

No.

HUMP:

Recently moved in, settling down?

MAROU:

Yes.

HUMP:

Are we somehow familiar from somewhere, from a familiar school of thought?

MAROU:

Few are left.

HUMP:

Fewer and fewer.

MAROU:

That's what I hear.

HUMP:

I've heard the same.

MAROU:

I'm not familiar with the details.

HUMP:

They were obscured.

MAROU:

That is what I've heard.

HUMP:

You will be fixing this hole?

MAROU:

Yes.

HUMP:

Should be an easy job.

MAROU:

I think so.

HUMP:

Pleasant day for it.

MAROU:

So far.

HUMP:

If the weather holds.

MAROU:

It might rain.

HUMP:

Hard to say if the weather will keep up like as it is, but I think so. Well, good day... And there are smaller bits here... dust.

(Hump throws in a few more pieces of the wall and a handful of dust. Hump disappears. Pause. Marou looks out the hole. Enter Nathalie dressed. Marou picks up from the desk a notebook, a pencil falls out from it. He picks it up.)

NATHALIE:

Someone was here?

MAROU:

It was a man outside.

NATHALIE:

Who was it?

MAROU:

He left.

NATHALIE:

Didn't stay long.

MAROU:

No, he didn't.

NATHALIE:

What did the man want?

MAROU:

I didn't ask.

NATHALIE:

Why was he here?

MAROU:

I asked he didn't say.

NATHALIE:

Who was it?

(Hump's head appears in the hole. He listens.)

MAROU:

We thought we were familiar, from a school of familiar thought, few were.

NATHALIE:

Someone educated?

MAROU:

He wasn't dressed well.

NATHALIE:

An educated man.

MAROU:

An academic.

NATHALIE:

And what was his education?

MAROU:

I should have asked.

NATHALIE:

So he might have been an idiot for all you know.

MAROU:

Doesn't mean he isn't educated.

NATHALIE:

True.

MAROU:

And whoever he was, I can say that he was not a blind prophet, who had come to hand down a prophecy, unless expected to do so, which is unlikely... And have I... *(Waves his notebook about.)* And have I mentioned what the future holds in store for those who must take it as it is handed down?

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

You remember?

NATHALIE:

I think so.

MAROU:

When?

NATHALIE:

Recently.

MAROU:

Yesterday? A few days ago the day before?

NATHALIE:

Maybe a week ago.

MAROU:

I can remind you.

NATHALIE:

If you remember having told me then I remember and you don't have to remind me.

MAROU:

Just to remind you.

NATHALIE:

It was a dream you had...

(Nathalie looks out the window. He opens his notebook.)

MAROU:

And... *(Finds the page in his notebook. Reads it.)* And if we were eviscerated while asleep, then brutally assassinated before waking up... and feasted upon by cannibals... and then... and when was the last time we might have considered how painful it is to die?

NATHALIE:

Not long ago.

MAROU *(reading)*:

How degrading and humiliating it is. The sense of loss of everything; the feeling of meaninglessness and hopelessness. No relief. No happy memory to make us think it was all worthwhile. No one less fortunate than us to make us think how lucky we are. Rather there is an inexplicable pain, from within, filling us with fear, and every moment is lived in absolute horror... in those final moments of agony that never seem to end.

NATHALIE:

It is terrible.

MAROU:

Which is where the inexplicable pain comes from.

NATHALIE:

And every moment is lived in absolute horror and there is nothing to ease the pain.

MAROU:

Can't do any harm to be prepared for the absolute worst.

NATHALIE:

Yet I'm disappointed that nothing ever gets done to make up for the harm that has been done.

MAROU:

I know and for that we could excuse one another?

(Pause. The door bangs in the wind.)

NATHALIE:

The door, it won't stay closed.

MAROU:

It won't.

NATHALIE:

Well?

MAROU:

I should hammer it closed.

NATHALIE:

Do it.

MAROU:

But then the noise would bother you.

NATHALIE:

The noise is bothering me.

MAROU:

And it would be noisy if I were hammering.

NATHALIE:

Hammer it quietly then.

MAROU:

But, but, I can't hammer quietly.

NATHALIE:

You can't? Why not?

MAROU:

Because hammering can't be done quietly.

NATHALIE:

Then find another way. What is wrong with you?

MAROU:

And I know how sensitive you are to noise.

(The door bangs shut. Pause.)

NATHALIE:

Once you were subtle... but where is the feather in your cap now?

MAROU:

It blew away.

NATHALIE:

On a windless day.

MAROU:

A feather doesn't need much wind.

NATHALIE:

Is it gone forever?

MAROU:

No, no, it will return one day... and oh... and I was thinking earlier that I was going to work on your memoirs... on the chapters that I'm having trouble with; on the chapters on hope... and if you knew how I feel when writing about you.

NATHALIE:

I know how you feel when writing about me.

MAROU:

It's impossible to describe... and it is like a dream, that I haven't forgotten or ever will... a dream... as if... like in the early morning... *(Searches for the page in his notebook. Reads.)* when you wonder if you'll ever wake up again, or if you even want to. You are half asleep, alive enough to think you aren't dead, but sleepy enough to wonder if you'll ever get up, and it's foggy and the stars are more distant than ever, in a forgotten dream.

(pause)

One morning I was standing outside watching the fog. It was dark and I couldn't see for the clouds. Then a hole opened in the sky, and I saw one star, at the end of a black tunnel. A light at the end of the tunnel. I remember it was like a bad poem, but it was poetry nonetheless.

NATHALIE:

Had you listened to your critics.

MAROU:

I haven't as much as I should have.

NATHALIE:

Why should I criticise you?

MAROU:

Well, you don't have to force yourself to.

NATHALIE:

Why should I? It doesn't do any good.

MAROU:

We've had this conversation.

NATHALIE:

We have.

MAROU:

We've said all of this before.

NATHALIE:

Any number of times.

MAROU:

The last time was only --

NATHALIE:

A moment ago.

MAROU:

Which is a coincidence as everything always is, the past and the future, it's all coincidence, and the future... we know it could do with some improvements and we need a future, and we aren't the only ones; the whole world needs a future, it will be missed if there isn't one... like it was once... when we were children, if you see it... (*Finds the page. Reads.*) like when we were young... and we would play dead at night, until we fell asleep, and then dreamt of being dead.

(beat)

Lying on our backs... pretending we had long since been dead... looking up at the night at the stars that were invisible, and nothing mattered. For hours we'd just lie there stone dead, imagining how it would feel... as our souls disappeared into nothing. We were very young, and so far away from really dying... but there we were, lying there thinking how restful it

would be to be sound asleep deep in the ground beneath the dirt, or off following some old comet into the distance... into endless space. *(Stops reading.)* Ooh... that comet... It hasn't come back since then.

NATHALIE *(gently)*:
I haven't seen it.

MAROU:
It could be peaceful to be seen again in the light of a comet, it is in that that we would see each other... Let's make up once again... one last time...

NATHALIE:
No.

MAROU:
One of the last times. For a rest.

NATHALIE:
You're always resting.

MAROU:
So we have lots of time before a shooting star passes over, or a giant asteroid three times as big as the earth comes crashing down.

(Waves his notebook.)

As I work this over I'm afraid of what I might have left out.

NATHALIE:
It's all the same.

MAROU:
But all the same...

(Male voice offstage sings briefly. Marou takes a shredded hat from the wall. Pause.)

NATHALIE *(responding to voice)*:
Ah... ah...

(A dog barks. The male voice stops singing.)

MAROU:
I gave your hat to the dogs to play with. You weren't intending to wear it again.

(He gives her the hat. The hat is a shred of a rag. She turns the hat in her hands. Pause.)

I thought better of it afterwards.

(She puts on the hat. Pause.)

I remember how they always jumped up to try and take them from our heads.

(pause)

Watching them tear it up reminded me of them jumping up to get it from your head.

(Male voice offstage quietly sings. They listen. Pause.)

NATHALIE:

You gave this to me.

MAROU:

And then I gave it to the dogs.

(She takes off the hat.)

NATHALIE:

Well, I won't be wearing it any more now.

(Voice sings slightly louder. Pause.)

MAROU:

We might as well hear him if he is going to sing, so I thought I'd put out a microphone...

(Indicates microphone.)

I'll put it out so we can hear him singing... and we can also then listen to the harmony of the spheres?

(Voice fades out.)

NATHALIE:

If you are going out you can turn the compost heap.

MAROU:

I could.

NATHALIE:

If you don't turn it, it will not rot.

MAROU:

But it has to sit first.

NATHALIE:

It needs to be turned.

MAROU:

As it is rotting at the bottom underneath and it will work its way up, and rise, like bread, though it doesn't smell as nice.

NATHALIE:

If you don't turn it, nothing will decompose.

MAROU:

Well, we'll wait and see?

NATHALIE:

You can't even get things to rot.

(beat)

MAROU:

I can't... no? But I rot.

NATHALIE:

You rot.

MAROU:

Yes, I am at the bottom of the heap. I am at the bottom. I am rotting at the bottom.

NATHALIE:

You are.

MAROU:

You'd say so yourself.

NATHALIE:

I would.

MAROU:

You would mean it.

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

You would tell me if I were.

NATHALIE:

I would.

MAROU:

Then tell me I am at the bottom of the heap. I am rotting at the bottom.

NATHALIE:

Yes you are!

MAROU:

Tell me. I am.

NATHALIE:

Yes, Marou you stink up the air we breathe.

MAROU:

I do. I agree.

NATHALIE:

You reek of pestilence. Is that what you want to hear? Is it? THAT YOU STINK OF A NEW PLAGUE. YES? YES? AND I CAN'T VOICE MY DISGUST ENOUGH. YOU OBJECT OF DISGUST.

(pause)

MAROU:

Oh... really... I stink of a new plague... oh... to that extent.

(He removes a microphone from a desk drawer. Lengthens some cable that is attached to the microphone. Plugs the microphone into the amplifier. Pause.)

It's possible to consider anything.

NATHALIE:

I can't consider anything any more.

MAROU:

But everything can be considered.

NATHALIE:

I can't consider anything! I HAVE BEEN MORE THAN CONSIDERATE!

(pause)

MAROU:

And the other day I was spelling out some words and wondered if the word relationship, was spelled with one word -- ought to be two words -- relation... ship. I was crossing the ocean of life on a "relation ship" – and it sunk.

(pause)

I am riding an armadillo across the desert headed to the last oasis on earth. It is dark, and the sky is lit up by an explosion of comets that have washed the sky white of stars. I walk into an oasis, and take shade from the light of the night sky. And all I know is that my thoughts are far away.

NATHALIE:

If you turn the pile it will smell less.

MAROU:

I ought to turn it.

(Voice sings in the distance. Hump disappears. Marou turns on the microphone. Mumbles into it to see it's working. He drops the microphone out the hole, feeds the cable out.)

The hole is a little bigger than I wanted it to be. I moved the light switch next to the door.

NATHALIE:

I saw that.

MAROU:

I'll turn them on when I go.

(He turns on the lights.)

NATHALIE:

You put the switch the wrong way. They should be on when you flip it up, and off when you flip it down. It is upside down.

MAROU:

I don't think I'll change it back, though it wouldn't take me long.

(The door blows open. Bangs.)

NATHALIE:

Turn them off.

MAROU:

They are coming on.

NATHALIE:

They are flickering.

MAROU:

No, they are coming on.

NATHALIE:

Turn them off.

MAROU:

They are coming on.

(Lights are not flickering, but dimming slowly, then getting brighter. Pause.)

NATHALIE:

What have you done to the lights?

MAROU:

There.

NATHALIE:

Why didn't you leave the switch where it was?

MAROU:

We'll get used to where it is now, and that the switch is upside down.

NATHALIE:

Turn them off!

MAROU:

They are getting brighter.

NATHALIE:

Turn them off.

MAROU:

I should move the switch back then.

NATHALIE:

TURN OFF THE LIGHTS!

(He turns out the lights.)

And leave them off!

(He exits, slamming door. The door bangs open. Marou sticks his head in through the hole in the wall. He smiles, disappears. The cable is pulled out through the hole in the wall. Marou's footsteps are heard amplified as he walks along.)

MAROU *(speaking into the microphone, voice amplified)*:

Can you hear me walking behind the house in dead leaves. I could be walking off to be executed, dragging my feet. Or would I go willingly, knowing that it was for you that I was being dragged off, maybe never to return.

(Amplified sound of a barking dog.)

Get off her.

(Amplified sound of a dog being kicked, a yelp. Marou appears in the window.)

If I were a dog...

(Marou pushes a hound's head through the hole in the wall.)

MAROU *(voice amplified)*:

Despite everything there is some part of us that reflects a few good intentions... *(to the dog)*
there you go girl.

(Removes dog from the hole. Sound of Marou's and the dog's footsteps amplified as they walk. He blows into the microphone.)

The wind has just come up. A cold blast... It seems to be coming from our house.

(Whispering.)

I don't whisper in your ear, any more. Or blow into it.

(He blows into the microphone.)

Do you hear it?

(He blows into the microphone.)

There is someone by the door.

(pause)

You should close the door. Close the door. But it doesn't close. He's... He's going in...

(The microphone having been dropped is heard hitting the ground. Amplified sound of feet, Marou running, dogs barking. Hump enters. Pause. Marou enters.)

NATHALIE:

Hello.

HUMP:

Hello.

NATHALIE:

I heard someone coming.

HUMP:

Your door was open.

NATHALIE:

I saw you outside earlier.

HUMP:

I was by the window.

NATHALIE:

That was you looking in the window.

HUMP:

I noticed you standing in the window.

NATHALIE:

Yes, I saw you looking in.

HUMP:

A picture was called to mind that I saw once... a painting. I admire paintings.

NATHALIE:

So do we as you can see.

HUMP (*points to canvases*) :

I see the canvases.

NATHALIE:

I was the subject for a painter at one time.

HUMP:

And this scene I had seen in this painting.

NATHALIE:

What was the painting?

HUMP:

The canvas was of a naked figure of a woman seen through a broken window of a tall building, looking down on the body of a man on the ground.

NATHALIE:

Who was the man?

HUMP:

The man --

NATHALIE:

Was the artist?

MAROU:

It was the artist who jumped.

NATHALIE:

But why did he jump? Did he do it on his own? Was he pushed?

MAROU:

Thought he could fly, maybe he fell.

NATHALIE:

You have seen it?

MAROU:

No.

HUMP:

So I was reminded of this painting: the window, the man, the woman.

NATHALIE:

I see...

HUMP:

And there I was just passing by on my travels and I stopped to have a look.

NATHALIE (*to Marou*):

Someone who travels.

HUMP:

Just to keep moving.

NATHALIE:

It is safe to travel?

HUMP:

Not with others like me about.

NATHALIE:

It is dangerous.

HUMP:

The trick is to move faster than anyone else.

NATHALIE:

You move faster than anyone else.

HUMP:

No one moves faster, I'm very quick.

NATHALIE:

I should think you would be.

HUMP:

You have a fine home. New?

NATHALIE:

New for us.

MAROU:

We are doing repairs and planning renovations.

HUMP:

Structural changes?

MAROU (*offhandedly*):

Minor.

HUMP:

Work on the foundation.

MAROU:

Just decorations really.

NATHALIE:

You know something about these things?

HUMP:

Enough to make conversation.

NATHALIE:

You should talk to my husband.

MAROU:

I am doing the work.

(Hump walks around the room.)

Beginning to.

NATHALIE:

Planning it.

MAROU:

And I don't do as much as I should. I am one of those people that does less than what should be done, but who doesn't?

(Hump walks about the room, looking at objects. Pause.)

HUMP:

I do more than I can do.

(Hump looks at the hats on the wall.)

NATHALIE:

Is there anything we can do for you?

HUMP *(moving in on her)*:

Yes, I'd like to look at your personal belongings. Your intimate objects. Whatever you have.

NATHALIE:

Oh...

HUMP:

I am looking for objects that have emotional value, that you cherish. Anything you couldn't bear to part with. Even if it has no real value I'll take it and I know what people are attached to, and I am aware of what attachments mean to us.

NATHALIE:

Is there anything in particular?

HUMP:

Objects of religious value are of especial interest: statues, relics, spiritual artefacts.

MAROU:

Our previous house burned, most of what we had was lost.

HUMP:

So what you took was probably of the most value.

NATHALIE *(to Marou)*:

He wants you to be helpful.

MAROU:

Well, I was thinking I could humour you, maybe? Or maybe not.

NATHALIE *(to Hump)*:

Would you like to be humoured?

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

He's not interested.

MAROU:

Oh well and I usually humour myself mostly.

HUMP:

Is he fooling with me?

MAROU:

No, no, not at all.

HUMP:

There would be no point in fooling with me, I must warn you.

MAROU:

It would be a mistake on both our parts.

HUMP:

On your part.

MAROU:

Mostly on my part.

NATHALIE:

My husband wants to apologise if he in any way appears to come off as being impolite.

MAROU:

I apologise.

NATHALIE:

And he doesn't usually apologise.

MAROU:

But I'd like to.

HUMP:

I rarely accept apologies.

NATHALIE:

You should.

MAROU (*apologising*):

I am sorry.

HUMP:

I accept that.

(Hump walks around the house. Continues examination of their belongings. Pause.)

Must have been quite a fire.

MAROU:

Arson.

HUMP:

Any dead?

NATHALIE:

No, not that we know of.

MAROU:

Nothing was left.

HUMP:

Must have been something left.

NATHALIE:

You are interested in what was left?

HUMP:

Why you wonder?

NATHALIE:

If I can ask.

HUMP:

It's interesting to know what's left I've always found.

MAROU:

Nothing was left but what we have here, which is --

NATHALIE *(to Marou)*:

What we took, but there are your writings and notes.

MAROU:

Most of it was lost.

NATHALIE:

And his poems and your essays.

MAROU:

The essays are on the poems.

NATHALIE:

And my biography. That he might like. (*To Hump*) If you appreciate reading biographies, or poems, stories. The biography is of me. My husband has written a biography on me.

MAROU:

Well...

HUMP:

You're a biographer.

MAROU:

Yes...

NATHALIE:

He's close to retirement.

HUMP:

You've been a biographer for some time?

MAROU:

Since birth.

NATHALIE:

Yes, it's been a long time.

HUMP:

So you have experience.

MAROU:

And would you maybe be looking for someone to tell the story of your life to?

HUMP:

It's been told.

MAROU:

But you never know until it's over.

NATHALIE:

Not all his subjects are willing participants.

MAROU:

A good subject is often the most unwilling.

HUMP:

Well, I can't say that poetry interests me.

NATHALIE (*to Marou*):

I've had to take the good with the bad.

MAROU:

Haven't I?

NATHALIE:

It was worse for me.

MAROU:

You only complained more.

NATHALIE (*to Hump*):

Do you see the hats on the wall? Those hats?

HUMP:

Those hats.

NATHALIE:

We didn't want to leave our old house without them, so we took them with us, because neither my husband nor I at one time were seen outside without a hat on, even in the wind. We'd hold them on our heads, which has nothing to do with the story. Are you going to interrupt?

MAROU:

The story?

NATHALIE:

I'll tell it.

MAROU:

Do I know the story?

NATHALIE:

You will not interrupt. (*declaiming*) There were two lovers who disappeared one night, their horses were found tied to a tree. And they were never found, they just walked off the end of a page somewhere and were never to be heard of again. They had ridden horses for sentimental reasons. And the point of the story is. What is the point of the story?!

MAROU:

That it's a good story.

NATHALIE:

That there is no point to such stories.

MAROU:

Needs a different ending? A happy ending?

NATHALIE:

What?

MAROU:

A happy ending?

NATHALIE:

He's writing my biography so that no one would ever read it or I wouldn't at least.

MAROU:

Yes well, what is of interest is how the subject is interpreted and not specifically the subject itself --

NATHALIE:

What?

MAROU:

It's really just a matter of interpretation.

NATHALIE:

What interpretation?

MAROU:

The conclusions are one's own. For those who want to come to their own conclusions.

NATHALIE:

Who wants to come to their own conclusions?

MAROU:

Everyone.

NATHALIE (*to Hump*):

You come to your own conclusions?

MAROU:

Same as everyone.

HUMP:

I might be an exception.

MAROU:

Excluding the exceptions.

NATHALIE:

And what would we conclude from that, what would anyone conclude from that?

MAROU:

Whatever you want, or anyone else wants.

NATHALIE:

What do I think about that, Marou? What do I think? What would I think about that?!

MAROU:

What anyone would think I should think.

NATHALIE:

Then maybe we can get an opinion from someone who would disagree with you and agree with me, someone who doesn't like you. Have you taken a dislike to him? Say so if you like, you find him...

HUMP:

Well...

NATHALIE:

Difficult?

HUMP:

Yes, I suppose.

NATHALIE:

Despicable?

HUMP:

Well...

NATHALIE:

So your first impression...

HUMP:

Was...

NATHALIE:

Not a good one.

HUMP:

No, well...

NATHALIE:

Well, well.

HUMP:

But I never trust first impressions.

NATHALIE:

But so often they're right I find. And in this case --

HUMP:

Usually I give someone the benefit of the doubt, as I would like others to do for me.

NATHALIE:

If you would read it, would you?

HUMP:

Read what?

NATHALIE:

My biography. I would be grateful.

HUMP:

Well...

NATHALIE:

When you have the time. I wouldn't expect an effort to be made.

HUMP:

If I had the time.

NATHALIE:

I'll make an offer to you.

HUMP:

I don't know...

NATHALIE:

I will make it worth the trouble for you. When you had the chance.

MAROU:

He wouldn't be interested.

NATHALIE:

You'll read it. Would you? Couldn't I convince you?

HUMP:

I could have a look at it.

NATHALIE:

My charms have given luck to those who can make use of their good luck. And you'd be able to do so. You'll have a look at it? Please if you would.

HUMP:

I suppose I could.

NATHALIE:

And you can take what ever else you want, I wouldn't mind, whatever it was. Anything you like, it's yours.

HUMP:

I'll have a look at it.

NATHALIE:

I'll make an offer to you. Thank you, thank you very much. Marou, go get it out.

MAROU:

No, I don't think so. It's not ready. I don't even have a title for it and it wouldn't be interesting for him.

NATHALIE:

Get it out.

MAROU:

And the drawer's locked.

NATHALIE:

Well unlock it.

MAROU:

But I haven't got the key.

NATHALIE:

You have the key.

MAROU:

It's lost.

NATHALIE:

You found it.

MAROU:

Yes, I did, but I lost it again.

NATHALIE:

You put it in your pocket.

MAROU:

Oh.

NATHALIE:

You put it in your pocket!

MAROU:

Yes, it is in my pocket. You are right.

NATHALIE:

Open it.

MAROU:

I have to open it?

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

I'd rather not. No, I refuse.

NATHALIE:

You can't refuse.

MAROU:

I refuse.

NATHALIE:

You can't refuse, Marou. You are in no position to refuse anything. Open the drawer!

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

Open the drawer.

MAROU:

I'd rather not open it.

NATHALIE:

Will I have to do it myself?

MAROU:

You shouldn't have to.

NATHALIE:

I shouldn't.

MAROU:

It shouldn't have to be opened.

NATHALIE:

Open it, or you will get nothing from me ever again. Nothing.

MAROU:

Nothing?

NATHALIE:

Nothing ever again. You won't get another moment of my time. Not a second of it.

MAROU:

No...

NATHALIE:

Open it!

MAROU:

Don't force me to.

NATHALIE:

Open the drawer!

MAROU:

Nathalie.

NATHALIE:

Nothing from me ever again. NOTHING. You will get nothing from me ever again.

MAROU:

I might not anyway.

NATHALIE:

You won't know unless you open it.

(Marou opens the drawer.)

Give it to him.

(Marou hands a mound of paper to Hump.)

MAROU:

It's not finished yet...

NATHALIE:

He can't write. Can't spell. His grammar doesn't adhere to any rules. His punctuation doesn't exist.

MAROU:

But what is in grammar?

NATHALIE:

Meaning, Marou.

MAROU:

And punctuation only gets in the way.

NATHALIE:

You will find sections that are written like the Bible with those same sad tired old miracles that even if they had been true no one would have believed them. And when you look for style, you won't find it. No style.

MAROU:

And what is style?

NATHALIE:

Everything, Marou. Everything is style. STYLE IS IT... in those little moments, in the flourishes... But no, you like a good story.

MAROU:

Who doesn't like a good story?

NATHALIE:

Yes, what idiot doesn't like a good story?

MAROU:

Well, I do.

NATHALIE:

The same story. Told over and over again.

MAROU:

They all are. So he has heard it all before. Then why should he bother?

HUMP:

I am sure I have.

MAROU:

He isn't interested.

HUMP:

But I will have a look it.

MAROU:

Well, then there will be no more happy endings from now on. No more happy endings! I certainly will never write any more happy endings!

NATHALIE:

When have you ever written a happy ending?

MAROU:

I was about to.

NATHALIE:

Who would have believed it?

MAROU:

You might have.

NATHALIE:

But I am unhappy.

HUMP:

Yes, I saw in the window that you were unhappy and that reminded me of the painting.

NATHALIE:

I don't make a mystery of it...

HUMP:

You unhappy woman.

NATHALIE:

And can you tell that nothing makes my disappointments go away? Could you tell that? They add to each other day after day and I wouldn't feel comfortable explaining the situation.

HUMP:

You have no choice then but to be unhappy?

NATHALIE:

I've been given no choice.

HUMP:

Given a choice, it might be better not to have one.

MAROU:

There aren't as many choices any more as there used to be for Christ's sake.

NATHALIE:

No there are not.

MAROU:

And if there are any they are not the ones you want.

HUMP:

That is why I take what I want, and what I don't want I leave for someone else.

(Hump takes a hat from the wall and puts it on his head. Takes it off and hangs it up.)

NATHALIE:

Would you like a hat? A reading hat?

HUMP:

Well, you have a fine collection of them.

NATHALIE:

Take a hat. Try them on. Take whichever fits the best.

(He tries on a few hats.)

NATHALIE:

Here, try on the one that I would like you to wear. Please.

HUMP:

It fits. It does fit. How does it look?

NATHALIE:

You need clothes to go with it. *(Pointing to Marou's clothes.)* You look like you need a new set of clothes. Those are obviously your travelling clothes. Marou, you can give him your clothes, I should think they'll fit. I would like you to give him your clothes. Why not?

MAROU:

What?

NATHALIE:

Take off your clothes.

MAROU:

My clothes?

NATHALIE:

They are about the same size.

MAROU:

What?

NATHALIE:

They will fit you nicely I should think.

MAROU:

My clothes? You want me to take off my clothes and give them to him?

NATHALIE:

That is what I said.

MAROU:

Is that what she said?

HUMP:

Yes.

MAROU:

No... I don't think so.

NATHALIE:

Go on.

MAROU:

No, no.

NATHALIE:

Take them off.

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

Take them off or I'll tear them off you.

MAROU:

No, what are you saying? They are my clothes.

NATHALIE:

Undress Marou.

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

You are going to take them off.

MAROU:

I have no reason to.

NATHALIE:

You don't need a reason. Undress!

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

GET OUT OF THOSE CLOTHES!

MAROU:

I am reluctant to do so!

(She undresses him.)

NATHALIE:

Won't you take off your clothes for me? Just slip out of them like a snake from his skin. Unbutton a few buttons. Let me help you. It is not even as difficult as it was to put them on. There you are. Out you come. You won't even know you have them off.

(She gives Marou's clothes to Hump who willingly and amused undresses himself and puts on Marou's clothes.)

MAROU:

I don't see why I would agree.

NATHALIE:

There you are. As you were meant to be. Skinned alive.

MAROU:

I am surprised you want to be so generous. Why be so generous?

NATHALIE:

Because you've nothing to lose.

MAROU:

I have everything to lose.

NATHALIE:

Your underwear... Your underwear.

MAROU:

What?

NATHALIE:

Take them off.

MAROU:
No, no...

NATHALIE:
Take them off.

MAROU:
No.

NATHALIE:
You want to be difficult.

MAROU:
No.

NATHALIE:
Well?

MAROU:
They are dirty.

NATHALIE:
They're dirty?

MAROU:
Filthy.

NATHALIE:
How could they be dirty?

MAROU:
I've been wearing them for a while.

NATHALIE:
How long?

MAROU:
For a while.

NATHALIE:
How long?

MAROU:
A few days.

NATHALIE:
How many days?

MAROU:

A few.

NATHALIE:

How long, Marou?

MAROU:

About a week.

NATHALIE:

YOU DISGUSTING PIG!

HUMP:

I am wearing my own. They're fine.

NATHALIE:

They are clean?

HUMP:

Like fresh air after a spring shower.

(Marou turns his back to them. Takes off his underwear. Hump puts on Marou's clothes.)

NATHALIE:

He doesn't want them.

HUMP:

He needn't bother.

NATHALIE:

He doesn't want them. Put them back on. Or you might want to change them while you're at it.

HUMP:

Thank you.

NATHALIE:

Fit?

HUMP:

Yes.

NATHALIE *(to Marou)*:

You can get dressed. Get on some other clothes.

(Marou puts his underwear back on.)

NATHALIE (*to Hump*):

You did need some clothes. (*to Marou*) How do they look on him?

MAROU:

I will not be humiliated. No matter how hard you try to humiliate me. I will not be humiliated.

HUMP:

Thank you.

NATHALIE:

I wish I could say that I had made them myself.

MAROU:

He looks ridiculous.

NATHALIE:

He looks ridiculous? And how did you look? And you should see yourself now.

MAROU:

I will not be humiliated.

NATHALIE:

You will be humiliated, you are being humiliated, and denying it only humiliates you more.
Get dressed.

MAROU:

I will not be humiliated.

NATHALIE:

And look at you. Standing in your underwear, admiring how another man looks in the clothes your wife has given away. You are being humiliated. You've suffered a horrible indignity. To be treated in such a way is humiliating.

MAROU:

I can't be treated like this.

NATHALIE:

Go get dressed.

MAROU:

I have been a good human being.

NATHALIE:

Go and get some clothes on.

MAROU:

I have been treated with respect. I have a right to it.

NATHALIE:

Get dressed.

MAROU:

You want me to get dressed now?

NATHALIE:

You'll catch cold.

MAROU:

Yes, I will.

NATHALIE:

If you stand there like that.

MAROU:

Look what you have done to me. Why?

NATHALIE:

Get dressed.

(Hump picks up his own clothes and gives them to Marou.)

HUMP:

If I could say something. I'd like to say that I have never found indignation to be very useful.

MAROU:

Oh, you haven't.

HUMP:

Unless you sincerely think you deserve better.

NATHALIE:

He doesn't.

HUMP *(sincerely)*:

Do you? Some do. I have always thought I did myself, and I have, but I have been quite lucky.

(pause)

MAROU:

I am going to get dressed.

(Marou exits. Pause. Hump takes off his hat and fans himself.)

NATHALIE:

Does the hat go well with your thoughts?

HUMP:

As if made for them.

(Fans himself with the hat. Pause. Nathalie puts on a hat.)

Hot... A hot hat.

NATHALIE:

I wore it once when I met someone I loved. It was love at first sight.

HUMP:

The way it should always be.

(Hump puts his hands up to the fan. Moves them around to feel the air.)

I thought it was working.

NATHALIE:

No.

(Hump fiddles with the fan. The fan starts up.)

HUMP:

There you are.

NATHALIE:

What did you do?

HUMP:

Nothing.

NATHALIE:

I didn't see what you did.

HUMP:

It started on its own.

NATHALIE:

Because of the electricity in the air.

(He holds the fan up to her face. Her hair blows. Pause.)

HUMP:
It is blowing now.

NATHALIE:
I feel it blowing.

HUMP:
Your hair.

NATHALIE:
Hot.

HUMP:
The air.

NATHALIE:
It is circulating.

HUMP:
Blowing.

NATHALIE:
Turn up the speed.

(He turns up the fan speed.)

HUMP:
How's that?

NATHALIE:
Better... Go any higher?

HUMP:
That's as high as it goes.

(She languishes in the air.)

NATHALIE:
Aim it down.

(He aims the fan down to her chest.)

The air is so warm. Lower. Down lower.

(He aims the fan lower.)

HUMP:
It's the humidity.

NATHALIE:
Suddenly humid.

HUMP:
Moist.

NATHALIE:
Lower.

(He aims the fan further down.)

Never has the air felt so good against my skin. Warming my fluids. And there is a chill running down my back. All the way down... and under... A warm chill.

(The fan sparks, and stops.)

HUMP:
It's shorted.

NATHALIE:
Oh no.

HUMP:
Motor must have been ready to burn out.

NATHALIE:
It did go through a fire.

HUMP:
Wires must have been burnt.

NATHALIE:
And I had been meaning to throw it away. *(Indicating his clothes.)* They certainly fit you well.

HUMP:
Bit tight, a little.

NATHALIE:
I used to tell my husband to leave the fly open.

HUMP:
Oh, I haven't closed it.

(He closes his fly.)

NATHALIE:

Leave it open.

(He opens it.)

Is that better?

HUMP:

The same... what a topic of conversation.

NATHALIE:

And why not talk about anything? Why not?

(He sways on his feet.)

HUMP:

Yes, and I'm wondering there's a place I've heard of where the ground moves under you. And you don't have to do anything but be moved by the earth beneath you.

NATHALIE:

Oh?... Such a place exists?

HUMP:

I am looking for it. I always have been.

(pause)

NATHALIE:

And here we are?

(He sways on his feet. Stumbles about.)

HUMP:

Yes, I almost lost my balance.

NATHALIE:

Perhaps you should lie down? You can stay for a while. If you like.

HUMP:

If I were to stay I would have to know if I could escape. I was incarcerated for a time so escaping is important to me.

NATHALIE:

You were incarcerated? Against your will?

HUMP:

Bound and gagged and chained.

NATHALIE:

But you escaped?

HUMP:

Barely with my sanity.

NATHALIE:

You were held unjustly no doubt.

HUMP:

Even my captors knew I was innocent.

NATHALIE:

Did they let you escape?

HUMP:

No, I fooled them.

NATHALIE:

So are you being followed now?

HUMP:

No, my trail has been lost.

NATHALIE:

You are alone.

HUMP:

I have been.

NATHALIE:

You're out travelling alone.

HUMP:

Except when I stop.

NATHALIE:

Alone, you're all alone?

HUMP:

I have been forgotten.

NATHALIE:

I've wanted to be forgotten myself.

HUMP:

My criminal activities cease to call attention to themselves.

NATHALIE:

That must make it easy for you.

HUMP:

It is because I take what no one else wants.

NATHALIE:

You are certainly on the side of right.

HUMP:

At one time I wasn't, once I was a dishonest criminal, and I often resorted to devious psychological strategies in order to cover up my real intentions. So no one knew what I wanted or why. And to make it worse I would sometimes lie even when earnestly called upon to tell the truth.

NATHALIE:

I have done the same.

HUMP:

But I have never been so honest as now.

NATHALIE:

Neither have I.

HUMP:

I have never been so honest.

NATHALIE:

Never.

HUMP:

I was never as much a criminal as I'd have liked to have been. The bigger crimes have always eluded me, but there is no point in dwelling on one's losses or disappointments.

NATHALIE:

We understand each other. And I didn't think such a person was anywhere to be found.

HUMP:

There is always someone and I happened to come along.

NATHALIE:

What is love? What is it really?

HUMP:

Love?

NATHALIE:

Compromise?

HUMP:

I have never liked compromise very much.

NATHALIE:

But if there is compromise, or isn't, not too much though. Is that love? Or something else? Is love something else?

HUMP:

Well love... well love...

NATHALIE:

Is something else. One shouldn't have to compromise too much. I have often compromised too much.

HUMP:

Often I don't compromise enough.

NATHALIE:

That could be a problem.

HUMP:

Well no, not really.

NATHALIE:

I hope not.

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

Love is something else.

HUMP:

Something else...

NATHALIE:

You can stay until we find out...

HUMP:

If I did stay for a while... I'd like to... I'd like to stay on for a while, yes, I need to rest, it's been a long time since I've had a rest... And would he leave... your husband? If I were to stay...?

NATHALIE:

Yes... I think he would... he might...

HUMP:

Would he?...

NATHALIE:

I would think so.

HUMP:

But if he didn't?

NATHALIE:

If someone moved in he would probably go.

HUMP:

You are looking to get rid of him?

NATHALIE:

He might go on his own.

HUMP:

And if he didn't?

NATHALIE:

Then I would have to discuss it with him.

HUMP:

Would you resort to desperate measures?

NATHALIE:

Yes, I suppose I would if I had to.

HUMP:

Killing him is no solution.

NATHALIE:

No?

HUMP:

As a last resort.

NATHALIE:

Of course.

HUMP:

I don't do that sort of thing. I'd have to hire someone.

NATHALIE:

Or I should maybe go away...

HUMP:

But... I have just been looking for somewhere where the earth would move beneath me.

(He sways on his feet.)

And the ground does seem soft here.

(He stumbles about.)

And why leave when you have somewhere to stay, and nowhere else to go?

NATHALIE:

I would rather stay.

HUMP:

But if he doesn't leave...

NATHALIE:

He may take his own life.

HUMP:

Suicide.

NATHALIE:

He's a romantic.

HUMP:

So am I. I have toyed with the idea myself.

NATHALIE:

So have I.

HUMP:

Any attempts?

NATHALIE:

Hasn't even tried.

HUMP:

For yourself?

NATHALIE:

No... you?

HUMP:

Two attempts, one almost successful.

NATHALIE:

But it wasn't.

HUMP:

I failed.

NATHALIE:

Failure is hard to live with.

HUMP:

Yes, it was at the time, though it doesn't bother me any more. I got over it and have never looked back since. Hard to believe I ever wanted to kill myself. And I have never felt so alive.

NATHALIE:

I wish I had such enthusiasm. But I have little enthusiasm. I become disheartened.

HUMP:

Well, I tend to be optimistic.

NATHALIE:

What I have had to live with! Christ!

HUMP:

You have had an unfortunate life...

NATHALIE:

So what would you do in my situation?

HUMP:

Well... I'd think about it.

NATHALIE:

I have been.

HUMP:

Look at the options.

NATHALIE:

Yes I do that.

HUMP:

Weigh them.

NATHALIE:

I am.

HUMP:

I'd decide what I want and reasonably could expect to get, and then see how to achieve those ends.

NATHALIE:

How?

HUMP:

I'd look for how.

NATHALIE:

That's the problem.

HUMP:

It is.

NATHALIE:

So how would you?

HUMP:

I wouldn't ask someone else.

NATHALIE:

But you won't say no if someone asked.

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

You wouldn't.

HUMP:

I wouldn't.

NATHALIE:

Well I'm asking.

HUMP:

There might be something I don't know.

NATHALIE:

And guess what it is.

HUMP:

Well, I couldn't guess.

NATHALIE:

Take a guess.

HUMP:

No, I couldn't.

NATHALIE (*despairing*):

No, we can't guess at anything. There is nothing to guess at with any real certainty!

(pause)

And what might be happening is as if something could have happened but never had the chance to... oh God...

HUMP:

Well, I too have missed a few opportunities, I do admit that.

NATHALIE:

It is a shame to let them go by.

HUMP:

Yes, it is.

NATHALIE:

Love is cruel.

HUMP:

It is.

NATHALIE:

Is it possible to mourn what never was? Our missed chances.

HUMP:

There are always others.

NATHALIE:

You are a romantic.

HUMP:

And I am still alive.

NATHALIE:

There isn't much to do but see our chances for happiness slip away and disappear.

HUMP:

Well, at times it seems like that.

NATHALIE:

I couldn't be unhappier if everything I ever cared for were to disappear.

(She sighs. Pause. Hump sighs.)

We are sighing.

HUMP:

Ah yes.

NATHALIE:

Breathing the same air.

HUMP:

I'd hold my breath.

NATHALIE:

And I'd let all mine out.

HUMP:

All of it?

NATHALIE:

Every last breath.

(They breathe loudly together.)

HUMP:

Wedding vows could be exchanged soon at this rate.

NATHALIE:

And I'm a married woman.

HUMP:

But you could be a widow.

NATHALIE:

The nights I have spent dreaming of being a widow. I remember one day when he hung a noose out on the tree, and did nothing. I don't know what prevented him from not going through with it. And I should figure out what prevented him. I think he is holding out for better days. I must convince him that things will only get worse. And if I can't convince him... it will only get worse for me... there will be no end to my suffering. Maybe I should be the one to die. I've often wondered...

HUMP:

No, no, you'd be better off alive...

NATHALIE:

You are an optimist, aren't you? A rare optimist. But optimists don't really have it better than cynics.

HUMP:

They try.

NATHALIE:

And what good does it do them?

HUMP:

They are happy.

NATHALIE:

Really?

HUMP:

I think so.

NATHALIE:

I don't agree.

HUMP:

Because you're a cynic.

NATHALIE:

But I do have moments of pleasure, but to sustain them...

HUMP:

Ah, well, you see --

NATHALIE:

To hold onto it. It's easy to be discouraged.

HUMP:

No need to be.

NATHALIE:

Everyone around us is discouraged and I am despairing with everyone who is happy to join me. And when you look at who is out there, running around as unhappy as the rest of us, and our lives, that are so insignificant, and we're living for nothing. It's all for nothing. To not give up hope, and what is the excuse for that? I can't think of one. What excuse do we have to not give up hope?!

HUMP:

Please I am... I am sensitive to this kind of talk. I have trouble listening to it.

NATHALIE:

These tales of woe. The same stories over and over again and nothing improves but only gets worse. Worse by the day, day in and day out!

HUMP:

I can get depressed myself. I used to be a manic depressive myself. You will depress me.

NATHALIE (*howling*):

LIFE IS SHIT! AND WHEN YOU THINK OF ALL THAT COULD BE DONE WITH THE ENERGY WASTED BY LIVING. LIFE IS SHIT. I TELL MAROU THAT EVERYDAY, HOPING HE WILL DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, HE DOES NOTHING!

HUMP:

Stop. Please.

NATHALIE:

I can't help myself.

HUMP:

I will leave if you continue.

NATHALIE:

We are despairing. We live in despair, with no hope for tomorrow. For our children. There is no hope. No hope. There is no hope for existence. There will some day be no existence. It will cease to exist.

HUMP:

You are upsetting me. Please, I'll have to leave.

NATHALIE:

I am full of rage! Blind rage! I see nothing!

HUMP:

I am upset.

NATHALIE:

I have been poisoned. My desires are killing me. I loathe the sight of everything and it doesn't do any good to ignore anything, nothing disappears if you know it's still there. AND I WANT TO SEE ABSOLUTE DESTRUCTION. AND I WOULD ONLY BE HAPPY SURROUNDED BY CORPSES, AND LIVING IN AN OLD RUIN. I SHOULD HAVE STAYED IN OUR OLD HOUSE, THERE WAS NOTHING LEFT OF IT!

HUMP:

Stop.

NATHALIE:

AND I'LL GET RID OF HIM. I'LL TEAR HIM APART. I WILL EAT HIS LIVER AND GNAW ON HIS BONES AND TRAMPLE HIS SEED INTO INFERTILE GROUND. BECAUSE OF HIM I HATE. I HATE WITH MY SOUL, WITH MY LIFE. AND LIFE IS SHIT.

HUMP:

I'll come back.

NATHALIE:

You are leaving. No, don't leave.

HUMP:

What?

NATHALIE:

Wait... no wait. I am not as intolerable as I appear to be. Wait. Stop.

(pause)

I am...

(pause)

Excuse me. I'm fine.

(pause)

It is over.

(pause)

I over-react. Makes me feel better for a moment, but then afterwards I am as depressed as I was before. I'm sorry. Forgive me. I'm sorry...

(Pause. Nathalie regains her composure.)

Who are you? What's your name?

HUMP:

Hump.

(pause)

For Humphrey.

NATHALIE *(suppressing laughter)*:

Hump...

HUMP:

Hump or Humphrey.

NATHALIE *(giggling)*:

Hump is a nice name for a man.

HUMP:

It is a terrible name.

NATHALIE *(laughing)*:

It is actually.

HUMP:

It is nice of you to say it isn't.

NATHALIE *(laughing)*:

It is a terrible name.

HUMP:

Call me Humphrey.

NATHALIE *(laughing wildly)*:

How could I ever love someone called Hump?

HUMP:

A name isn't necessarily the person.

NATHALIE:

I am Nathalie. Pronounced as in the French. I was French when I was younger, but was then forced to speak another language.

HUMP:

The French are so depressing.

NATHALIE:

Not if you know them.

HUMP:

But who knows the French?

(pause)

NATHALIE:

I will be happy... I have moments, that are pleasing... and I will become an optimist someday. But it is impossible to be an optimist and realistic in the same breath. When everything disintegrates and what hurts becomes painful, and the pain is... *(screaming)* I have shared pain with that man. We have shared our pain. But I can no longer bear the pain of that wart on my heart. He is killing me. *(Howling.)* HE IS KILLING ME. Why me? I lose all faith in others whenever I see him.

HUMP:

You are depressing me. Excuse me, I must leave if you continue. I become upset. I can't listen to this.

NATHALIE:

THAT FOUL ROTTING SCUM HAS DESTROYED ALL I HAVE WANTED FROM MYSELF AND OTHERS. AND I USED TO THINK THE STORY OF MY LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN WORTH HEARING, BUT LOOK WHAT HE HAS DONE TO MY LIFE. LOOK AT IT. READ IT AN YOU WILL SEE. READ THOSE SCRIBBLINGS AND YOU'LL SEE.

(She points at the biography.)

HUMP:

Stop. Stop. I must go. I'll have a look at it.

(Hump exits with the biography.)

NATHALIE:

Wait. Stop. Don't go. Come back.

HUMP *(offstage)*:

Ahh... I am an optimist. I am! You will not depress me!

NATHALIE:

Come back. You'll come back? You will come back. We had a nice talk...

(Pause. Marou enters, wearing wet clothes.)

MAROU:

It's me.

NATHALIE:

I see it's you.

(pause)

You're dripping.

MAROU:

You gave him my only dry pair of clothes.

NATHALIE:

You are going to stand there dripping.

MAROU:

I have no other clothes.

NATHALIE:

You are dripping on the floor.

MAROU:

It doesn't matter what you do to me.

NATHALIE:

Why don't you take them off to dry?

MAROU:

I don't mind.

NATHALIE:

Take them off.

MAROU:

I am going to leave them on!

NATHALIE:

I don't want to have to tell you to take off your clothes every time I see you, Marou.

MAROU:

I am leaving them on!

NATHALIE *(understated)*:

Then I won't say anything.

(pause)

MAROU:

What if in twenty years from now we were better off? Let's say we will be much better off and we just don't know it now.

NATHALIE:

By then it wouldn't matter.

MAROU:

Maybe the wait will be worth it.

NATHALIE:

No, it wouldn't.

MAROU:

You have always given up so easily.

NATHALIE:

And why don't you give up?

MAROU:

I ought to. I have been thinking of it.

NATHALIE:

Now might be the time to think of giving up.

MAROU:

It might be.

NATHALIE:

It is.

MAROU:

You are probably right.

NATHALIE:

It was only really just a matter of the opportunity presenting itself.

MAROU:

And it has, hasn't it?

NATHALIE:

Or would you like to see me die and you would live?

MAROU:

No, I want you to live.

NATHALIE:

For me.

MAROU:

For you.

NATHALIE:

You'll do it?

MAROU:

Yes.

NATHALIE:

I was expecting more of a fight.

MAROU:

No, I'd agree to anything at this moment.

NATHALIE:

Not that I wanted you to kick up a fuss.

MAROU:

We are past that now. I think, aren't we? Our fighting is over. The screaming, the yelling, the crying. And I would like to forgive you if I could find it in my heart to do so.

NATHALIE:

Yes... I'd like to forgive you.

MAROU:

But you have never accepted my apologies. And I meant for them to be sincere. But it always seemed that every time I said anything it made things worse.

NATHALIE:

I didn't think you were aware of it.

MAROU:

That is why I kept trying to apologise.

NATHALIE:

I haven't shown much sympathy, have I?

MAROU:

You did what you could.

NATHALIE:

I tried sympathy, then pity, but Marou there comes a point when you can't do anything for some people.

MAROU:

I couldn't do anything for you.

NATHALIE:

There is something you can do now... Sit down and get a pencil, and a piece of paper.

(Marou sits at table. Gets a paper and pencil.)

All right now get this down... Dear Nathalie, my love, these are my final words. Write it down. Go on.

(She dictates slowly and deliberately, but too quickly for him to write. He doesn't write.)

These are my final words. The last words I shall ever write. I have decided to put an end to my miserable existence because I believe this is always what you wanted from me. It is in order to please you that I am going to take my life. Don't think it's because I have any courage, as you know I don't. By the time you get this note my decision will be irreversible. The means I have chosen to take my life is a comment on who I am and I will not die instantly as you will see... but I will bleed slowly to death... and I'd like you to know that I had time to realise what was happening to me. And I could have shot myself in the head or in the heart, but I don't believe anything should happen too quickly... I suspect that I will be in great pain, that I will be screaming, and crying, and wondering why I did it. And I am sure it will be of comfort to you to know that I died in great pain... And there is so much more I'd like to say but I know you wouldn't be interested...

Love, Marou.

(pause)

Anything you'd like to add?

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

That about sums it up. You agree with the instructions?

MAROU:

Wasn't it always me who read the instructions?

NATHALIE:

Yes, but who followed them?

MAROU:

Where should I leave it?

NATHALIE:

Somewhere, where I'll find it.

(He puts the note on a hat hook.)

MAROU:

Where my hat was hung.

NATHALIE:

You don't have to follow the directions to the letter. There are other options, various ways to kill one's self.

(She takes out a knife from a desk drawer.)

But what would be the most appropriate, and effective? Will you stab yourself? Will you shoot yourself? Or you could always hang yourself.

MAROU:

I'll do all three to make sure... And a gun is a possibility. Yes, I could see shooting myself in the head. If I still have the gun I had. I haven't seen it for a while. I am not sure I remember where I put it. I wouldn't have mentioned to you that I had a gun, did I? I wouldn't have wanted to tell you.

NATHALIE:

No.

MAROU:

No, I wouldn't have told you. I wonder what I did with it.

NATHALIE:

What were you doing with a gun? Were you going use it for something?

MAROU:

I'd have to remember if I even still have it.

NATHALIE:

Were you going to kill me, Marou?

MAROU:

No... No... I had it for the long nights... when I was wondering if you would ever love me.

NATHALIE *(crushed)*:

If I hadn't... God...

(pause)

How depressing. You can't imagine how that makes me feel.

MAROU:

You will feel guilty when I am gone.

NATHALIE:

I'll feel no guilt.

MAROU:

You will.

NATHALIE:

I won't.

MAROU:

It will consume you until you yourself will take your own life.

NATHALIE:

Ridiculous.

MAROU:

That is something else that should be in the note. That I don't want you to feel guilty.

NATHALIE:

You're afraid?

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

You seem agitated.

MAROU:

Just nerves.

NATHALIE:

You're afraid.

MAROU:

Only nervous.

NATHALIE:

It's only a few seconds and it's all over.

MAROU:

Yes... I am afraid.

NATHALIE:

In some cultures you would be a hero. You are about to do the honourable thing.

MAROU:

But it can't be easy, when it comes down to it. *(Looking at the knife.)* It must be difficult.

NATHALIE:

But everything was easy for you, you just made things difficult.

MAROU:

Didn't I always though... You know me so well... How well you know me.

NATHALIE:

I can't help you any more.

MAROU:

You've always helped me.

(She puts the knife into his hand.)

NATHALIE:

It isn't suicide unless you do it yourself.

MAROU:

Doesn't seem possible.

NATHALIE:

But it is.

MAROU:

There are your memoirs to finish. I'd have liked to have lived to finish them.

NATHALIE:

I'll find someone else to finish them for you.

MAROU:

It wouldn't be the same.

NATHALIE:

You wouldn't want it to be the same.

MAROU:

You can't expect me...

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:
You do.

NATHALIE:
I do.

MAROU:
We aren't joking.

NATHALIE:
No.

(pause)

MAROU:
What do I want now?

(pause)

NATHALIE:
Is there anything you want? If there is anything you have to say. May this be your last chance. Finally.

MAROU:
You know, I was expecting a peaceful end. And I'd be sitting by a fire in my old age, drinking a glass of ale, and our dogs would be curled up at my feet, and a cloud would drop down out of the sky and ask me to go for a walk into the night... I'd ask the cloud what it's like, and it'd say... it's just a long walk... a great long lonely walk into the stars... and I'd be out there with our comet, hanging onto its tail, not worrying about anything.

NATHALIE:
You won't be worrying. Your worries will be over.

MAROU:
It's the thought of never seeing you again that I couldn't live with.

NATHALIE:
You won't have to.

MAROU:
I can't leave you without knowing...

NATHALIE:
You can kiss me goodbye.

MAROU:
May I?

NATHALIE:

Yes.

(He kisses her.)

NATHALIE:

Your last kiss.

(She kisses him.)

MAROU:

That was it?

NATHALIE:

The last kiss.

MAROU:

There could have been so many more.

NATHALIE:

But what would it take for me to love you again?

MAROU:

What would it take for you to love me again? One last time.

(pause)

One last time.

(pause)

NATHALIE:

No.

MAROU:

Why not?

NATHALIE:

Wouldn't be appropriate.

MAROU:

No.

NATHALIE:

What pleasure would we get out of it?

MAROU:
Not much.

NATHALIE:
It would be unpleasant.

MAROU:
I just want to show you some affection.

(pause)

I am begging you for mercy.

NATHALIE:
I don't want to have to give you anything ever again.

MAROU:
No you wouldn't... I know why.

NATHALIE:
Prepare yourself now... you can be alone... alone as you have ever been. I'll leave you.

MAROU:
Is there anything else? That we've forgotten?

NATHALIE:
I'll leave you to it.

MAROU:
You will have to make the arrangements.

NATHALIE:
I will.

MAROU:
You'll need to get a death certificate for me.

NATHALIE:
I will.

MAROU:
You'll take care of it.

NATHALIE:
Yes, I will.

MAROU:

You'll have to go to vital statistics. They will need to know where and when, whether or not I was married, cause of death.

NATHALIE:

I'll tell them.

MAROU:

They'll need proof.

NATHALIE:

I'll take care of it for you.

MAROU:

I don't want to leave you with any obligations.

NATHALIE:

It will be done.

MAROU:

And my tombstone, nothing too elaborate.

NATHALIE:

There is no need for a tombstone.

MAROU:

I thought I might like to have one.

NATHALIE:

If you think it is necessary.

MAROU:

For the epitaph... what would it be?

NATHALIE:

I'll think of something.

MAROU:

I would like it to reflect what I always wanted in my life. Something that would stand the test of time long after I have gone.

NATHALIE:

It might be better to leave it blank.

MAROU (*grandiose*):

"For the life I lived, and now it is gone. Here lies a man who has found peace in death that was not to be found in life. For the life I lived, and now it is gone."

(She moves to leave.)

Wait.

(pause)

NATHALIE:

I'll put on some music for you...

(She looks up. Raises her hands. Music comes on. Concerto No. 1 in A minor for Violin and Orchestra by Bach the Adagio. Pause. They listen to the music.)

It will be beautiful now... And I will get a certificate for you, don't worry...

MAROU:

You know I will go through with it?

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

You'll miss me.

NATHALIE:

I will miss you.

MAROU:

One last kiss.

NATHALIE:

You've had it.

MAROU:

Yes, I have.

NATHALIE:

It may seem like we are making light of it, but we're not.

(She blows a kiss to him.)

Bye. Don't let me down.

MAROU:

I won't.

NATHALIE:

If I were to tell you I love you...

MAROU:

I'd do anything for you.

(She exits. Her footsteps are heard amplified walking away. He holds the knife up to his heart.)

Well isn't this wonderful? And I don't appreciate pain very much. I never had any use for it. Talk to yourself, don't lose heart. I have nothing to live for... Do I have anything to die for? God, I hate pretence!

NATHALIE *(voice amplified)*:

Can you hear me, Marou?

MAROU:

I hear you.

NATHALIE *(voice amplified)*:

Listen.

MAROU:

I always loved the sound of your voice. Talk to me.

NATHALIE *(voice amplified)*:

You always said you liked the sound of my voice.

MAROU:

Speak to me.

NATHALIE *(voice amplified)*:

I am imagining you in pain, lying on the floor. I see your heart struggling to pump its last drops of blood. I can hear your lungs gasping and failing. Your mind closing down. I am your last thought Marou. See me waving goodbye to you in the distance. Imagine me laughing at your graveside and dancing on the mound. I despise you Marou. You are too insignificant for words. You must kill yourself. Don't hesitate. Find love in death, you have none in life. I can hear the music from here. It is beautiful, wonderful music. That man was a genius.

(Amplified footsteps fade out.)

MAROU:

I shall write a poem... a poem for you. I am in the dark, dreaming of death. A form moves toward me. It is shapeless. A shapeless form. I look to where the edges would be... They are not there. It was nothing. I am in a desert, a rock speaks to me complaining of inactivity. I understand. I can hear it eroding endless... Grain by grain... The last leaf of autumn is falling, I stand by a collapsed bridge, the leaf falls in the water -- I take a step to cross the river, the leaf is swept away, and I drown.

(Marou holds the knife to his throat.)

I have to fight indulgence... I don't want to indulge (*indulging*). I HAVE TO FIGHT IT. DO NOT INDULGE YOURSELF. THIS IS NO TIME FOR IT. Indulge me God. Indulge me!

(Marou howls. Music stops in the middle of his howl. Footsteps approach. Hump enters.)

HUMP:

Hello.

(pause)

It is about to rain. Looks like you got caught in the rain yourself.

MAROU:

It hasn't rained yet.

HUMP:

About to.

(Pause. Hump puts the biography down on the desk.)

MAROU:

You read it?

HUMP:

I had a look at the end.

(pause)

I could see why you stopped where you did.

MAROU:

I would have liked to have finished it.

HUMP:

Why ruin someone else's life?

MAROU:
What's that?

HUMP:
Often it is better to bow out gracefully.

(pause)

MAROU:
I was thinking of killing myself. But I was wondering if I was doing the right thing? If you wanted to kill yourself how would you be sure? What would be a good reason?

HUMP:
If you have nothing to live for...

MAROU:
A good reason.

HUMP:
It comes down to that.

MAROU:
How do you know that?

HUMP:
It's up to the individual.

MAROU:
I don't know if I am as disappointed as I think I am.

HUMP:
Look at what you have lost.

MAROU:
... What I have lost...

HUMP:
What I have taken... Your biography. Your wife. Your hat. I am wearing your clothes. When I am finished you'll have less than you started with, a lot less.

MAROU:
Yes... my misfortunes are my own. I only really have myself to blame... This is all my fault.

(Hump opens up the biography to the end and reads.)

HUMP *(quoting)*:
I keep wondering what I could have done differently. We were to have spent years wondering

about what was impossible. We were to have forgotten that we were human, (*Marou joins in. Hump cues him and Marou takes over reciting his own words.*) and then to have evolved into some new and more sophisticated life form. And the story of her life would have been the one she would have wanted to hear.

MAROU:

But something got lost in the telling. Our lives got lost in the telling... And the end... I don't even want to think about the end. And when I am gone. It will be as if I had never lived.

(pause)

She went to make my arrangements.

(pause)

I can see why she likes you. You listen. And I don't hold it against you.

(pause)

I guess we can all understand how some things have to end.

HUMP:

Oh yes.

MAROU:

A long time ago I met a historian who was so involved in his work he claimed to be living in the past, and whatever he said always gave the impression that it had all been said before, in the exact same words as these I am using now, and yet despite that, it was still interesting, as what I am saying is hopefully interesting. If I asked you to go back to another place and time, to another place, into someone else's memories, and then create them... a place and time that is already over, waiting to be retold. Two lovers disappeared while following each other to the ends of the universe, as the world's greatest empires fell apart around them. I don't know why such a story shouldn't be told. Yet who cares?

(beat)

Do you know what our story is, inescapable. Do you know that? That is what we have become. Inescapable, we are doomed you and I -- when confronted with everything that is out there waiting to get us -- there is not much we can do. And here I am being forced to kill myself against my own will. And all I can do is think of the woman I love for whom I am killing myself.

(Voice sings amplified.)

Another man who loves her. That makes three of us. There wasn't a hope or dream that I didn't have that wasn't shared with her. But we drifted apart. We woke up one day and our dreams weren't the same.

HUMP:

As you say, some things have to come to an end.

MAROU:

When one least expects it, and suddenly you're awake.

HUMP:

Yes, we go to sleep, we wake up.

MAROU:

I will be going to sleep then...

(Voice sings. Nathalie enters.)

That is death calling me, my friend, and I always thought he would go before me. I should have found out who he was. The other man. But I was afraid we would recognise each other. I was afraid to die, and I was supposed to have been fearless. There was a time when I wanted nothing more than to have my life threatened. And it was. Many times. But it didn't seem to matter then, now all of the sudden it does... I should go meet him, but I won't. It is maybe better that we never got to know each other.

(Pause. He notices Nathalie.)

NATHALIE:

It's Sunday. I'll have to go tomorrow.

MAROU:

I could wait?

NATHALIE *(to Hump)*:

You came back.

MAROU:

I will go...

(Marou exits.)

HUMP:

He's gone.

(Hump looks out the window.)

There he goes.

NATHALIE:

You've been here long?

HUMP:
Not long.

NATHALIE:
What did he say to you?

HUMP:
Said how sorry he was.

NATHALIE:
Did he sound like he meant it?

HUMP:
No.

(Nathalie goes to the window. Hump looks through the contents of the desk.)

NATHALIE:
You going to rob me?

HUMP:
It's a habit.

NATHALIE:
I can't look.

HUMP:
I always like to make sure I can get whatever there is.

(She looks away from the window. He looks out it.)

NATHALIE:
What's he doing?

HUMP:
He is still standing there. He's got the rope around his neck. Tightening it. And... and... there he goes... he's hanging.

(Sound of a branch breaking. Pause.)

The branch broke.

NATHALIE:
It broke?

HUMP:

The branch has fallen. It hit him on the head.

NATHALIE:

What?

HUMP:

He fell. He is down.

NATHALIE:

It hit him on the head.

HUMP:

He is down...

NATHALIE:

Down?

HUMP:

He isn't moving.

NATHALIE:

On the ground?

HUMP:

He is lying there.

NATHALIE (*looks out window*):

He must be hurt.

HUMP:

He would be moving if he were.

NATHALIE:

Marou... Marou.

HUMP:

He isn't moving.

NATHALIE:

He is suffering.

HUMP:

No, hopefully his suffering is over.

NATHALIE:

I didn't want him to suffer.

HUMP:

He would be moving if he were in pain.

NATHALIE:

I ought to do something.

HUMP:

He's lying quietly. That's it.

NATHALIE:

I don't believe it!

HUMP:

The man's dead...

NATHALIE:

And so this is a day to remember! I can't allow myself to let it pass unnoticed, and what a beautiful day! The rain is about to fall. I am amazed. I am in a state now. And look at the sky! What an amazing day! As if I am seeing things for the first time... There is nothing I can do. I will not feel guilty, but my natural tendency is to feel guilty, but I will not feel guilty. It would make him happy to know I was feeling guilty... And he almost looks dead, but is he really? NO, he'll get up and walk back in here, and tell me he's all right, and that if only we could forgive each other. He will come back to life and beg forgiveness. In fact I am convinced there is nothing wrong with him. Has he moved?

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

No.

HUMP:

He won't.

NATHALIE:

I might have to go on doing what I have been doing... but for how long?

(He makes a physical advance towards her. She brushes him off.)

And there is no point in being interested in any more love tales. They are always tragic. Someone dies in the end. Did you know that it was women who invented God, so men would have something else to worship besides us, SO THEY WOULD LEAVE US ALONE. BUT THEN LOOK WHAT HAS BEEN DONE IN THE NAME OF GOD! He has not got up?

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

And where is the element of surprise gone to? Even that has been destroyed!

(pause)

Quiet, isn't it? All of the sudden. Why is it so quiet?

HUMP:

Always is after someone dies.

NATHALIE:

Rain. Now it is raining.

(Rain falls through the compluvium into the impluvium.)

I am despairing as I always have. Has he moved?

HUMP:

No.

NATHALIE:

The rain will wake him up. What is taking him so long?

(pause)

Excuse me, I don't think this is the right place or time for an optimist. You ought to leave. Because if he doesn't come back soon I shall begin mourning, and you would be better off to leave, because I will weep for the sins of all men and women. I will despair until I die of sadness. I SHALL DESPAIR AS NO HUMAN HAS EVER DESPAIRED. I WILL CRY FOR ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DIED AND FOR THOSE YET TO DIE. FOR MOTHERS WHO HAVE LOST THEIR CHILDREN. FOR ALL PEOPLE WHO HAVE EVER LIVED. FOR THE UNBORN. FOR US. FOR US.

(Nathalie grimaces.)

HUMP:

You don't know how to live.

NATHALIE:

Who wants to really?

HUMP:

I do.

NATHALIE:

So go and live. Live! LIVE! GO AND LIVE!

HUMP:
I shall.

NATHALIE:
I AM CRYING NOW. I AM WEEPING!

(Enter Marou with a noose around his neck and carrying a branch. He is dripping from the rain.)

HUMP:
If I become depressed. I avoid becoming depressed. If I become depressed...

MAROU:
It's a lot worse for others. I mean our situation isn't really so bad.

NATHALIE:
He's about to leave.

MAROU:
I fell.

NATHALIE:
I have asked him to leave.

HUMP:
I've been asked to leave? Have I?

MAROU:
If she wants you to leave...

NATHALIE:
Nothing here for you.

MAROU:
And the thing is, it just wasn't a good time for us. But come back another time if you like.

HUMP *(to self)*:
But I can't be got rid of that easily... It's raining...

MAROU:
I am sure you've been out in the rain before.

NATHALIE:
I am sorry we can't help you, but as you see we can't help ourselves.

(Hump moves to exit.)

HUMP *(to self)*:
So I'll go.

MAROU:
Thank you for listening.

NATHALIE:
Good luck.

MAROU:
Hope all goes well for you.

NATHALIE:
Best of luck to you in your travels.

MAROU:
I'm sure we will remember you.

HUMP:
I thought I had won.

MAROU:
That would have been difficult. Impossible.

HUMP:
I've lost...

MAROU:
On your way then.

NATHALIE:
Bye.

(Hump exits. Door blows in the wind, banging.)

MAROU *(shouting after him)*:
Academic!

NATHALIE *(shouting after him)*:
Optimist!

MAROU:
AND BY THE WAY YOUR FLY IS OPEN ASSHOLE... You strung him along.

NATHALIE:
I didn't mean to.

(pause)

Are you all right?

MAROU:

Yes.

(Crow cries.)

There were buzzards flying over me, and I knew I had to get up. I had to get up before they thought I was dead.

NATHALIE:

I thought you were.

MAROU:

No, you didn't.

NATHALIE:

I wanted to.

MAROU:

But you didn't.

NATHALIE:

You're bleeding.

MAROU:

It will stop.

NATHALIE:

You don't want to bleed to death.

MAROU:

It won't be immediate.

NATHALIE:

You knew the branch wasn't thick enough.

MAROU:

Yes.

NATHALIE:

That's a twig!

MAROU:

I didn't want to take any chances.

NATHALIE:

It was a chance even still.

MAROU:

I was willing to take it.

NATHALIE:

Not much of a chance.

MAROU:

For a few seconds I worried. I mean it did hit me on the head.

NATHALIE:

A few seconds? How long?

MAROU:

Not long I admit.

(pause)

NATHALIE:

How slow everything is when you wait for something to happen.

(Music.)

MAROU:

Is that your music?

(Music stops.)

NATHALIE:

It has stopped.

MAROU:

I thought I heard music.

NATHALIE:

It would have stopped when you fell. Magic.

MAROU:

I am here?

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

I don't believe it. I am still here.

NATHALIE:

You realise, of course, that I will continue to regret having to spend the rest of my life with you.

MAROU:

In the future I will talk less.

NATHALIE:

Good.

MAROU:

But I have a few things to say now.

NATHALIE:

Later.

(pause)

MAROU:

But look! I am still alive! I am still alive. I am alive. I am living... breathing... thinking... talking!

NATHALIE:

I know you are...

MAROU:

I am.

NATHALIE:

Hmm.

MAROU:

And glad that I am.

NATHALIE:

Ask why?

MAROU:

I was thinking of that.

NATHALIE:

Don't try and answer...

MAROU:
I am not so desperate any more.

NATHALIE:
No.

MAROU:
I'm calm.

NATHALIE:
So am I.

MAROU:
Relaxed.

NATHALIE:
I am relaxed.

(pause)

MAROU:
God, I loved you... and I do...

NATHALIE:
So did I... and I...

MAROU:
My greatest fear is to think I had never been loved.

NATHALIE:
Come here.

(He drops to his knees. Crawls towards her. Gives her the branch.)

MAROU:
Had it only been an olive tree.

NATHALIE:
I'll take it for one.

MAROU:
What will it be like when we are old and really on the verge of dying?

NATHALIE:
Worse.

MAROU:

Should we eat something? To see how tasteless it would be. Are you hungry?

NATHALIE:

You have even taken my appetite away from me.

MAROU:

When was the last time we ate together?

NATHALIE:

Before the great famine.

MAROU:

If I were to make something you like.

NATHALIE:

On the principle alone I wouldn't like it.

MAROU:

This time you will.

NATHALIE:

What do you have in mind?

MAROU:

We don't have anything.

NATHALIE:

No, we will starve to death.

MAROU:

We could get some food.

NATHALIE:

I'm not really hungry.

MAROU:

By the time it is ready maybe you would be.

NATHALIE:

Later.

MAROU:

We can think about what we'll eat and maybe that will make us hungry.

NATHALIE:

Relax.

MAROU (*calmly*):
Smoke.

(They sniff the air.)

NATHALIE (*calmly*):
It is.

MAROU (*calmly*):
The house is on fire.

NATHALIE:
Could it be?

MAROU:
I think so.

NATHALIE:
Again.

MAROU:
What do we do?

NATHALIE:
I don't know.

MAROU:
Maybe this time we should stay.

(A beam falls down from above, flaming. They don't move.)

It will probably go out on its own.

NATHALIE:
I think so.

MAROU:
We'll wait and see.

NATHALIE:
And with it raining.

MAROU:
We'll be fine.

(Fire roars. Rain pours. Sound picked up over the microphone crackles. Silence.)

NATHALIE:

This is a momentous moment.

MAROU:

We've had a few.

NATHALIE:

I shall never forget it.

MAROU:

Is it stopping?

NATHALIE:

No. I was in a fire, at first I didn't feel the heat, it just felt warm, and then...

(Marou gets a large stack of papers from a desk drawer. The new biography. Puts papers on the desk.)

MAROU:

The flames were licking our loins, but when we looked down there were only ashes.

NATHALIE:

A momentous moment.

MAROU:

Two coals burning on a cold dark night.

NATHALIE:

A moment.

MAROU:

We won't get cold.

NATHALIE:

No.

MAROU:

Not even if winter were to go on forever...

(Another beam on fire falls. Nathalie lifts her arms. Music.)

A happy ending!

NATHALIE:

Yes.

MAROU:

It is collapsing, coming down... on us...

(Lights fade. Fire goes out. Blackout.)

Curtain

THE FALL

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Characters

Nathalie

Marou

Hump