

The Beloved

**Text for a stage by
Kristofer Blindheim Grønskag
translated by Neil Howard**

This translation supported by NORLA and the Writers' Guild of Norway (2015)

2009

**Skiveien 10 B 1672 Kråkerøy. Tel. +4790140527.
kristofer.gronskag@gmail.com**

About the piece

The Beloved should be played by two actors.

The final lines of the piece should be spoken by David.

Characters

DAVID

KATHERINE

***The Beloved* was first performed during Teater Avant Garden's 'Symposium' arrangement in the autumn of 2009. The two roles were then played by Ola G. Furuseth and Marianne Meløy from Trøndelag Teater.**

***The Beloved* has since been presented as a staged reading at Rogaland Teater's TXT NXT with Christian Lollike, Jonas Hassen Khemiri and Johan Harstad.**

***The Beloved* won the Amsterdam Fringe Bronze Award during the Amsterdam Fringe Festival in 2012.**

***The Beloved* won third place in the Norwegian Theatre Council's manuscript competition in 2012.**

*’Maria, alle smerters moder
Nevn vårt navn i dine bønner!
Vi er alle tornekrønet
Vi er alle dine sønner!’*

*(...) Vi som hang på begge sider
Av din sønn på smertens tre –
Vet hva Verdens Frelser lider.*

*Jomfrumoder, bare vi
Vet hva nådens kalk vil si:
Kronens torner blir til roser.’*

Blomster for Genet by Jens Bjørneboe

PROLOGUE

Lights up.

A little girl, perhaps 7-8 years old, on the stage. She is squatting down, lost in her own thoughts, in her own world. A little boy, the same age as the girl, enters from the other side of the stage. He stops and looks at her. After a while she notices him and gets up. They look at each other.

Pause.

They smile at each other. Enter David. He stands beside the boy and looks at the girl. Smiles at her.

Immediately afterwards, KATHERINE enters from the other side. KATHERINE goes over to the girl, puts her hand on her shoulder and looks at David. Then KATHERINE sends the girl away.

SCENE 1. The interrogation begins.

(Strong light on DAVID. He is blinded by it.

Interrogation set-up.

Two chairs and a table.

DAVID's jacket hangs over the back of one of the chairs.)

DAVID

So that's what it's like for someone like me?

It suddenly tips over from being care to being obsession, is that it?

The point where you begin to hate us? *(Laughs.)* But is it the schizophrenic or the paranoid you hate?

(Short pause.)

Oh? You don't think I read? Then it's all about not being fucking stupid. Or so damned smart for that matter. We're average too, you know.

(Pause.)

Perhaps you can tell me why I'm here soon?

KATHERINE

Studies show... *(Is interrupted.)*

DAVID

I know what studies show. Low IQ, low grades, poor memory and all the rest of it. But who the fuck do you think takes part in the studies, eh? The ones who want to show off, who are proud of what they do? The ones who are just glad of the company? Or those who don't want to get beaten up in their cell every day like some fucking Rosa Parks?

Fucking idiots, that's who. I asked why I'm here!

KATHERINE

Rosa Parks?

DAVID

It's not the same, I know. It was a bad example. I just don't buy the starting point for your argument. You know there's a limit there somewhere and you do all you can so as not to cross it. You think I don't know that?

But that's not what it's about.

KATHERINE

What is it about then?

DAVID

Being given a chance.

KATHERINE

A chance?

DAVID

Yes, a chance.

KATHERINE

A chance to do what?

DAVID

Not what you're thinking about!

(Short pause.)

What are you supposed to do? When you find out? Because that's what you do actually. One day. One fuck of a day. You can't exactly tell anyone. Make yourself an outcast?

KATHERINE

Do you feel like an outcast?

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

It's a completely rational way of dealing with it on society's part. Society doesn't want you.
Can you understand that?

DAVID

Yes, I can understand it! But you can fuck me feel like an outcast regardless.

(Pause.)

Please, can't you tell me why I'm here?

KATHERINE

What about friends?

DAVID

What about them?

KATHERINE

Do you have any?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

(Rummages through some papers. Finds what she is looking for.)

What about this... Johannes?

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

You met each other on a business trip?

DAVID

Did he say so? Must be right then?

KATHERINE

I guess so.

You work... should I say... worked as a team-builder?

DAVID

(Pause.)

Yes, I work as a team-builder. I'm good with people.

SCENE 2. Work.

(Office.

DAVID is younger.

The sound of people talking.

The room is emptying.)

KATHERINE

You. Are. Fucking! Good with people.

DAVID

Hm?

KATHERINE

Good with people! How they fucking work! On time and...

Lazy fuckers and all.

DAVID

Yeah... Thanks.

KATHERINE

(Holds out his hand.)

Johannes. The lazy fuckers' boss.

DAVID

(Shakes hands.)

David. Carrot and Stick Ltd.

KATHERINE

(Laughs.)

Funny fucker.

DAVID

That's what it's all about. Something to entice them with, something to scare them with.

KATHERINE

Like a flock of fucking sheep, right?

DAVID

I'm afraid so.

KATHERINE

It's fucking genius, man.

DAVID

Thanks.

KATHERINE

Human nature. The primal instinct. Animals, the whole lot of them!

DAVID

Just simple psychology.

SCENE 3. The lines.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

And you counted Johannes as a friend, didn't you?

DAVID

Guess so.

KATHERINE

But he broke off contact with you?

DAVID

Why ask if you know the answer?

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

Is it simple psychology, David?

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

Manipulating people?

DAVID

Simplest there is.

KATHERINE

Was it manipulation with Johannes?

DAVID

(Laughs.)

You're reading my...whole life story on the basis that I'm manipulative? It can only go wrong.
Why can't he just be a friend?

KATHERINE

So he was a friend?

DAVID

You think I don't know what you're trying?

To trick the answers out of me? So you carry on with that piddling analysis of yours like some fucking...psychologist.

KATHERINE

I'm intelligent. And you are too, apparently. I'll get the answers one way or another. It's up to you. I've got plenty of time...

DAVID

Alright, I suppose he was a friend.

KATHERINE

He doesn't want to have any more to do with you, does he?

DAVID

No, not him either.

KATHERINE

Not many do any more.

DAVID

She lied.

You know that?

KATHERINE

Did she?

DAVID

Yes.

(Pause.)

Is it that you want *me* to say it?

KATHERINE

Maybe.

DAVID

Why?

KATHERINE

Don't know.

DAVID

You're getting pleasure out of this, aren't you? A kick?

Jesus.

KATHERINE

What? Did I cross the line?

DAVID

You do this with everybody, or just me? I was acquitted!

KATHERINE

You were! Now is now.

DAVID

Yes. Now is now. There's been a line drawn under that now.

KATHERINE

Has there? I'm afraid it's been rubbed out, David.

New information.

DAVID

Not about that?

KATHERINE

Does that worry you?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

It started with a dinner at Johannes' place?

(Pause.)

DAVID

(Reluctantly.)

Yes.

KATHERINE

And?

DAVID

We went outside.

In the garden. Because it was summer.

It was summer with cold white wine.

KATHERINE

There was only Johannes and his daughter there, isn't that right?

DAVID

Yes. His wife was out of town or something... Everything was absolutely fine. Brilliant.

SCENE 4. Summer evening.

(Summer evening.)

DAVID

Johannes was in great form. Like he always was when he was drunk. He just “You know, you, you know what? You shouldn’t be working there, you. At that there...shit place. You’re a boss, you are, David. That’s what you are. A fucking boss”.

KATHERINE

And his daughter was there too?

DAVID

Yes...

(Slightly drunk. Hears footsteps.)

Johannes. You and I, you know... We should...

(Turns round.)

Oh... Is it just you?

KATHERINE

Just me? That’s not very nice, is it?

DAVID

No, sorry...I didn’t mean it like that.

KATHERINE

So how did you mean it?

DAVID

Um...don’t know really.

KATHERINE

He’s gone in to fetch some more to drink.

DAVID

More?

OK? Not really necessary, strictly speaking.

KATHERINE

Isn't it? Are you drunk?

DAVID

No... Maybe not drunk exactly, but... *(Is interrupted.)*

KATHERINE

Do you think I'm pretty?

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

I saw you looking at me when we were eating.

DAVID

You...

KATHERINE

How you kept on looking at me.

(Touches DAVID.)

DAVID

No, you...don't...

KATHERINE

I won't say anything to him.

(Touches him again.)

DAVID

(Leaps up.)

No!

KATHERINE

What the fuck's the matter with you?

DAVID

Nothing. I have to go...

(Takes his jacket from the chair-back and heads towards the exit of the interrogation room. Is stopped by KATHERINE's voice.)

SCENE 5. History.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

But then she went and said something anyway?

DAVID

(With his back to KATHERINE.)

Yes.

KATHERINE

To Johannes.

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

(Looks through her papers.)

And then a few days later you were charged with sexual assault of a minor.

(DAVID turns round and nods.)

For which you were acquitted.

DAVID

Of course I was. I hadn't done anything.

KATHERINE

Why?

DAVID

Why?

Because I was innocent.

KATHERINE

No. I'm not talking about that.

DAVID

So you believe me?

KATHERINE

Maybe.

I've had a talk with the girl. She's not quite right somewhere.

DAVID

So what are you wondering about?

KATHERINE

Why you didn't say yes?

DAVID

(Not understanding.)

Yes..?

KATHERINE

Why you didn't say yes to her.

DAVID

(Scoffs.)

You said it yourself. There's something not quite fucking right about her.

KATHERINE

Was she too old for you, David? Too clearly shaped? Was it too easy? It's more fun if they resist, is that it?

DAVID

I'm not a rapist.

KATHERINE

What are you then?

DAVID

You have no right to... *(Is interrupted.)*

KATHERINE

Wrong, David!

I'm assuming whatever right I want.

DAVID

(Pause. Weakly.)

I wasn't in love with her.

KATHERINE

What?

DAVID

You don't do that kind of thing if you're not in love, ok?

KATHERINE

In love?

DAVID

I wasn't infatuated. I didn't like her. Didn't fall for her. You understand? It's fucking simple enough.

KATHERINE

Hm..?

DAVID

What? Surprised?

You didn't think I could be in love?

KATHERINE

But you knew at this point, didn't you?

DAVID

Knew..? It's not like a light-switch.

KATHERINE

But you had your suspicions?

DAVID

I...Yes, I had a 'suspicion'.

KATHERINE

You had a girlfriend.

(Pause.)

Were you in love with *her*?

DAVID

She was my girlfriend, wasn't she?

KATHERINE

That's not what I asked.

DAVID

What on earth does it matter? It's over.

KATHERINE

You *were*, weren't you.

DAVID

That tone of yours...

KATHERINE

What tone?

DAVID

Surprise.

KATHERINE

Things aren't always like you imagine.

DAVID

No, you bet.

KATHERINE

But I don't get it...I can't get it to make sense.

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

She was the same age as you, wasn't she?

DAVID

Yes. What don't you understand?

KATHERINE

Why didn't it last?

DAVID

You think everything is so fucking clinical. It's fucking feelings we're talking about here.

KATHERINE

Feelings?

DAVID

Yes!

(Pause.)

Nearly all...nearly all of those I've talked to try to hide it, you know. Repress it, shut it off.

Stubbornly insist on living a normal life. As long as you do that and keep your mouth shut...then everything's fine.

KATHERINE

Yes, it is!

DAVID

No it isn't! Not for us!

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

Why did it end?

DAVID

Why do you think?

(Pause.)

I should really have done so much for that woman. Emily is one of the best things that ever happened to me.

SCENE 6. The relationship.

(Summer day in a park.)

DAVID

Emily.

KATHERINE

Yes?

DAVID

You're the best thing that's ever happened to me. Do you know that?

KATHERINE

I do now...

(Flirting.)

I quite like you too.

DAVID

Quite?

KATHERINE

Well you are top three.

DAVID

Oh?

KATHERINE

Behind chocolate ice-cream.

DAVID

And...?

KATHERINE

More chocolate ice-cream.

DAVID

You're fond of ice-cream then?

KATHERINE

Yes.

DAVID

A good third. I suppose one can live with that?

KATHERINE

I think so.

(They kiss.

The silence is broken by children playing nearby. KATHERINE turns round to look at them.

Laughs.

Pause.)

I want one of those.

DAVID

Um...

KATHERINE

Wouldn't that be good?

(She blows up her tummy so that it becomes nice and round.

Takes DAVID's hand and puts it on her tummy.)

DAVID

I...

KATHERINE

Ooh. A bit nervous all of a sudden?

DAVID

Pack up.

KATHERINE

Shh, listen...Don't be like that.

It's not like it's going to happen this evening or anything.

You...

DAVID

Emily, I don't know...

KATHERINE

Imagine it, you and one of those going fishing, playing football, a new kind of team-building, eh?

(Laughs. Flirting.)

And I know you know how they're made.

DAVID

Stop it now!

KATHERINE

What's the matter?

DAVID

(Pause.)

I *can't* have children.

KATHERINE

What?

DAVID

I can't have children, ok?!

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

That... But David... You should have said.

(Embraces him. DAVID clearly feels uncomfortable.)

You...it's alright. We don't need to...

DAVID

I'm sorry, I didn't mean to...

KATHERINE

Don't worry about it. You hear me?

(Pause. They calm down in the embrace.)

We can...we can adopt.

DAVID

(Discomfort back.)

No...

KATHERINE

It's not a problem. Loads of couples do. Nothing unusual.

DAVID

No...

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

You don't want to have children with me, is that it?

DAVID

That's not it. Not the way you think.

KATHERINE

So how is it then?

DAVID

It's... I just don't think I'm ready for that.

KATHERINE

When will you be ready?

DAVID

I... don't know.

KATHERINE

I don't like it when you're like this.

DAVID

Like what?

KATHERINE

When you close yourself off inside yourself.

(They look at each other.)

You know I love you, don't you?

SCENE 7. Mum.

(Interrogation set-up.)

DAVID

That was the last steady relationship I've had.

KATHERINE

Most women want children, don't they?

DAVID

Maybe.

KATHERINE

They do.

DAVID

I now...

She used to blow up her tummy. Bite her lower lip. Look up at me with her head bowed forward. And then she'd put my hand on her tummy.

KATHERINE

And...?

DAVID

And then she left me.

(Short pause.)

I could never be a parent. Poor Emily...

KATHERINE

She's doing fine...

DAVID

She is?

KATHERINE

Yes.

DAVID

What...?

KATHERINE

She's got a family now. Husband, and kids, car, dog...

The whole shebang.

DAVID

(Genuinely happy.)

That's good.

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

I could see it in her, you know.

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

That she cared about you.

DAVID

Something in her eyes, was it?

KATHERINE

(Laughs briefly.)

Yes.

DAVID

(Nods.)

After her...well...I isolated myself. Became pathologically scared of becoming fond of anyone.

KATHERINE

Why?

DAVID

You come to a point where you can't bear hurting any more people.

KATHERINE

That must be tough.

DAVID

Easier than the alternative.

KATHERINE

Almost brave.

DAVID

(Bitter.)

Or cowardly...

Do you have a boyfriend?

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

Sorry, I...

(Short pause.)

You still haven't told me why I'm here.

KATHERINE

We'll get there.

She took good care of her appearance, Emily.

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

Did she shave?

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

Emily. Did you get her to shave? Smooth all over?

DAVID

What do you mean...?

KATHERINE

A bit more authentic.

DAVID

For fuck's sake, loads of girls shave! It's perfectly normal!

KATHERINE

Why do you think it's like that?

DAVID

I don't know.

KATHERINE

But what do you think, though?

DAVID

Don't know.

KATHERINE

Do you know what I think?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

I think it's an attempt to stop time.

DAVID

OK?

KATHERINE

Idiotic. A little less hair doesn't make you any younger.

DAVID

No, it doesn't.

KATHERINE

Did you get her to put her hair into a pony-tail?

DAVID

Did I get her to..? I didn't decide over her!

KATHERINE

It's perfectly normal!

DAVID

We were a couple! A perfectly normal couple!

KATHERINE

It is perfectly normal. To live out your fantasies.

There's all sorts, you know.

People who beat each other, strangle each other, people who tie each other up, who stick pins in each other and piss on each other... *(Is interrupted.)*

DAVID

I understand!

KATHERINE

But you're not like that?

DAVID

No!

KATHERINE

So what are you like?

DAVID

Not like that!

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

What kind of a relationship did you have with your parents?

DAVID

(Laughs.)

Isn't that a bit of a cliché?

KATHERINE

Perhaps.

DAVID

So what do you want?

KATHERINE

I just want you to answer the question. Simple as that.

DAVID

I...have an ok relationship with them.

(Short pause.)

KATHERINE

Pleasant woman, your mother.

DAVID

What would you know about it?

KATHERINE

I talked to her.

DAVID

You talked to her?

KATHERINE

Yes.

DAVID

OK. When?

KATHERINE

A few weeks ago.

DAVID

Oh?

KATHERINE

She was quite well under the circumstances.

DAVID

What did you say?

KATHERINE

To her? Not much.

Wondered about things.

DAVID

Like what?

KATHERINE

Things about you.

From when you were little.

If she knew where you were. Lots of things.

DAVID

Did you say who you were?

KATHERINE

As I should.

DAVID

You couldn't just leave her in peace?

KATHERINE

We needed information. You were in hiding.

DAVID

I was not in hiding! Hasn't she had a rough enough time as it is?!

KATHERINE

Because of you?

DAVID

Yes! Because of me too.

KATHERINE

Yes. You've not made things easy for her.

DAVID

What did she say?

KATHERINE

She got quite sentimental actually. Quite surprising.

DAVID

How so?

KATHERINE

I think she has a big need for closeness, David. Her too.

(Short pause.)

She told me about you, and about your father.

DAVID

About dad?

KATHERINE

That was the word she used in fact: "David's dad".

According to her, calling your relationship with him "OK" is putting it in a very good light.

DAVID

I haven't got reason enough to say anything else.

KATHERINE

When was the last time you saw him?

DAVID

Don't remember.

KATHERINE

Yes, you do...it was at Christmas, wasn't it?

SCENE 8. Dad.

(At Christmas.

The sound of footsteps on stairs.

DAVID knocks on a door.

In his father's flat, in the doorway.)

KATHERINE

David? Is that you?

DAVID

Well it is Christmas.

KATHERINE

It is that. And it only comes but once a year. Isn't that what they say?

DAVID

Yepp...

KATHERINE

Come on in then.

DAVID

I don't think...No, thanks.

KATHERINE

You should've rung first, David. I haven't even...

(Attempts to comb his hair with his hands.)

DAVID

You look fine dad.

KATHERINE

Hmm...Then you can't see so good.

(Tries to smile.)

DAVID

I've brought you a little something.

(Hands him a present.)

KATHERINE

You shouldn't have...

DAVID

Go on.

KATHERINE

But I haven't got anything for you, David.

If you'd only rung, then...

DAVID

I don't need anything, dad. It's ok.

KATHERINE

Alright. So...

So how are things then? Everything alright?

DAVID

Don't start all that.

KATHERINE

Too late for that, is it?

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

Yeah... I've got some coffee made if you want some..?

DAVID

No thanks.

KATHERINE

No, perhaps you don't like coffee?

DAVID

I do.

(Short pause.)

Just don't fancy any.

KATHERINE

Oh? Fine...no problem.

(Short pause.)

What about Emily then? How are things with Emily?

DAVID

I haven't seen her for years.

KATHERINE

Oh? But she was so...Yeah. Sorry.

What about mum then? Is she alright?

DAVID

No. She says you don't visit her.

KATHERINE

No... It's not so very nice there, David. I don't like to go out much myself.

DAVID

What about her? Have you thought about her?

KATHERINE

Every day.

DAVID

Have you at least sent her a Christmas present?

KATHERINE

I'm going to. Just haven't managed to...

DAVID

No...

KATHERINE

There was someone here asking after you.

A girl.

Said she was from the police, David. You're not in any trouble, are you?

DAVID

What did you tell her?

KATHERINE

That I didn't know where you were.

(Short pause.)

I miss you, David.

DAVID

Next time she comes you tell her we don't have any contact any more. Understand?

You understand?!

(The father nods. DAVID leaves.)

SCENE 9. Sympathy.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

He didn't know where you were, he said.
But then he was completely confused. Poor bloke.

DAVID

That... pig is much better off than he deserves.

KATHERINE

Getting drunk on the social?

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

Do you blame him for what happened to your mother?

DAVID

Yes... Who should I blame otherwise?

KATHERINE

You haven't exactly been the most protective son, now have you?

DAVID

Bollocks to that. That's fuck me not ok.
You don't even know what it is you're talking about.

KATHERINE

And what's that, David?

DAVID

Have you any idea what that's like?

To be nine years old and have to protect your mother.

The first time I understood that. Fucking nine. You're not supposed to understand stuff like that when you're a kid. You're supposed to have a childhood, that's what you're supposed to have. Not to be worrying what you'll find when you get home from school. If you need to help your dad to bed or if everything's ok.

Nice dinner. Nice family.

KATHERINE

But you do what's needed, don't you?

Don't you?!

SCENE 10. Childhood.

(A door slams.

The mother stands with her back towards DAVID.

DAVID is nine years old, hiding under the kitchen table.

He looks at his mother, who is sobbing gently.)

DAVID

Mum?

(Slightly louder.) Mum?

(The mother jumps a little but does not turn round.)

Mum?

KATHERINE

Your mum's a little bit upset just now, David.

DAVID

Why?

KATHERINE

Your dad and I have been talking.

DAVID

What about?

KATHERINE

Different things...

DAVID

About all the bottles getting broken? That doesn't bother me. I just tip-toe in-between when there's broken glass around.

KATHERINE

You're such a good boy.

DAVID

Are you crying, mum?

KATHERINE

Just a little bit... You mustn't start. Right?

DAVID

I'm tough, I am. Dad says so.

You don't cry if you're tough. Don't say anything.

(Pause.)

You're tough too, mum.

(Cuddles his mother.)

KATHERINE

Sometimes grown-ups don't quite agree, David; that's all it is.

DAVID

Is it my fault that dad doesn't agree?

KATHERINE

(Turns towards DAVID. Serious.)

It's never your fault, David. Never. You understand?

Look at me and tell me you understand.

DAVID

(Nods.)

It's not me. Not my fault.

SCENE 11. Snare.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

That wasn't what I meant.

DAVID

What then?

KATHERINE

(Short pause.)

Why are you telling me all this?

DAVID

You asked...

KATHERINE

It was your father I was interested in.

(Short pause.)

What did he *do*?

DAVID

He didn't *do* anything. He treated my mum like shit. He was constantly drunk, but otherwise he was nice.

KATHERINE

How nice?

DAVID

Just fuck off.

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

You're so fucking arrogant! D'you realise that?

You stand there looking at me. And you look at me just like I'm a word. Like a fucking word you've heard on the news or read in a book. That's not what I am! I'm actually a bit more than just that.

I've lived my life, just like you. Just like everyone else. I've been a little kid, I've learned to swim, got drunk at parties like you, crammed for exams like you.

But it...it's like you can't understand that and it's fucking hurtful. Because, unlike you, I've got an illness. And believe you me, I don't want it, but I have. I hate it. I hate it that it's like this!

But it is the way it is. It's the way God made me.

KATHERINE

God... If god isn't dead, then he's at least deaf and blind. And that's not fucking alright.

I'm going to get you all. Every single one.

And now I'm going to get you.

DAVID

So now you're going to *get* me?

KATHERINE

Yes.

(KATHERINE fetches a picture from a file.

Shows it to DAVID.)

Do you know her?

DAVID

Is it *her* this is all about?

KATHERINE

I asked, do you know her.

(Pause.)

DAVID

No. I don't know her.

KATHERINE

But you have *seen* her?

DAVID

Maybe.

KATHERINE

Where?

DAVID

Round about.

KATHERINE

You know...Her family miss her.

DAVID

Miss her?

KATHERINE

She's gone missing.

DAVID

OK?

KATHERINE

OK?

OK!? An eight year old girl goes missing and all you can say is 'OK'?

DAVID

What should I say? It's unfortunate. Pity on the parents.

KATHERINE

Pity on the girl. What do you think it might be doing to her?

DAVID

Well I don't know, do I?

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

Perhaps she's just run off. Run away from home?

KATHERINE

Why would she do that? She was fine at home.

DAVID

Isn't that what they usually do at that age?

KATHERINE

So you've made a study of that age, have you?

DAVID

I've *been* that age!

KATHERINE

(Laughs briefly, joylessly. Pause.)

Where did you see her?

DAVID

Where you usually see children.

KATHERINE

Can't you tell me where that might be?

DAVID

At the shops, on the street, in playgrounds. Everywhere.

KATHERINE

Are you often in playgrounds?

DAVID

Why would I be? I don't have any children.

KATHERINE

I don't know...No harm looking.

DAVID

No, as a matter of fact, there isn't.

KATHERINE

We all have fantasies, don't we.

DAVID

I guess so.

KATHERINE

But not everybody does something with them.

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

Do you have those kinds of fantasies?

DAVID

I have fantasies like everybody else.

KATHERINE

When you're sitting in the playground?

DAVID

I haven't seen the girl!

KATHERINE

But you see, I think you have.

DAVID

You got no fucking proof. You've just got me in here because I'm the only one you know about.

KATHERINE

You really think so?

(They look at each other.)

This little girl's father,

she's called Annabel by the way, the little girl,

he saw a man talking to her here one day.

They'd been out for a walk and were playing in the park. The father was sitting there reading his paper. Keeping half an eye on Annabel.

But then suddenly he couldn't see her anymore.

SCENE 12. Clown.

(In a park.

Winter.

DAVID takes a clown-nose out of his pocket.

He puts it on his nose.)

DAVID

Tataa!

KATHERINE

Are you a clown?

DAVID

Better than that. But it's a secret.

(DAVID play-acts. Annabel laughs.)

KATHERINE

What is it?

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

The secret?

DAVID

Do you promise not to tell anyone?

(Annabel nods.)

Come here then.

(DAVID looks around. Whispers loudly.)

I am a magical clown.

KATHERINE

Are you?

DAVID

Yepp.

KATHERINE

Can you do magic?

DAVID

(DAVID looks at Annabel's ear.)

What have you got there?

(Pulls a coin out of Annabel's ear.)

Yuck. When was the last time you had a proper wash?

KATHERINE

How did you do that?

DAVID

It's a secret. And just between the two of us. Isn't that right?

That's what secrets are.

(Annabel nods.)

DAVID gives her the coin.

DAVID takes a lollipop out of his pocket.)

You like lollies?

KATHERINE

Yes.

DAVID

But do you like *magical* lollies?

(Annabel nods.)

DAVID gives her the lolly.)

SCENE 13. Allegations.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

When the father caught sight of her again, he was of course very relieved. His little girl...
That same evening he found a lollipop hidden under her pillow.

DAVID

That wasn't me.

KATHERINE

He asked who had given it to her.

DAVID

And...?

KATHERINE

She refused to answer. It was a secret.

DAVID

And they're for keeps...

(Pause.)

Like I said: it wasn't me.

KATHERINE

Where were you when she disappeared?

DAVID

At home.

KATHERINE

I haven't told you when she disappeared.

DAVID

I'm always at home.

KATHERINE

You weren't at home when we came looking for you.

DAVID

What of it? I didn't want to spend Christmas there. In an empty house.

KATHERINE

So where'd you go?

DAVID

Does make any difference does it...

KATHERINE

It does now.

DAVID

I went to a hotel.

I hate being at home. Particularly on evenings like that.

KATHERINE

Oh?

DAVID

It's so damn oppressive there all the time. Small town. Rumours spread fast.

(Short pause.)

You know there are lists. I guess that's how you found me...?

(Short pause. Scoffs.)

You know...everywhere I move, have ever moved, there's a mail sent to at least one of the neighbours. Or maybe a phone-call. Or a letter. Whatever. Saying that I'm moving into the neighbourhood.

That's nice... don't you think?

Never be able to start again. Never get the chance of a fresh start.
Wherever I go. And then people start looking at me. Staring, as if I was blind.
It's so easy to read people's eyes.
Fear, disgust, hate.
Not one single eye with compassion.
It makes me sick.

KATHERINE

It makes you sick? Do you think Annabel will be getting a new start?

DAVID

I don't know where she is!

KATHERINE

You think she's ever going to be able to forget?

Answer.

Answer me!

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

You think she's ever going to be able to have a normal sexual relationship with a man?!

DAVID

No!

KATHERINE

Don't you lot ever fucking think about that?!

DAVID

No. *We* think about what's good!

(Immediately.)

KATHERINE

What's good?!

DAVID

Taking off the little floral dress. A bra maybe. They make them in children's sizes now, you know.

KATHERINE

That's enough!

DAVID

It's so easy! However you want! Whatever position you want!

KATHERINE

That's enough!

DAVID

However much resistance you want!

(KATHERINE slaps DAVID across the face.

Pause.)

KATHERINE

You think that's going to make any difference to me?

You think anyone's going to care about how you're treated?

DAVID

Almost no-one.

KATHERINE

No. *(Pause.)*

Do you want a glass of water?

(Fetches a glass of water.)

Suppose you were given an offer.

DAVID

What?

KATHERINE

(Puts the glass of water in front of DAVID.

Takes a tablet out of her pocket.)

This is called Depo-Provera.

DAVID

You want to castrate me?

KATHERINE

It's not castration. To do that you have to cut the vas deferens. Stops you having children...doesn't diminish your sexual desire. To do that you have to lower the level of testosterone.

DAVID

Yeah, well it's not fucking far away.

KATHERINE

It doesn't change your body in any way whatever.

DAVID

It changes *me*!

KATHERINE

Thankfully! You said it yourself. It's an illness.

If you think it's an illness, it seems logical to take the medicine.

DAVID

It's not medicine. It's punishment.

KATHERINE

If your illness is that you have fantasies, or that you act upon them –

DAVID

I don't!

KATHERINE

- then here's your cure!

Let's say I give you a choice.

DAVID

Take a part of me away?

KATHERINE

Put you on the treatment.

You do it voluntarily, I might be more inclined to believe you've never seen Annabel.

DAVID

Blackmail in other words.

KATHERINE

A win-win situation. You don't have to sit here, and society... *(Is interrupted.)*

DAVID

Gets rid of me.

With the help of a few tablets?

KATHERINE

Everybody wins.

(Pause.

DAVID picks up the glass of water.

Looks at the tablet on the table.

He lifts the glass to his mouth whilst staring at KATHERINE and empties the glass in a single draught.

He then puts the glass upside-down over the tablet so that it makes a kind of bell-jar.

Pause.)

DAVID

You know what I think?

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

That there isn't any Annabel. That all this here is just to give me that tablet. That you haven't got shit on me.

KATHERINE

(Laughs.)

It's funny. Just the same with all of you.

You simply can't fucking understand when it's all over. Like an animal that doesn't understand it's going to die before the knife slices open the artery in its throat. But then it's too late.

Not possible to make any admissions when you're lying in a pool of blood.

DAVID

I haven't got anything to admit.

KATHERINE

Annabel is real. We want to know where she is. It is possible you may have to stay here for a while, and I'm going to be here with you, talking, until I get the truth.

It's actually that simple.

And if anything's happened to that little girl, David... I'm not just going to make sure that you're castrated, with or without the tablets; I'm also going to make sure that you never see the light of day again.

(Pause.)

We've been on your computer.

DAVID

That's all legal.

KATHERINE

Legal?

DAVID

They're models who cash in on looking young. It's legal.

KATHERINE

So they just *look* the way you want but they *aren't* actually that.

DAVID

In a way.

KATHERINE

A bit like smoking dope when you're addicted to heroin?

DAVID

Couldn't tell you.

KATHERINE

Do they get paid to look scared too, or is that just a kind of bonus?

(DAVID doesn't answer.)

We found some other things too.

DAVID

Yeah?

KATHERINE

Yes, apart from all the pictures.

We found the receipt for a car rental.

DAVID

That's not illegal.

KATHERINE

But you've *got* a car, David. What did you need another one for?

DAVID

Mine had broken down. Something wrong with it.

KATHERINE

So you had to rent one?

DAVID

Yes.

KATHERINE

But it's working now? Your car?

DAVID

I got it repaired.

KATHERINE

In the middle of Christmas?

DAVID

Yeah. I know someone who takes on little jobs like that.

KATHERINE

You do realise this is getting a bit too silly?

DAVID

It's true!

KATHERINE

How did you manage to get her in the car, David?

(DAVID doesn't answer.)

You...I don't think you're the type to resort to force. That's a bit...beneath you, isn't it?

No. You're the type who talks their way to things.

I guess you've never been very popular have you? Or strong?

Does it get you to feel strong? Is that why? That it makes you feel like a real man?

(Pause.)

There was a car seen outside her school. Sometimes they play in the school playground after school.

SCENE 14. Annabel is picked up.

(Winter.

In an empty school playground.)

DAVID

Annabel.

KATHERINE

I'm not allowed to talk to you.

DAVID

To me?

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

What are you doing now then?

(Annabel doesn't answer.)

I was just wondering if the lolly was nice?

KATHERINE

I didn't get it.

DAVID

What? It was your lolly. That's not fair.

I'm going to have *words* with them.

KATHERINE

With mummy and daddy?

DAVID

Yes...I know them pretty well, I do.

KATHERINE

Do you?

DAVID

Didn't they tell you?

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

They asked me to come and pick you up.

KATHERINE

Did they? Now?

DAVID

We're going to eat.

KATHERINE

What?

DAVID

Your favourite.

KATHERINE

Pizza?

DAVID

That's right. We're going to drive and buy one on the way home.

Come on.

KATHERINE

In the car?

DAVID

Yes. How else?

KATHERINE

I'll just go and tell... *(Is interrupted.)*

DAVID

You'll have to come now if we're going to make it. Hurry up.

SCENE 15. Predators.

(Interrogation set-up.)

KATHERINE

You knew that already, didn't you? That they usually play there. In the school playground.

(DAVID shakes his head.)

She was absolutely beside herself. The mother of the one of the other girls. Who was looking after them. She thought it was one of the parents who'd come to fetch her.

But it wasn't.

Who was it, David?

DAVID

I don't know.

KATHERINE

Was it you?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

Wasn't it?

DAVID

It wasn't me. I haven't seen that girl before. I didn't know she was playing in the school playground. And I didn't go to pick her up in a car!

KATHERINE

I've always wondered how you prepare for something like this.

How do you find out what to buy in, for example?

Do you ask other people for advice?

Or do you imagine I specific situation? Think your way through it so many times that in the end you're obsessed by it? Utterly possessed. Just got to have it?

(Short pause.)

Do you check out prices? Does *that* make any difference?

What's the price per metre for rope, David? Strong tape? Wallpaper knives?

How much is pick'n'mix these days?

Do you go where it's cheapest? Spread your purchases around? Do you ever think at any point that maybe this is going a bit too far?

DAVID

Well, obviously there's somebody who doesn't.

KATHERINE

There's always someone. Always fucking someone. You've no idea.

DAVID

No, I don't.

KATHERINE

Do you watch a lot of TV, David?

(DAVID doesn't answer.)

I do. One programme in particular: Dateline. You ever seen it?

DAVID

Yes...

KATHERINE

They catch people like you live on TV.

DAVID

People like me?

KATHERINE

They pretend to be children on the internet. Chat with them. Ask them over, as their parents aren't there. When they arrive, they're met by a dozen cameras and the police. Exposed before the whole world. Live.

DAVID

And you think that's fun?

KATHERINE

Fun. Pleasing. All kinds of things.

DAVID

Have you any idea what that can do to a person?

KATHERINE

Well they should have thought about that before.

DAVID

Yes, maybe they should. But that's not the point.

KATHERINE

So what is the point?

DAVID

Many of them are constantly punished for their illness. If they break the law, they should be punished by the legal system. *Not* by being hung out to dry as cheap entertainment for paranoid Americans.

KATHERINE

"Sexual predators" they're called. Hunting on the net for little boys and girls.

DAVID

They're just trying to find outlet one way or another for something they can't do!

KATHERINE

There is a reason for it!

DAVID

(Short pause.)

Louis Conradt was on that programme.

KATHERINE

Yes.

DAVID

A District Attorney.

KATHERINE

Not on the net, he wasn't. Then he was a 19 year-old college lad.

DAVID

Yes... And Dateline was a 13 year-old boy. Just as big a lie.

KATHERINE

Have you read the log? What Conradt was suggesting?

DAVID

Fantasies! Just role-play.

KATHERINE

He meant every word!

DAVID

How do you know?! We can never know.

KATHERINE

(Smiles.)

No.

DAVID

He broke off all contact. With "the boy".

Didn't pick up the phone. Didn't answer messages. Stopped chatting. Became just what you'd want.

KATHERINE

He was covering up his tracks. Trying to delete everything.

DAVID

And *that's* not very entertaining, is it? Someone not doing anything illegal? So you have to go a step further.

The TV channel pressured the police, special forces and everything, to take action against him in his own home.

It's the only time it's happened. And the decision was taken on a fucking *TV channel*.

They smashed through the door. Found Conradt in his own bedroom with a gun in his hand.

He shouted out: "I don't want to hurt anyone; I'm not going to hurt anyone."

Then he put the barrel to his head and pulled the trigger. And that was that.

A TV camera filmed it all.

You think that's good entertainment?

(KATHERINE doesn't answer.)

Is that the way to treat an illness?

KATHERINE

They found child pornography on his computer. Even on his cell-phone.

DAVID

Yeah, maybe...

KATHERINE

No, not maybe. They *did*.

DAVID

So he deserved to die then?

(KATHERINE doesn't answer.)

Can't you see how idiotic that is?

You said it yourself. Predators! You don't understand it. An instinct takes over. You throw a chicken to a crocodile, he eats it!

KATHERINE

(Pause.)

The hunt? Is that what's the kick?

Searching on the net and at playgrounds until you find the right one?

DAVID

I don't know.

KATHERINE

Think about it, David! When do you feel it?

Your heart beginning to beat that little bit quicker. A feeling in your guts, a bit like being nervous, but not exactly. That it does you good to breathe.

(Short pause.)

Did you feel like that when you hid her?

DAVID

I haven't... *(Is interrupted.)*

KATHERINE

Or when you tied her up? I'm supposing you did that. Can't risk her running away.

DAVID

I've told you; I don't know where she is.

KATHERINE

We need to be getting somewhere soon, David. Put a stop to all this.

(Short pause.)

But it never quite stops completely, does it?

There was this friend of mine.

She said it was a secret. That I mustn't say anything.

SCENE 16. Secrets.

(A bedroom with low lighting.)

KATHERINE

You remember what we agreed, don't you?

If you tell anyone, I'm going to be very upset. So upset that I'll have to leave. And then mummy will be alone again. Do you want that?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

Because you don't want mummy to be upset either, do you?

DAVID

No.

KATHERINE

You... This is our secret. That nobody else knows about. Not anybody. Right? Just you and me.

DAVID

Nobody else'll find out.

KATHERINE

That's right.

DAVID

Just me...

KATHERINE

We have fun, the two of us. Me and you...

(DAVID doesn't answer.)

Answer.

DAVID

Yes...

KATHERINE

Don't we have fun?

DAVID

Yes...

(Pause.)

KATHERINE

You've told someone...?

DAVID

No...

KATHERINE

Look at me! Have you?

DAVID

No!

KATHERINE

Don't lie.

DAVID

I'm not lying!

KATHERINE

You think I can't see when you're lying?

(Opens his belt-buckle.)

Who? Who have you told?

DAVID

No, don't!

KATHERINE

Little children are not allowed to lie. There's such a lot which isn't allowed.

DAVID

I promise!

KATHERINE

You know that I don't enjoy this.

DAVID

I won't do it anymore! I'm sorry! Sorry!

KATHERINE

You make me sick.

(Tears his belt out from its belt-loops.)

SCENE 17. Scar tissue.

(Interrogation set-up.

Immediately.)

DAVID

No! Stop?!

KATHERINE

It's always turns out that way, David.

DAVID

No!

KATHERINE

It's just a variant!

DAVID

I wouldn't know.

KATHERINE

Yes, you do!

DAVID

It's not true! I'm feeling sick. Let me out.

KATHERINE

No, David. You're part of it!

DAVID

Let me out! You hear me?

KATHERINE

(Slowly.)

Let me out. Let me out. Let me out! Mum! Dad! Please, let me out!

DAVID

No. It *isn't* like that.

KATHERINE

It's always like that! What's so different about you?

DAVID

Nothing is *always like that!*

KATHERINE

No? So what's the difference between you and all the other sick bastards? What's the difference between you and my friend's step-father?

DAVID

He hit her! You don't hit the ones you love.

KATHERINE

Love? There are many different types of wounds, David!

DAVID

You don't hit! *That's* hate!

KATHERINE

Don't you think it amounts to the same thing in the end?!

DAVID

No!

KATHERINE

A destroyed childhood!

DAVID

Not always!

(Immediately.)

KATHERINE

There's no difference!

DAVID

I don't hit...

KATHERINE

Again and again! Harder, harder and harder! Deeper!

DAVID

I don't hit...

KATHERINE

What's a few bruises? A little blood?!

DAVID

I don't hit...

KATHERINE

That they pass out because they're too little!

DAVID

I haven't hit Annabel!

(Long pause.

DAVID realises what he has said.

Calmly.)

I...

I haven't touched her...

KATHERINE

What have you done, David?

DAVID

She likes me.

KATHERINE

That's just something you like to believe.

DAVID

No. She said so. Just like Emily used to.

"You're nice", she said.

KATHERINE

She didn't say that.

Perhaps Emily said it, but she didn't.

DAVID

(DAVID shakes his head.)

It's difficult, isn't it? Imagining that anyone can care about me?

KATHERINE

Yes...

DAVID

Can you help who you fall in love with?

KATHERINE

Love?

DAVID

Because that's what it is.

KATHERINE

No.

DAVID

There's nothing I can do about it...

KATHERINE

That's not helping, David...

(Pause.)

DAVID

Explain it.

KATHERINE

What?

DAVID

Will you explain it to her?

(Short pause.)

KATHERINE

Now you're going to write down where she is on this piece of paper. You understand?

DAVID

(KATHERINE opens a pen and lays it on top of a sheet of paper.

DAVID scribbles down an address.

KATHERINE is about to take the sheet when DAVID grabs hold of her hand.)

Please, explain it to her.

(They stare at each other. KATHERINE removes her arm and looks at the sheet of paper.)

KATHERINE

The worst of all of this, you know what that is?

That I don't feel any pleasure.

Just hate.

As long as you exist, there's no hope.

You are a confirmation of evil, David.

That's *all* you are.

DAVID

Not everything...

(KATHERINE goes towards the exit.)

What happened to her?

(KATHERINE stops.)

The girl who was hit? Your friend?

KATHERINE

(Pause.)

She was visited almost every single evening for years.

Everybody knew...

She still wakes up from feeling his hand round her stomach. Even though he's dead.

DAVID

I'm sorry...

KATHERINE

What for?

DAVID

Everything.

Because none of this should have happened. Should never have happened.

How easy everything would have been then. But it's not that easy.

Sorry.

SCENE 18. The end.

*(KATHERINE stands calmly with her back turned, listening to DAVID's last monologue.
Strong light on DAVID, as at the start of the piece.)*

DAVID

It's all in the report.

They went to the address. A cellar on the outskirts of town. Whatever cellar. She was there. Came running towards Katherine and then stopped. "Where's David", she asked. "He was going to buy more ice-cream." She was perfectly alright. Had been sitting watching cartoons. Playing with a magic set.

It gets written in the report that there's nothing that can defend what he did, you just don't do such things. It's illegal.

(Short pause.)

But he *hadn't* done anything.

He wanted company.

It's going to say who told my parents. That their son had hanged himself in prison. That his mother was too poorly to understand.

(Pause.)

What it's *not* going to say is that sometimes they don't take a prisoner's belt before they take him to the cell.

People like David.

That they're given a chance to settle their account.

It's not going to say that everybody knows.

That everybody accepts it.

That nobody cries.

- The end -