

They Say She Will Start In July

A Danceplay

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For Mika

The characters

Man

Woman

Perhaps a choir of a thousand voices

The place

A room. A mattress. A notebook. A table. A lone chair. A lamp.

"Even if you called, I would not hear,
And even if I heard, I would not turn,
And even if I made that impossible move,
your face would seem strange to me. (...)
Even if you barred my path
even if you looked into my eyes,
I would pass you by on the razor's edge of the abyss."

[**Landscape** / Wislawa Szymborska,
Translated by Joanna Trzeciak]

1.

A man writes - I circled the house six times till I got back and went in again. Your smell is still here, behind the big pillow I found a shirt you left behind. I want to go out again, mingle in cigarette smoke that isn't yours. I can't stand it when you smoke.

[A bar. A woman appears on the left, holding an extinguished cigarette. The man holds a drink, as he leans against the bar/table]

Woman There was a motorbike accident outside just now.

Man Is everything alright?

Woman The ambulance arrived, so I came inside

Man Is he seriously hurt?

Woman Who?

Man The man on the motorbike.

Woman It was a woman. [Pause] Got a light?

Man No. Are you alright?

Woman Yes, so you don't have a light, uh?

Man Sorry.

Woman Too bad.

[Pause. She stares at him intensely]

Woman There are always accidents in August, because of the heat. [Pause]

Man I like your shoes...

Woman [Looks at her shoes] Thanks. What are you doing?

Man Writing.

Woman So that's why.

Man What?

Woman You noticed the shoes.

Man Maybe, and you?

Woman I work at the post office.

Man So what are you having?

Woman Whatever you... [Pause] You remind me of someone I used to know, are you...

Man No.

Woman For a moment I could have sworn you were him. Well, I don't know.

Man Sorry.

Woman [Music starts playing] I like this one a lot. [Starts dancing] If only you were... my god, would I dance with you now. The way he used to dance, I couldn't feel my feet.

Man May I?

Woman [Bows, they dance] I sometimes dream I'm dancing.

Man What time is it?

Woman October.

Man October already? Summer sure went by fast.

Woman Yes. Now accidents will start to happen, because of the rain.

Man What are you thinking?

Woman About double scotch and a cigarette and that you probably don't have a light, and you?

Man About your smile.

Woman I know, your face immediately reveals what you're thinking.

Man I want to show you something.

[She leaves]

2.

A thousand voices. To not hide. To give it all up, without limits. Without return. Without leaving a trace. To be an empty vessel. To submit to you, like jumping from a tall springboard into distant waters. To long for you. To yearn. To be tormented by a faceless longing. To see your face in every face. Not remembering your face. To dream at night. To wake. To look for the sound of your voice among a thousand voices. To chase shadows. Your body's warmth has left a dim impression.

Something I couldn't bear to look at was chasing me for a while. I searched for shelter. Between buildings. Between lightless streets at night. Between shuttered windows of hollow houses. Hot grey tarmac, boiling and leaving burn-kisses on bare feet. I ran away from sorrow. From the sorrow of the whole world. I crawled through yards, lost myself and came back again. I washed up onto a sea-shore. With unkempt hair, dripping, strewn with sand. On my body nothing but a drenched shirt. I looked for something. Maybe I looked for you. I found a hand. I took it.

3.

A man writes - I am writing to you because I know you will not read this - which infuriates me even more. How dare you, a woman of words, not read those I've chosen especially for you. You left remnants in every corner of this house.

[A house. A woman walks in with a nylon bag]

Woman I brought cheese, what are you doing?

Man Just finishing writing something. And then I'll make you a sandwich.

Woman They say in July there'll be war.

Man Do you want a tomato on the side? Who says?

Woman They say, I heard it on the radio at the grocer's

Man It'll be fine.

Woman You just have to step outside and you feel it.

Man People say a lot of things. You shouldn't listen to everything.

Woman It's cold, it smells like the end of Autumn outside. You can feel something is coming.

Man The first rain will wash it away. Do you want tomato or cucumber?

Woman I have to go to the post office.

Man Wait, I'll make you a little something for the road.

Woman I can't. I have to do one more thing before it starts raining.

Man I thought that maybe...

Woman Another time... [He stands up, approaches her- she stops him] No, sorry. I need a light.

Man [She comes closer, gives him a kiss] Why don't you stay.

[She leaves]

4.

A man writes - I reinvent you with my words, only differently. More peaceful, serene. Not climbing up the walls, trying to injure them with your fingernails.

[A bed-table. The woman lies on the mattress, the man is next to her]

Woman I'm cold, I hate these mid-December mornings.

Man But finally it's a little quiet.

Woman I can't stand the chill coming from the walls in this place. Tomorrow I'm painting the house, I don't care what you say.

Man Fine.

Woman You're never cold.

Man I'm used to it.

Woman Why is there never a light in this house? [Pause] Tell me something instead...

Man Like what?

Woman Something you're writing.

Man I can't.

Woman So something you might write someday. Or something.

Man When I was small, my favorite day was Wednesday. In the first lesson the tallest girl used to sit between me and the window, and the sun shone precisely on her, and turned her hair into gold until ten o'clock.

Woman I like Sundays the most.

Man Why?

Woman Because everything is still possible.

Man Now you tell me something-

Woman I never remember anything.

Man You must remember something.

Woman I used to have an orange dress I got from my grandmother for my birthday. I wore it for a whole year.

Man Where is it now?

Woman I don't know. You hold on tight to something and then you don't.

Man I have a feeling something's missing, I don't know what.

Woman Yesterday morning someone standing next to me at the bank said that you can never know and that she may start any day now.

Man Who?

Woman The war.

Man Yes. I think I forgot something. Do you want some tea?

Woman No.

Man Sure?

Woman Stay with me.

Man [Kisses her] I'll make some tea to warm you up... I don't know what it was.

Woman I need you to stay, I can't move.

Man What?

Woman I can't move.

Man Come on, that's enough.

[Nudges her. She falls down]

Woman I can't move.

Man Stop it.

Woman I can't move.

Man Enough.

Woman I can't move. I can't move. I can't move. I can't move. I can't move. I can't move. I can't move. I can't, I ca-an't, I ca, a, a.

Man I don't know what to do.

Woman Hold me.

Man I'm holding.

Woman [sitting, hugging him from behind] Stay with me, I'm afraid. They talk all the time.

Man Who do? The people at the bank? You don't know them – but you do know me. And I'm telling you it will be alright. I just need to remember what it was and I'll be back. [Stands up again, walks to the table]

Woman [Follows him] Now, come back now.

Man One minute.

Woman [Pushes away his papers from the table] Enough.

Man What are you doing?

Woman What are you doing?

Man You're crazy.

[Picks up his papers from the floor, she leaves. He reads his papers]

5.

A man writes - Every time I raise my head there's a ceiling above me, above you there are skies and your eyes are closed. And there's something missing that I cannot find/remember.

[A room. A woman is shoving furniture around]

Man What are you doing?

Woman Tidying.

Man Why?

Woman I can hear too many noises coming through this wall at night.

Man I don't hear anything.

Woman I know.

Man [Holds the table] Leave the table here.

Woman Yesterday I dreamt about you.

Man What?

Woman You were standing next to water with a crocodile, giving it a picture.

Man What picture?

Woman And the crocodile kept creeping closer, I woke up crying.

Man It must be the wall.

Woman I'm scared.

Man Of what?

Woman Help me move the bed.

[He shoves]

6.

Rivers flow under the floor of the house. Huge tree roots grow in the walls, waiting to burst out. Enormous forces from above try to cave the ceiling in. We are standing on ladders, holding the ceiling. Unbelievable strength is needed to keep the walls standing. We share the task. We press ourselves against a different wall each time. It's a miracle the house doesn't shatter into a thousand pieces. Caves in. The outside is thrust inside through all the windows, crevices, under the tiles, through the cracks, and we can't block it all. And we can't stay inside. And we can't go outside. We're doomed. There's no relief. Not even under the bed which is also a house.

To turn off the radio. Switch off the television. Not read the paper. Close your eyes. Not believe in anything. Not believe in Man. Not believe it will get better. Or worse. Burn all the electronics. Annihilate the antennas deciphering the ether. Ruin all the electromagnetic signals transferring sound or form. To not hear anything. Not read anything. Not see anything. Not smell or breathe. Plug every bodily orifice. For a moment, just for a moment. To not be.

7.

A woman gazes - I am looking at you through the slits in my fork. You come with slitted stripes on your face. Fork tongue lines are dripping from your eyes. It's so quiet. You can only hear it through the windows now...

[A table. Dinner with two candles]

Man I made you something.

Woman I know.

Man I thought you'd like to eat.

Woman What?

Man What we had. You're cold.

Woman It's raining.

Man But you came on time.

Woman It's so cold here.

Man Do you want...

Woman I dreamt about the crocodile again. I'm scared.

Man Of what?

Woman She'll come eventually.

Man You don't know that.

Woman I do. Do you hear?

Man No.

Woman Do you listen?

Man Yes.

Woman Do you hear?

Man What?

Woman [Music, she hums] That.

Man Are you hungry?

Woman What?

Man You're so beautiful.

Woman Do you hear?

Man Yes.

[Lifts her to bed]

8.

Water flows. Then there's silence. Turmoil. A flourishing. Blossom. We were light years away but breathed together, at exactly the same moment. For an instant we had the world in the palm of our hand, we held on to it, contented.

A star-strewn night appears in a drop of water.

In a wheat grain - a whole life.

For a moment there were no words.

A sweet February.

9.

Man - You have the breath of a thousand women. I used to eat you with my eyes. Now you're holding my neck and your hands are cold. Sometimes I almost-

[A voyage. A woman with a suitcase enters]

Woman Can you smell it?

Man Are you going?

Woman It's already in the air.

Man Are you going?

Woman For a few days.

Man Do you have to?

Woman No.

Man Stay, we'll try.

Woman Terrible things are about to happen. It's February, it can't be delayed anymore.

Man Forget everything for once.

Woman This time I can't forget anything!

Man I don't understand, it's no different to any other February, I promise you.

Woman Wrong, this one smells different.

Man You'll get used to it.

Woman You don't get used to it. I can't trust anyone anymore.

Man Trust me.

Woman And I keep dreaming of crocodiles in the water and they're staring at me.

Man What will they do at work?

Woman They'll do.

Man Where to?

Woman Even if I try I can't see the end of them.

Man Tell me where to!

Woman We can't keep it. Not now.

Man We can - It's ours.

Woman I can't.

Man Look at me when you say that.

Woman [Looking out of the window] Eagles are lurking in the sky. Bad winds have brought the plague upon us.

Man I don't understand what you're saying. It's almost spring.

Woman There's a red sun outside.

Man It's just haze. Will you come back?

Woman There won't be any more Wednesdays-until-ten. Sunshine wednesdays-until-ten.

Man There will be. There will always be.

Woman I have to go, do you understand?

Man No.

Woman Look out the window and see what's happening.

Man I don't care what's behind this glass.

Woman I do. You're a coward.

Man You're the one who's scared.

Woman I have to go.

Man No.

Woman Will you come?

10.

Woman - It's March. I'm looking at you writing. As long as you don't turn round, one might think it's not you at all. One of us was wrong. You didn't come. A windowless room with a single bed. There were crocodiles around me. I had no picture to give them. I stared at the white fluorescent light.

[A table. A woman stands behind a man]

Woman You didn't come.

Man I said I might

Woman But you said.

Man I needed something.

Woman No.

Man Sorry.

Woman It hurt.

Man And now?

Woman Empty. You didn't come.

Man No. I was scared. I was writing.

Woman There's no more. I wanted to break your hands. So you couldn't write anymore. Then you might have come.

Man I wouldn't have come.

Woman I know.

Man You didn't have to.

Woman I did.

Man Why?

Woman She's getting closer. All the time. [Closing the windows]

Man We could have tried, both of us.

Woman I'm going.

Man Where?

Woman To the post office.

Man I thought you'd quit in May.

Woman This is May. Do you even listen? We're getting closer.

Man This summer could have been different.

Woman It will be.

[She leaves]

11.

I saw eagles. And crocodiles. I saw lions in the streets. I saw a thousand jackals lurking outside the front door, whining. You were sitting with your back to me. I saw a red sky turning upside down and buildings dripping down. Boiling tarmac rivers were now flowing through the streets, scalding concrete dripped from the-walls of buildings, flooding everything. There was nowhere to run. The city had no end. I ran to the forest. I wrote you poems. In my head. I sent them via thought-mail and they got lost on the way. Vanished in an infinite thicket. Tangled around treetops that never saw the light of day. Read only by dreadful night birds. Then I returned. Your skin pressed against mine, I couldn't peel you off. We got glued so strongly together, the skin had to be completely torn off and grown anew.

The letters all bled into one long word, without beginning or end. Crammed together. One on top of the other. Shoved and squeezed. An endless column of lines and circles. Condensed force, without meaning, only movement. Then there were just long continuous lines, climbing the electric wires, the street lamps, the pavements, shutters, corners, rows, avenues, linesssssilence... no soundssssscratching of the pen against the checkered surfacesssplash of ink. Blue lakes of thick ink. Lakes to drown in. Imprinted by ancient stamps no one could decipher. Archeological signs from the heart of the earth.

We spoke in an ancient tongue. From the bottom of the pit. From the soul. Long deep sounds, like the waves of the sea. Like wind through treetops. Like sprouting wheat. Like a Wednesday. Like an orange dress. Like a dream. It all unraveled. There was only one, long, warm sound. A sound that comes after. We didn't know after what. We opened our mouths to say something, but someone else's voice emerged from our oral cavities. We opened our eyes. We were but resonance.

12.

A man writes on the wall/etches into the table - You're a demon. My whole body aches with you. Poison is dripping from your eyes. Your tears burn everything. You have the devil's nails.

[A house. A woman enters carrying boxes- her hair disheveled, her dress open]

Woman It's food, so don't ask me what it is.

Man What for?

Woman It's June, they said to stock food. You have no idea what's going on outside.

Man No one's stocking anything.

Woman Stop fighting with me. Put it under the bed, or in the corner, or I don't know where. I need a light.

Man What do you want?

Woman Did you miss me?

Man [Doesn't look at her] Always.

Woman Love me.

Man I'm writing.

Woman Love me with your eyes.

Man Did you miss me?

Woman Love me.

[Music starts. They dance]

Man Where were you?

Woman I saw a valley of horrors. I stormed right through it.

Man Good that you're back.

Woman I don't dream anymore about dancing or crocodiles, now I dream about an orange sky, like my dress, and about sirens.

Man It's all in your head.

Woman [Turns away from him, starts unbuttoning her dress] Don't you dare talk to me like that again.

Man Can't you see it?

Woman It's not your business.

Man Of course it's my business, it's all my business.

Woman You're too stubborn. [The music gets louder] Quiet! [The music stops] Next time I hear that, I'm throwing all the plants from the balcony. I know what I'm doing.

Man I'm not so sure.

Woman I'm not lying, you'll see.

Man I can't believe you, you're driving me crazy. You do whatever you want.

Woman I never promised you anything, you didn't either.

Man You're driving me crazy. [Whispers] Do you hear?

Woman Love me. I can't move. Love me.

Man [Approaches her] You're not worthy. I love you, always.

Woman Shhh...[Quiet music is heard] I really like this one... just love me.

Man I can't not.

[Lifts her up and carries her to bed]

13.

A man writes on the wall/etches into the table/into the bed/into the pillow with a knife - I'm trying to speak with you, you're not listening. Refusing to take part. You never look at me. You've eaten my heart. Drunk my eyes. I can look at you for hours and you wouldn't even notice.

[Breakup. He sits next to the table. She stands]

Man What are you holding there?

Woman It doesn't matter now.

Man A surprise?

Woman No, it's a weapon.

Man What?

Woman A pistol.

Man Why?

Woman I'm preparing.

Man For what exactly?

Woman For war. Do you listen to me at all?

Man Do you listen to yourself? Where did you get it anyway?

Woman [In defiance] What's that?

Man I don't want it here, it's dangerous. We don't need it. You're losing your mind.

Woman I need it.

Man Stop, why are you doing this?

Woman You think I'm enjoying it?

Man I don't know anymore.

Woman How can you know anything. What are you writing there? What the hell are you writing there?

Man You.

Woman I'm here.

Man No you're not, you were never here. Though you had the chance.

Woman No. She began.

Man Enough.

Woman I love the color of your eyes. It's sweet.

Man I look at you and don't know who you are, who you've become.

Woman I don't know you either.

Man I don't know you. Who are you? Who are you?

Woman Who are you?

Man Why don't you go?

Woman Why don't you?

Man Expelled. Expelled. Expelled.

Woman [Standing in the corner] Your palm is big enough to enclose my arm.

Man I can't hear you.

Woman If you wanted you could break me with a single blow.

Man There's something I can't remember.

Woman I can't move.

Man I look at you and you're far away.

Woman She's here.

Man What time is it?

Woman July.

[She leaves]

14.

Man - You were right. You left and a war broke out. Not the one you expected - but worse. The one your frightened eyes created in this house. I'm writing you a last breakup letter. How come you are always the one leaving, while I write the breakup letters? This is the last one. I will not send it. And I won't bump into you either. And if I would, I wouldn't recognise your face. You left me a poem and an empty cigarette packet on the table. I can't stand it when you smoke.

15.

[Maybe it's a beginning, maybe an end]

The deposes are full. Ammunition, food, water and blankets. Whatever. We're ready. Whatever comes. We'll burn everything. Nothing will be left behind us. All the pain will be turned to dust and buried in the ground. Trees will grow from it. And we'll have fresh air to breathe. They'll never break us apart. Our rank and file are visible from afar, we stand together, though if you come closer you can see we're still apart, and that the skies press against us, horrifically open.

But there's always something left. After we rise from the ruins. Matter always transforms into matter. And a new form always comes.