

love exists

by

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first draft
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A room in a hospital. Paul asleep in a bed. Diane sitting on a chair at the foot of the bed. A puzzle on a table. Paul wakes up.

DIANE Hello.

PAUL Fuck off.

DIANE Alright.

Pause

(moving a piece of the puzzle) May I...? I know this painting. Renoir, isn't it?

PAUL You speak English?

DIANE Like a native.

PAUL I'm sorry. I was still half asleep. I didn't realise.

DIANE No matter.

PAUL Did the Embassy send you?

DIANE After a fashion.

PAUL I don't speak any German. They wouldn't let me go. I got a bit upset...

DIANE You can't go yet.

PAUL Why not?

DIANE You haven't finished your puzzle.

Pause

They want to keep you under observation for a while. Best be on the safe side.

PAUL But there's nothing wrong with me. Just a few scratches.

DIANE Best not take any chances.

PAUL They locked me in.

DIANE Did they?

PAUL Why would they want to do that?

DIANE I should have thought that was obvious.

PAUL Why?

DIANE To stop you getting out.

Pause

It was quite a serious accident. You're lucky to be alive.

PAUL Who says?

DIANE What do you mean?

Pause

At that speed there's no telling what might happen. Don't you want to ask me anything?

PAUL What about?

DIANE The accident.

PAUL Where's my car?

Pause

DIANE There's not much of it left actually.

PAUL Ah. Shit.

DIANE Can you remember anything, about the accident?

PAUL No.

DIANE You don't know what happened?

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE Don't you want to know if there were any other victims?

PAUL What do you mean, victims?

DIANE In the accident.

PAUL Oh. No, I hadn't thought of that.

DIANE And you don't care?

PAUL Why, were there other people in this accident?

DIANE No.

PAUL Well then?

Pause

DIANE You could easily have killed someone. You don't have any memory of it?

PAUL None.

DIANE There was a witness. A lorry driver. He saw you go off the road. He said you suddenly accelerated, veered off the road, went into a wall. He thinks you must have fallen asleep, then woken up with a start.

PAUL Yes, that's probably it.

Pause

DIANE Had you been driving for long?

PAUL S'pose so.

DIANE Where were you going?

PAUL I was... Bavaria.

DIANE Really? You were going there, or coming back?

PAUL Going there.

DIANE When you had the accident?

PAUL When I had the accident.

DIANE Are you sure? You've forgotten the accident, perhaps you've forgotten Bavaria too.

PAUL You can't forget Bavaria.

DIANE You remember it?

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE Where were you going exactly?

PAUL Eggenfelden.

DIANE Why? What is there in Eggenfelden?

PAUL Nothing.

Pause

DIANE Was anyone expecting you? Is there someone I should tell?

PAUL No. Nobody was expecting me.

DIANE You're on holiday?

PAUL Yes, that's it. I'm on holiday.

Pause

DIANE It's pretty, Bavaria. Do you know it?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE You've been there before then?

PAUL A long time ago.

DIANE To Eggenfelden?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE What's it like?

PAUL It's a dump.

Pause

DIANE Did you come directly from Sheffield?

PAUL No, I stopped off in London. I had someone I wanted to see.

DIANE Ah. Did you take the shuttle or just the regular ferry?

Pause

PAUL How did you know I was coming from Sheffield?

DIANE The car. There was the name of the garage on the back window.

PAUL When did you see the car? ... Who are you?

DIANE It's pretty, Bavaria. But it's a long way away. You didn't drive all the way from London without stopping?

PAUL No. I slept on the ferry.

DIANE On the ferry? You couldn't have got much sleep, it only takes an hour and a half.

PAUL I took the Ostend crossing. I wasn't in any hurry.

DIANE Ah. Yes, that's right. You were on holiday. You had time on your hands. What route did you take?

PAUL I just drove through the countryside.

DIANE Starting in Belgium... Did you come down into Alsace?

PAUL Possibly.

DIANE Didn't you stop anywhere?

PAUL I don't remember. I had other things on my mind.

DIANE Ah. Problems?

PAUL Yes.

Pause

DIANE And why were you heading for Bavaria?

PAUL Why are you here?

DIANE I'm here to help you.

PAUL I don't need help. I just want them to let me go.

Pause

I've done nothing wrong. Why won't they let me go?

DIANE What do they say you've done?

PAUL Nothing.

Pause

They've got no right to keep me here. Have they?

DIANE I don't know.

PAUL Perhaps I should register a complaint. Do you think I could register a complaint?

DIANE I wouldn't advise it.

PAUL Why not? I've done nothing wrong. I just had an accident. I didn't hurt anyone, except myself. And here they are treating me like a criminal.

DIANE This is Germany. No mucking about with the highway code here.

Pause

But this is not about that. This is about something else. You know that.

Pause

PAUL They have no right to treat me like this. I'm a British citizen. The Gestapo's days are over. Someone should tell them.

DIANE I'm not at all sure you'd be any better off in England.

Pause

PAUL I don't know what they wanted from me.

DIANE Don't you?

Pause

They just wanted to ask you some questions.

PAUL What about?

DIANE About your stay in Bavaria.

Pause

PAUL It's no wonder they don't get any tourists if that's the way they treat their visitors.

DIANE According to them it was you who turned nasty. They said you punched the officer.

PAUL That was an officer?

Pause

He had no right to talk to me like that.

DIANE Like what?

PAUL He insulted me.

DIANE I thought you didn't speak any German?

PAUL I didn't like his tone.

Pause

I got a bit upset. I admit that. I'll say I'm sorry if that's what they want. I'm just like a kid really. I get a bit carried away, then afterwards I forget all about it... Will you tell them I'm sorry and I'd like to go now?

DIANE You can't go now.

PAUL Why not?

DIANE You haven't answered their questions.

PAUL But I don't understand a word of their questions!

DIANE Then you'll just have to answer mine.

Pause

PAUL Alright. And then I can go?

DIANE If you've done nothing wrong.

Pause

 Why were you going to Bavaria?

PAUL I was going to Eggenfelden.

DIANE Why? It's supposed to be a dump.

Pause

PAUL I was going to see my mother.

DIANE Then she must be waiting for you!

PAUL She didn't know I was coming.

DIANE Don't you want me to tell her?

PAUL No, there's no point.

DIANE She has to be told about the accident, doesn't she?

PAUL Why?

DIANE She's your mother.

PAUL She doesn't care.

DIANE Don't you get on?

PAUL Not really.

Pause

DIANE Is she German?

Pause

I used to get teased at school in England for being German. I'm not, my father's Belgian, but that didn't make any difference. Now I live in France where they make fun of Belgians anyway.

Pause

Do you think Belgium's funny?

PAUL It's not at all funny.

DIANE You go there often?

PAUL Not really.

Pause

DIANE People always have to make fun of someone. There's no malice in it.

PAUL Yes, there is. Of course there is. People are malicious. Everyone knows that.

DIANE They're malicious with you?

Pause

PAUL Same as with anyone.

Pause

DIANE I'm not malicious.

PAUL That's what you say.

DIANE What did you visit, in Alsace?

PAUL Nothing special.

DIANE Didn't you stop anywhere?

PAUL I stopped off in some village.

Pause

DIANE Pretty?

PAUL Alright.

DIANE There are some very pretty villages round there. I know that region well, I have in-laws there. Colmar, Saverne, Obersteigen, - did you stop in Obersteigen?

PAUL Are you from the police?

Pause

DIANE Why do you say that?

Pause

Your mother didn't know you were coming?

PAUL No.

DIANE Is it a long time since you saw her?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE Don't you get on?

PAUL What's that got to do with you?

Pause

DIANE No, it's just that my mother hasn't spoken to me for years, so...

PAUL Why not?

DIANE She didn't approve of my choice of husband. The worst of it is that she was right, I ended up getting rid of the husband. But I never made up with my mother...

Pause

PAUL Do you have children?

DIANE Two. A boy and a girl. Twelve and nine. What about you?

PAUL I've got an eight-year-old son. But his mother won't let me see him.

DIANE Ah.

PAUL Do your children see their father?

DIANE Oh yes, every other weekend, or thereabouts. I'm not that bad. I don't bear a grudge.

PAUL Catherine does.

Pause

DIANE What does she hold against you?

Pause

PAUL Who knows?

Pause

DIANE It's hard work, love.

PAUL It's a waste of time.

Pause

DIANE What about your mother? Why don't you get on with your mother?

PAUL Ask her.

DIANE Perhaps I should. Where can I reach her?

PAUL You can't reach her.

DIANE Isn't she on the phone?

PAUL No.

Pause

Anyway, you'd need more than a phone, to reach her.

DIANE But she must live somewhere?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE Where?

PAUL Eggenfelden.

DIANE Does she have an address?

PAUL I don't know if they give her her mail.

Pause

She lives in a sort of community. They sing hymns. They read the Bible. They talk about God. They're raving mad.

DIANE I know the type.

PAUL I don't think so. I don't think you know the type at all.

Pause

DIANE What about your father? Do you get on better with him?

PAUL I never knew him.

DIANE Didn't you ever try?

PAUL He left. He moved out and Jesus moved in.

DIANE Jesus?

PAUL Or the Virgin Mary. One of that lot. They came to show us the ways of the Lord. My dad must have misunderstood the directions, we never saw him again.

Pause

DIANE You don't share your mother's religious convictions?

PAUL It's just a way of not facing up to things.

DIANE What things?

PAUL I don't know. Her life. My life.

Pause

 Anyway I don't bear it against her.

DIANE Yes, you do. In fact I'd say you were really very angry with her. No?

Pause

 Was it a long time since you'd seen her?

PAUL A few years.

DIANE A few years is a long time, for a mother.

PAUL We had nothing left to say to each other.

DIANE So why now?

Pause

 Do you have any brothers and sisters?

Pause

PAUL A half sister.

DIANE Your mother remarried?

Pause

 Was that a problem for you?

Pause

 I had problems with my kids when I changed men.

PAUL That's not the same.

DIANE Why not?

PAUL You're not insane.

DIANE Not everyone would agree with you there, but yes. It's a bit different. Plus I changed country at the same time, so it was even more difficult for my two.

PAUL You changed country?

DIANE Yes, I left England and settled in Paris. Why?

Pause

PAUL It's not the same thing at all.

Pause

DIANE Was your stepfather a member of this... sect?

PAUL He created it. More or less.

DIANE But he's not a priest, is he?

PAUL Not really.

Pause

DIANE Ah, there's the piece I was looking for. There's something not right.

PAUL What do you mean?

DIANE In what you've told me. About the accident. There's something that doesn't quite fit.

PAUL What's that?

DIANE The lorry driver who saw you, the witness. He was coming from the north. He was going to Munich. He was heading for Bavaria.

PAUL So?

DIANE So he said you were coming towards him. Until you veered off the road you were heading north. You were leaving Bavaria behind you.

Pause

Are you sure you didn't see your mother?

PAUL I don't remember anything.

DIANE So perhaps you did see her.

PAUL What the fuck difference does it make?

Pause

DIANE Perhaps you did see her. Perhaps you spoke to her. Perhaps it didn't go off too well. Perhaps you just wanted to forget all about it. Perhaps you did forget all about it. Or perhaps not.

Pause

I think you're a bit hard on your mother, to be honest. I think that's why you don't want to talk about this, because you were so unfair to her.

PAUL Unfair?

DIANE Yes. I think you do remember what you said to her. You're just ashamed to admit it because -

PAUL I'll tell you what I remember.

Pause

DIANE Yes?

PAUL I remember her hand tugging at my arm and shoving me in the back to get me to go and knock on the doors of the houses in the rain. I remember the faces coming down towards me then going back up and closing shop at the sight of my mother and her Bible. I remember the embarrassment in their voices, the polite contempt in their smiles, the furtive glances looking for an excuse to get away. I remember the shame twisting through my guts as the doors slammed shut in our faces. I remember the hiding I got when I refused to offer my thanks to the Lord.

DIANE Thanks for what?

PAUL For all the good things I had. For the stale bread and cheese I had for dinner. For the holes in my clothes that made the other children laugh at school. For the freezing room in the crummy hotel where we lived. For the door that finally opened and the man who invited us into the warm. I had to thank Him for that most of all.

DIANE Was that your stepfather?

Pause

PAUL Do you love God?

DIANE Me? I don't really believe in Him. I believe in mankind, that's all.

PAUL Mankind?

DIANE Yes.

PAUL Are you joking?

Pause

Mankind is proof that God is useless. He cocked him up. Nothing surprising about that, He cocks everything up. He's useless, God is. Everything He does is shit.

DIANE But you believe in Him?

PAUL I believe He's useless, that's what I believe.

Pause

They say He loves us but it's not true. He hates us. He hates us because He cocked us up. And we're still here - mean, ugly, stupid - we're still here to remind Him of the cock up. He wants to destroy us. He wants to trample on us till we disappear forever but He can't, we're still here, like dogshit stuck to the sole of His shoe. Is that what you love? This great stinking turd that sticks to everything and won't go away? You believe in mankind, you believe in shit.

Pause

DIANE I believe in love.

PAUL Love doesn't exist.

DIANE I think it does.

PAUL Then you're a fuckwit.

Pause

DIANE Perhaps I am.

Pause

Is your stepfather still with her?

PAUL He's not my stepfather.

Pause

He's just a bloke that took advantage of her. A crook. A con man. He knew what to say to her. He could get her to do whatever he wanted. It was because of him we went to Germany.

DIANE You lived in Germany?

PAUL For seven years.

DIANE And you never learned the language?

Pause

PAUL It's his language.

DIANE You hate him that much?

Pause

PAUL God sent him to us.

DIANE And is that why you hate him? Or is that why you hate God?

Pause

He wasn't with your mother when you saw her?

PAUL She doesn't see him any more.

DIANE He left her?

PAUL Years ago.

DIANE And the community?

PAUL Goes on without him.

Pause

DIANE You don't see him any more either?

PAUL Why should I see him?

DIANE You tell me.

Pause

When did you last see him?

Pause

Where?

PAUL In Brussels.

DIANE What was he doing there?

PAUL Business.

DIANE And you?

Pause

But he doesn't see your mother any more?

PAUL No.

DIANE Did you talk to her about him?

PAUL I don't remember.

Pause

DIANE Perhaps it's because of him that you argued. Perhaps the past came back to haunt you when you found yourself face to face with her. Perhaps that was what was so depressing. So depressing that you wiped it out of your memory.

PAUL Yes, that must be it.

Pause

DIANE Or perhaps there was more than that, that you wanted to forget. Perhaps it wasn't only the past, but the present too. Perhaps that's what prompted you to go and see her. Perhaps that's what she didn't want to hear. Perhaps that's what she couldn't understand.

PAUL Perhaps.

Pause

DIANE Do you know what I think? You didn't fall asleep at the wheel. It wasn't an accident. You did it on purpose. You were trying to kill yourself.

Pause

PAUL So what?

Pause

That's no reason to keep me here against my will. Can I go now?

Pause

I've done no harm to anyone.

DIANE What makes you so sure of that?

PAUL What?... You told me yourself, there weren't any other victims.

DIANE Not in the accident, no.

Pause

PAUL What do you want from me?

DIANE I want you to tell me about what happened before the accident.

Pause

PAUL I don't know what happened. I don't remember anything.

DIANE Then tell me the last things you do remember. You stopped off in Alsace, I think you said. You mentioned Obersteigen. Tell me what happened in Obersteigen.

PAUL You're the one who mentioned Obersteigen. I don't remember anything. It must be the accident, it must be the shock has made me lose my memory.

DIANE It must have been quite a shock then. That's why they can't let you go.

Pause

 So you stopped off in Obersteigen?

PAUL I didn't say that.

DIANE There's a little square, where you can park, with a church.

PAUL I don't like churches.

DIANE It's a pretty little church. Thirteenth century, I think. Did you visit it?

PAUL I didn't visit the church, I didn't park in the square, I didn't go in the bakery. I didn't stop in Obersteigen. I don't know it.

DIANE I didn't mention the bakery.

Pause

PAUL There's always a bakery, in those villages.

Pause

DIANE What were your problems?

PAUL What?

DIANE You said you had problems, that that was why you didn't pay attention to the villages you went through.

PAUL Ah. Yes.

DIANE What were they?

PAUL I lost my job.

DIANE In Sheffield?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE What was it?

PAUL Accountant. For a firm making cutlery.

DIANE Cutlery?

PAUL Yes. Forks and spoons...

DIANE And knives?

Pause

PAUL In the best Sheffield steel.

DIANE And what happened? Did the firm shut down?

PAUL Yes, that's right.

Pause

DIANE So you were out of a job. Nothing was keeping you in Sheffield. You didn't have any friends?

PAUL I've never had any friends.

DIANE But you have a wife?

PAUL Had.

DIANE Was it her you wanted to see in London?

PAUL She wouldn't see me.

Pause

She doesn't want to see me ever again.

Pause

DIANE Did you love her?

PAUL I hate her guts.

DIANE You do now. Of course. But before?

PAUL I was taken for a ride.

DIANE Why did you want to see her again?

PAUL A score to settle.

DIANE But you didn't see her?

PAUL No.

DIANE So you left. You came over on the ferry and you drove down through the countryside and into Alsace. Did you like it?

PAUL No.

DIANE So you went to see your mother. In Bavaria.

PAUL She talked about God. I went away again. I was depressed. I drove into the wall. I woke up in hospital. They kept asking me questions. I got a bit upset. But I've calmed down. I recognise the facts. Can I go now?

Pause

Do you have any other questions?

DIANE Tell me about yourself.

PAUL What do you want to know?

DIANE Whatever you want to tell me. You're in charge.

PAUL But I've got nothing to say.

DIANE Alright. There's no hurry. I've got plenty of time.

Pause

PAUL What do you want from me?

DIANE Nothing.

Pause

PAUL Are you going to stay there long?

DIANE I expect so.

PAUL Haven't you anything better to do?

DIANE No.

Pause

PAUL Who are you?

Pause

DIANE I'm someone who can understand.

PAUL No-one can understand. No-one has ever understood. Even I don't understand.

DIANE What's so hard to understand?

Pause

PAUL Nothing. There's nothing to understand.

Pause

Leave me alone now. I'm tired.

DIANE Don't mind me. You can go to sleep if you want.

PAUL I can't go to sleep with you there at the foot of the bed like a sparrow hawk hovering over a vole.

DIANE You like birds?

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE When I was little I had a book with photos of all the different birds. I used to study the photos then go out into the woods with a pair of

binoculars and a little notebook to keep a record of all the different species I saw.

PAUL All on your own?

Pause

DIANE Yes. My friends weren't interested.

PAUL Nobody's interested.

DIANE I am.

Pause

PAUL Who told you I was interested in birds?

Pause

What else do you know about me?

DIANE I know a number of things.

PAUL Who have you been speaking to? What did they tell you? It isn't true, you know. You mustn't listen to what people say.

Pause

Nobody knows me for a start. And then you mustn't listen to what they say.

DIANE So tell me yourself.

PAUL It was Catherine.

DIANE Pardon?

PAUL You've spoken to Catherine.

Pause

Did she call you, or you her?

Pause

You mustn't listen to her. You mustn't listen to what she says. She's malicious.

Pause

You're not malicious, are you?

Pause

DIANE No.

PAUL You're here to help me?

DIANE Yes.

PAUL But you don't know me.

Pause

DIANE I'll get to know you.

PAUL No no. Don't do that. You wouldn't want to help me after that. You wouldn't want to know any more. You'd let me down.

DIANE I won't let you down.

Pause

PAUL You're going to hate me. You're going to wish I was dead.

DIANE No.

PAUL Yes. You're not strong enough. You're not mad enough to understand.

Pause

I'm the opposite of all you believe in. I'm proof you're wrong to believe in it.

Pause

DIANE You watch too many horror films if you ask me. I've been around, you know. I've heard some pretty terrible things in my time. I'm well nigh unshockable.

Pause

PAUL Do you really want to know everything?

DIANE Yes.

PAUL So be it. I warned you.

DIANE I heard.

Pause

You can talk to me. I'm here to listen.

Pause

What happened in Eggenfelden? What did your mother say to you?

Pause

PAUL I did most of the talking.

DIANE What did you say?

PAUL I told her I'd lost my job.

DIANE Is that all?

Pause

What happened, actually?

PAUL What do you mean?

DIANE With your job.

PAUL Oh. Economic restructuring.

DIANE The same for everyone?

PAUL More or less.

Pause

DIANE And how did your mother react?

PAUL She said I'd find another job if God willed it.

DIANE Yes. I don't suppose that was much comfort to you. What else did you say to her?

PAUL I told her to look at me.

Pause

 To look at me just for once in her life. Right in the eyes. And tell me what God had ever done for me.

DIANE And did she?

PAUL She looked at me alright. She didn't tell me what God had done for me.

DIANE She couldn't.

PAUL Of course not.

DIANE I mean, you wouldn't have listened to her. I don't share her religious beliefs but at least she believes in something. Call it God, or love, or what you like, it's all the same thing in the end, isn't it? But it's impossible to talk to you about that. You're so angry.

PAUL Angry, me? I'm not angry. What are you talking about?

DIANE You're so angry. I can feel it. It's like electricity in the air. It's like a storm about to break. I'm sitting here talking to you and I feel like I'm just here to conduct the lightning.

Pause

PAUL I'm not angry.

DIANE What exactly do you hold against her?

Pause

 Did you speak to her about your stepfather?

Pause

When you saw her, in Bavaria, did you speak to her about your stepfather?

Pause

Tell me about him.

Pause

I'm sure he wasn't as bad as all that.

Pause

He probably wasn't a bad man at all, was he, really? When you look back.

Pause

PAUL

He was supposed to help me with my homework.

Pause

She used to leave me alone with him when she went off to do her rounds with her Bible.

Pause

DIANE

And...?

PAUL

Until then I'd always moaned when I had to go out with her. I didn't like it. So she couldn't understand why I suddenly wanted to spread the gospel.

DIANE

You didn't want to stay with him?

Pause

PAUL

No.

DIANE

Why not?

Pause

What did he do to you?

PAUL

He helped me with my homework.

Pause

DIANE He didn't do anything to you. You were just jealous, that's all.

PAUL He helped me with my homework. Then he took me down to the cellar. If I'd got a good mark I had to suck his cock, if not I got it up the arse.

Silence

DIANE How long did this go on for?

PAUL A few years.

DIANE Your mother never said anything? She never noticed?

PAUL She never said anything.

Pause

DIANE You never spoke to her about it?

PAUL There was no point.

Pause

Seeing as it was God who sent him to us.

Pause

DIANE You should have spoken to someone. It would have helped you live with it. You would have felt less alone.

PAUL No-one's ever less alone.

Pause

You can kid yourself. You can fill up your mind with other things. But you're always absolutely alone.

DIANE That's not true.

PAUL You're kidding yourself.

DIANE I'm not. I'm not even thinking about love actually, I know you don't want to hear about that. But there are moments every day when you feel a little less alone. When you look at a beautiful painting, a Renoir for example, even if it's just a reproduction, it speaks to you, doesn't it? It says something. It moves you. When you go to the theatre -

PAUL I went to the theatre once. I was bored shitless. Is that what you call being less alone, being in a room with a load of other people who are as miserable as you?

Pause

DIANE It's a pity I didn't meet you earlier. I might have been able to help.

PAUL Help me do what?

DIANE Get out of yourself. Get over what happened to you. But instead of that you kept it to yourself. All that suffering, all that anger.

PAUL Well of course I kept it to myself. Who do you expect me to share it with? Jesus?

DIANE You closed yourself off. You became more and more isolated. You started to create a world of your own, in your mind. A fantasy world, where you were master, where you were in control. You started to dream of revenge.

Pause

Didn't you?

PAUL I never spoke about it.

DIANE Of course not. It was your own private world.

Pause

Was it very violent?

PAUL Yes.

DIANE And sometimes the pressure would become too much, wouldn't it?

PAUL You know about that?

Pause

You can't understand. No-one understands that.

Pause

DIANE When did you cross the line?

Pause

PAUL What line?

DIANE Between fantasy and reality. When did you start living out your fantasies?

PAUL I never lived out my fantasies.

Pause

It was just what was going on in my head. It was my imagination. It never really happened.

DIANE Yes it did.

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE How did you get on with the other kids at school?

PAUL I didn't.

DIANE You didn't have anyone to play with?

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE What about your sister?

PAUL I don't have a sister.

DIANE Your half-sister. Your stepfather's daughter.

Pause

PAUL We played together a bit.

Pause

DIANE She was younger than you, wasn't she?

PAUL She was ten years younger than me.

DIANE So what did you play at?

PAUL We just played together a bit, that's all.

Pause

DIANE You crossed the line.

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE What became of her?

PAUL She died.

Pause

But not because of me. It was years later. She committed suicide when she was twenty.

DIANE And you feel responsible?

PAUL No. No no, I wasn't responsible. I wasn't even there.

Pause

She'd been round the bend for years. She'd got fat, ugly... she was round the bend.

DIANE Nobody knew? You never said anything? She never said anything? She grew up, she never spoke about it? She had personality problems, nobody ever understood why?

PAUL No. That's the way it is. People go round the bend. Nobody knows why. Nobody understands the first thing about it.

DIANE But you did.

Pause

It's the consequence of what you did to her. You understand that, don't you?

Pause

PAUL It was nothing to do with me. She decided to kill herself. Why shouldn't she? Leave her alone now.

Pause

DIANE Alright. Let's come back to you. Your sister bore the brunt of your pent-up aggression. But that's not the end of it. It's enough for a moment but then you have to start looking around for another victim.

PAUL My sister wasn't a victim. What are you talking about?

Pause

What are you talking about? I didn't do her any harm.

DIANE What happened afterwards?

PAUL Afterwards?

Pause

I went to college, I changed.

DIANE You met Catherine?

Pause

PAUL I changed.

DIANE Thanks to her?

Pause

You can talk about that, can't you? It's nothing to be ashamed of.

PAUL How would you know what I'm ashamed of?

Pause

I used to watch her during lectures.

DIANE Was she pretty?

PAUL She had loads of friends. Nobody would talk to me. They used to take the piss. Do you know what they used to call me? They called me the vulture.

DIANE Why?

PAUL I had these pictures of birds of prey on my files.

DIANE Birds of prey? Why birds of prey?

PAUL I liked them. I had this photo of an eagle on the carcass of some animal, its wings spread, its claws red with blood, right in the middle of the photo, majestic. And behind it in the background, on the edge of the picture, perched on a branch, waiting, there's this vulture. The other students thought I looked like the vulture.

DIANE Why?

PAUL Because of my haircut, I think. They thought I was ugly.

DIANE What about Catherine?

PAUL She didn't even see me. At least that's what I thought. Then one day I followed her into a pub. She was with a whole crowd of people laughing and playing billiards. I got myself a drink and sat at a table at the back of the saloon bar. She came round the billiard table, she crossed the room, she left them all behind. She came over and sat at my table. She wanted to talk.

Pause

We got married a year later. I really thought she was going to change my whole life.

Pause.

There are moments like that, sometimes. When you almost start thinking things could get better. That with a bit of luck you could almost be happy. But you've got to hand it to God. He knows what He's doing. Because,

living with your nose rubbed in the shit all day, you get used to it. You don't even notice it any more. So He lets you look up at the sky for a little while, just long enough to get you hoping again, to get you believing. Then he knocks you back down in it. That's His idea of fun. That's how He gets His kicks.

Pause

I was taken for a ride.

DIANE No you weren't. It's not a trap that was set for you, it's a love story. She believed in it, the same as you. Love stories always have unhappy endings. They're no less beautiful for that.

Pause

PAUL For a very short while I believed in the dream. Then I woke up.

Pause

Fucking stupid, dreams are.

DIANE Not that stupid.

PAUL No, well, of course, you're on the side of stupidity, aren't you? "You should have spoken to someone. You'd have felt less alone." Oh yes. That's where it all started to go wrong. From the day I told her, Catherine lost her faith in me. She saw me differently. She didn't love me any more.

Pause

DIANE You started again, is that it? She realised?

PAUL Not at all, no.

Pause

DIANE There was an incident with a little boy.

PAUL What?

Pause

Who told you that? That's Catherine again. That's her speciality, that is. That's her party piece: calling the police to tell them stories.

DIANE I'm not with the police.

PAUL Then why are you asking all these questions?

DIANE To find the answers. It's like your puzzle. I want to put all the pieces in the right place.

PAUL Why?

DIANE To understand.

PAUL You can't understand.

DIANE Yes I can. If you help me, I will understand.

PAUL There's nothing to understand. It's not understandable. I'm not a puzzle. There's nowhere to put the pieces. There's no design. There's no plan. It doesn't mean anything.

DIANE Perhaps you haven't really tried to understand.

PAUL Or perhaps I've really understood.

Pause

DIANE I'm not with the police.

Pause

I'm here to listen. I try to help the victims. And I try to help their torturers. That's what I do.

PAUL Not much of a job.

DIANE Somebody has to do it.

PAUL Why?

DIANE Because it's a vicious circle. Don't you see? The victim turns into the torturer and creates more victims. And it just goes on and on. There are more and more victims. And more and more torturers.

PAUL I'm no torturer.

DIANE Yes you are.

Pause

You know you are. You've turned into your stepfather.

PAUL Me? I wouldn't hurt a fly.

DIANE Yes you would.

PAUL No no, you've got the wrong end of the stick. You've got it all wrong. I've never done any harm to anyone.

DIANE Yes you have.

Pause

PAUL What do you know about it?

DIANE I know.

PAUL Because you've got a book with photos in, is that it? You know what species you're dealing with? Have you put me down in your little notebook? What do you do at the Embassy?

DIANE I try to help people. People like you.

PAUL No you don't. You've never helped anyone. You just put them down in your little notebook. They never get out afterwards. They're classified for all eternity.

Pause

You don't want to help me.

Pause

That's not what you're here for anyway.

Pause

I'm not stupid. I know why you're asking all these questions.

Pause

DIANE Yes?

PAUL It's because of that little girl that disappeared. In Obersteigen.

Pause

It's nothing to do with me.

Pause

I heard about it on the radio. It's nothing to do with me.

DIANE What about the one in Eggenfelden?

PAUL Eggenfelden?

Pause

I didn't even know about that. I didn't go to Eggenfelden.

DIANE You just said you did.

PAUL My mother's outside of Eggenfelden. I didn't go into the town.

DIANE But you were in the area? And you were in Obersteigen?

PAUL You were in Obersteigen, you were in Obersteigen - how do I know? That's what you say. That's what Catherine must have told you. She accused me. And you believed her.

DIANE She didn't accuse you of anything. She felt you were desperate. She was worried.

Pause

Shall I tell you what I think? I think Catherine still loves you. Even now. She wants to help you.

PAUL By giving me over to the police?

Pause

After that you say you did this, you did that, you were here, you were there. What do you want me to say? Yes, perhaps. I don't remember. I stopped somewhere. You tell me it was Obersteigen, I say alright, it was

Obersteigen. If that's what you want, what do I care? But can I myself state without fear of contradiction that I did in fact stop in Obersteigen? No, I can not. I wasn't actually paying attention. It was a dump like any other. I didn't know I was going to have to provide a detailed itinerary for the police.

Pause

DIANE You said some things to Catherine. You said -

PAUL Yes but that was just between ourselves. That was a private conversation. It's an old old story, actually. Catherine's got a twisted mind. All this is her fault. So I said all that just to get my own back, that's all. I wasn't serious.

DIANE She took you seriously.

PAUL No. No no, not really. She just realised she'd got another chance to put me in the shit. So she took it. She's pretty sharp, is our Catherine.

DIANE But you did say those things?

PAUL I said things... yes. Yes, I said things. But they weren't true.

Pause

It was just my imagination. It was just to give her the needle. Because she was the first one to talk about those things. She made it all up.

DIANE She wasn't the first one to talk about it.

Pause

In fact she waited rather a long while before she ever spoke about it. She didn't say anything until you were in prison.

Pause

PAUL In prison? Me? No no. She must have told you that. I've never been in prison. You see? She makes it all up.

DIANE No, she doesn't.

PAUL She'll tell you anything.

DIANE I've seen your record.

PAUL No no.

DIANE You were sentenced to four years imprisonment for sexual assault. You served eighteen months in Wormwood Scrubs.

Pause

PAUL Yes, but that was before. That was nothing.

DIANE What do you mean, nothing?

PAUL That was ages ago. I'd forgotten all about it. It was a misunderstanding. People got all excited but I hadn't actually done anything.

Pause

With the kid, we were just having a bit of fun. In actual fact it was his idea.

Pause

DIANE The child was seven years old. You were twenty-eight.

Pause

PAUL I'm really just a child myself.

DIANE Good God...

PAUL Don't expect Him to do anything about it. For a start He isn't good. And then He's the one that wanted all this. It's His fault.

Pause

But I didn't hurt the kid. We were just playing about. It was nothing.

DIANE You can't say that. He must have been traumatised. Like you were. You marked him for life.

PAUL Oh come off it. He had nothing against it. He thought it was funny.

DIANE I doubt that. And with a four year sentence, it must have been a bit more serious than you make it out.

PAUL No, that's just because they distorted it all afterwards. It didn't happen the way they said it did.

Pause

And anyway I didn't realise. It was all very innocent.

DIANE Even if he offered no resistance, what you did was criminal. He couldn't offer any resistance. You knew that. You knew what you were doing.

Pause

PAUL But I'm just a child myself.

DIANE You're not a child. You're an adult. You're responsible.

Silence

PAUL Afterwards, Catherine used all that against me. She distorted everything.

DIANE Catherine filed for divorce, that's all. She cited the acts you were sentenced for.

PAUL Yes, that's what I said.

Pause

DIANE According to you her suspicions were unfounded?

PAUL They weren't suspicions, they were lies. She found what she wanted to stop me seeing my son, that's all.

DIANE You're the one who found that, aren't you?

Pause

What about your son? What does he say?

PAUL He doesn't say anything.

Pause

He was too young to speak then. And now he doesn't even know me.

Pause

DIANE Did you have any therapy, when you were in prison?

PAUL I don't think the treatment I got from the other prisoners was designed to be therapeutic.

Pause

DIANE It couldn't have been much fun.

PAUL I'm not going back to prison.

Pause

Ever.

Pause

Whatever Catherine says.

DIANE It's not for Catherine to decide.

PAUL Then what are you doing here?

Pause

It's not enough to have ruined my life, now she wants to rub it in. She wants me out of the way for good.

Pause

What it was actually was that she found another bloke while I was in jail. That's what it was. So she made up all these stories to get rid of me. And it worked.

Pause

Why do you think they fired me?

DIANE It wasn't economic restructuring then?

PAUL They got these anonymous letters.

DIANE It wasn't necessarily her. Why would she do that?

PAUL She's trying to justify herself. She's a bit ashamed of herself, you see, because of what she's done, so she keeps on trying to find something else, to convince herself she was right. She keeps on making things up. Like she did with you.

DIANE Except that with me she didn't make anything up. It's all true.

Pause

PAUL Well, I wouldn't know about that. Perhaps. Perhaps she spends her time poring over the newspapers to find some sordid crimes to accuse me with, I wouldn't know. It's quite possible.

DIANE No. She knew details of things that she didn't want to mention. That she couldn't have read in the papers. Things that someone had told her.

Pause

You told her.

Pause

She didn't have to make them up, or read about them in the papers, because you phoned her to tell her everything.

Pause

PAUL I did?

Pause

I don't know what I could have told her.

DIANE No?

Pause

You called from Bavaria. You told her you were going to kill yourself, and that it would be her fault. She didn't believe you. You told her everything you had just done was also her fault. She asked you what you had just done...

Pause

You described in minute and repulsive detail the kidnapping, torture and murder of two little girls. One in France, in Obersteigen, the other in Germany, in Eggenfelden.

Pause

PAUL I just said the first thing that came into my head.

DIANE It all fits in with the facts.

Pause

PAUL What facts?

Pause

Well, that's rich, that is. I make up a load of completely incredible stories and it turns out some madman has gone and done just what I said. So the whole thing blows up in my face.

Pause

But of course, as it's me, no-one's going to believe me.

Pause

DIANE You're right. I don't believe you.

Pause

You were in Obersteigen at the time of the first disappearance. You were in Eggenfelden at the time of the second. Would you have me believe that's pure coincidence?

Pause

You told Catherine everything over the telephone. Why don't you tell me now?

PAUL I don't remember anything.

Pause

And then I don't know what Catherine told you. It's not necessarily what I told her.

DIANE It's exactly what happened to the two children.

PAUL You know what happened to them?

Pause

DIANE They found the body of the little girl in Eggenfelden.

PAUL Ah.

Pause

 Not the one in Obersteigen?

Pause

DIANE No.

PAUL Catherine might have heard about it on the radio.

DIANE The media haven't been informed yet.

PAUL Are you sure?

DIANE Don't take me for a fool.

Pause

 You talk about your mother, but it's you who won't face up to things. It's very tiresome.

PAUL You can go if you like. Don't let me keep you.

DIANE There are others waiting to take my place. But I think you're a lot better off with me.

Pause

PAUL And what if I were to go? What if I just left you here and walked out that door?

DIANE You wouldn't get very far.

Pause

You know that.

Pause

PAUL Are they still out there, the Gestapo?

DIANE Let's just stop this little game, shall we?

Pause

PAUL Let's stop everything.

DIANE No.

PAUL I'm tired. I don't feel well.

DIANE Too bad.

PAUL I've got a headache.

DIANE It'll pass.

PAUL Not for hours yet.

Pause

DIANE Do you often get them?

PAUL Quite often, yes.

DIANE And what do you do to calm them?

Pause

I mean, can I get you something? Aspirin? Codeine?

PAUL Nothing does any good.

Pause

DIANE But it doesn't stop you from talking?

PAUL No.

Pause

DIANE Help me. Please. I'm trying to understand. You're keeping me at a distance. Let me in. Trust me. Help me understand.

PAUL You're not trying to understand, you're trying to nail me, that's all. You want to send me back to prison.

Pause

DIANE What happened in Obersteigen? Where did you take the little girl?

PAUL Nowhere. Nothing happened. I've never been to Obersteigen.

DIANE Yes you have.

Pause

You can't bring yourself to admit it but you haven't really forgotten. It's haunting you. It's playing on your conscience.

Pause

Because you do have a conscience, don't you?

Pause

PAUL No. There's no such thing as conscience. We do things, just like that, for no reason. And with no consequence. It doesn't mean anything. The world has no meaning. There's no meaning anywhere. We live, a bit; we suffer, a lot; we meet a few people from time to time, but that's it. And then we die. It doesn't mean anything.

Pause

They try to make us believe in things but it's not true. It's just to keep us quiet. We can do what we like. There's no law. There's no justice. There's no salvation. It's just a question of who is the strongest.

Pause

I can do what I like.

DIANE And you like killing children?

Silence

PAUL I could kill you.

Pause

DIANE And why would you do that?

PAUL Because I can.

Pause

There's nobody here. If I put my hand over your mouth, to stop you from crying out, I'd have all the time I needed. I could strangle you. I could smother you. I could hit you over the head. I've got a razor in the bathroom. I've got some knives in the best Sheffield steel. I'd be spoiled for choice. There are so many things I could do.

DIANE You won't do any of them.

Pause

PAUL Who knows? My conscience won't stop me. The Good Lord won't intervene. I shan't be held back by the love of mankind.

DIANE No, you'd be held back by fear.

Pause

Because it's too risky. I might fight back. I'm not a child.

Pause

The little girl in Obersteigen didn't fight back, did she?

Pause

PAUL Do you really want to go on?

DIANE Of course.

Pause

PAUL When I was little I used to stay outside for hours. In the garden. Watching the birds. Sparrows mostly. But some prettier ones too. Blue tits,

blackbirds. Sometimes a thrush. People find them beautiful, thrushes. They sing. But they're wary. You have to be patient. I'm patient. I wait. I don't move. I stay perfectly still. The bird comes onto the lawn. It stops, cocks its head to look at me. It looks at me for a long time, with just the one eye, wondering. It's a matter of trust. I don't move. It comes a bit nearer, then freezes again. I hold my breath. It pokes around in the grass with its beak, looking for grubs, for worms. But it's really me it's interested in. It's curious now. It comes nearer again. I'm completely still, like a statue. It comes up. It's there, right by me. I thrust myself forward and grab it with both hands. I hold it tight. I can feel the beating of its heart through the feathers. I can feel its fear in my hands. It tries to flap its wings but it can't, I'm holding them down. I pull at it a bit, just to see what happens. It panics. I pull a bit harder. It must hurt. I want it to hurt. That'll teach it. It starts to peck at me, so I hold its body with one hand and take its head in the other. It's tiny, its head, I hold it between my thumb and forefinger. It can't get away, it's my prisoner. I can do what I like. I can make it suffer. I'm enjoying myself. I want to make this last. But it doesn't last. The bird tires, I get weary of it, the whole business begins to disgust me... So I twist its neck. That'll teach it. That'll teach it to come into my garden and sing in praise of creation.

Pause

Actually the one in Obersteigen did fight back a bit. Not at first but afterwards. When I got her out of the car I had to hit her. Then in the shed I had to tie her up. The rope was so tight her skin was all red. She soon realised there was no point in struggling. Still she couldn't help but recoil when I showed her my collection of knives. In the best Sheffield steel. Her neck was bleeding before I even -

DIANE Where is this shed?

PAUL Don't you like my story?

Pause

You kept on at me to tell you and now you interrupt! That's not really on, you know. Are you disgusted already? I've hardly started. I thought you were stronger than that. I thought you could take it. I'm disappointed in you.

DIANE Where is the shed?

PAUL Well hidden. Out of sight of the road. I'd spotted it some time before. Always handy, a shed in the middle of nowhere.

DIANE Where is it?

PAUL You won't find it on your own. I'd have to show you.

DIANE Alright, let's go.

PAUL What, now? I can't go now.

DIANE Why not?

PAUL I haven't finished my story.

Pause

DIANE I think I've got the gist of it. I already know pretty well what happened in Eggenfelden. I suppose it was much the same in Obersteigen?

PAUL With a number of interesting variations. You should listen carefully, you can put it all down in your notebook. It's a fascinating case, you know. You could write a book about it. You could lecture on it at university. You might even sell the story to the papers, make a bit of money. You can take it, surely. You have faith in mankind. You believe in love. Your mother and your children hate your guts but you can understand. You threw your husband out like a used condom as soon as you had no further use for him but you believe in human goodness. How long do you think you'll keep the new one? Where is he now? Have you left him alone with the kids? Are you sure that's a good idea? You trust him, is that it? But you trusted the one before, didn't you? For as long as it suited you. You only see what you want to see. You get on your high horse, then you go and do exactly what you want to do, just like everyone else. Is that what you call understanding? Is that what you mean by helping people? You know what? You're not just a fuckwit, you're a hypocrite too. How do you expect anyone to trust you?

Pause

DIANE That there. Ah, now I'm getting somewhere.

PAUL Will you leave that fucking thing alone?!

Paul grabs Diane's hand and forces her to let go of the piece of the puzzle she is holding. With his free hand he jumbles the other pieces and throws them to the floor. He keeps his hand over Diane's. She tries to withdraw it. He won't let her. They look at each other.

Diane puts her free hand over Paul's. They continue to look at each other.

Silence

DIANE Let me in, Paul.

Pause

PAUL I can't.

Pause

I can't.

He withdraws both hands and turns away.

Silence

DIANE Her name was Lucie.

Pause

PAUL What?

DIANE The little girl in Obersteigen. She had a name, Lucie. She was six years old.

Pause

She was a little girl. With her own life. Her own little stories, her own little worries. She wasn't very good at school, her mother told me. Her attention wandered. She'd lost a tooth a few days before. She had photos of the Spice Girls on the walls of her bedroom.

PAUL They're useless, the Spice Girls.

DIANE So what if they are!

Pause

She had her life before her. And you killed her. You terrorised her, you tortured her, and you killed her. She wasn't a fly, whose wings you were pulling off. She wasn't a bird. She was a little girl.

Pause

PAUL She didn't suffer.

DIANE Of course she suffered! What do you think? What were you trying to tell me back there if it wasn't the atrocious suffering you subjected her to?

PAUL No, that was just to provoke you. She didn't suffer.

DIANE Did you think of the mother?

PAUL What mother?

DIANE No, of course not. Believe it or not she has a mother. Who's been worrying herself sick since her child disappeared. Who's imagining the worst every moment of the day because she doesn't know, she doesn't know what's happened to her, she doesn't know who kidnapped her, or where he took her, what he did to her. She doesn't know but she can guess. She imagines the scene. And she'll go on imagining those scenes, worse and worse, like a nightmare that won't go away, until they show her the body and they tell her all the atrocities her daughter actually suffered.

PAUL No. She didn't suffer. You must tell her that. She didn't suffer.

DIANE The problem is she won't make do with a lie, you see. Unlike you she won't accept a fiction. She has to have the truth. In any case it can't be any worse than what she's been imagining at every moment, all day long and all through the long lonely nights. She has to see the corpse. She has to see the poor little mutilated body so that she can begin to grieve. It's very hard, but it's possible. At least she'll know.

Silence

PAUL But I'm just a child myself.

Pause

 It's too late now, is it, to help me?

Pause

DIANE I'm not going to lie to you. You're going to go back to prison. There's every chance you'll stay there for the rest of your life.

Pause

You've committed a very serious crime. Some people will never forgive you for it. You're going to inspire hate.

Pause

The papers will talk about you as a monster. They won't try to understand. People everywhere are going to wish you were dead.

Pause

PAUL I'm not a monster. I'm a vulture.

Pause

Do you know what a vulture is? It's just an eagle that hasn't quite come out right. One of God's little cock ups. And all his life he's told he's ugly, he's weak, he stinks, he's a failure, he'd better not show himself, he can only eat the leftovers. He'd like to taste fresh meat for once but all he gets is skin and bones. If ever he dares show up before they're ready to leave, the eagles scare him off and peck at him until he goes. So he hides away and he watches, he keeps a lookout. He develops a plan. While the eagle is busy filling its belly, the vulture makes himself scarce. He goes up in silence to the eagle's nest. Nobody sees him. He waits. He waits patiently for the moment when the female leaves the nest to join the male, the moment when he can attack the little eaglet, when he can take him up in his claws and bang him against the rock till his head bursts open and he can eat his brains. And then and only then he feels he's strong. He feels he's living rather than letting life wash over him. He knows at last what it's like to be an eagle.

Pause

DIANE We're going to go now.

Pause

PAUL Yes.

DIANE You can go into the bathroom and get dressed. I'll wait for you here. Then we'll go and meet the police in Obersteigen and you can show them where you hid the body.

PAUL Yes.

He gets up and goes into the bathroom. He stops in the doorway.

Will you come and see me, in prison?

Pause

DIANE Yes. Yes, if you want me to, I'll come and see you.

He goes out into the bathroom.

Silence

Diane takes out a mobile phone and punches a number.

Oui, ça y est, on va sortir. Il va nous montrer où il a caché le corps. ...
Donnez-moi deux minutes, j'arrive.

She rings off. She stays still for a moment, then punches another number.

Yes, it's me... Alright. A bit tired, but alright. How about you? ...
Tomorrow, I think. I'll get the train back... Has Nicholas done his
homework? He had an exercise to do for Madame Petit, for Thursday...
Yes, check, would you, you know what he's like... Listen... No, nothing...
No, don't go! Don't go... I need to hear the sound of your voice... I don't
know, say whatever you like... Hmm, yes... Yes, that's what I wanted to
hear... Me too... No, I really can't now but tomorrow... tomorrow, I
promise... Je t'aime aussi, bye.

She rings off and remains pensive. Paul has appeared in the doorway to the bathroom. He looks at her. She eventually realises he is there. She looks at him. He looks down.

DIANE Right. Are you ready?

PAUL Let's go.

They go to the door.

THE END