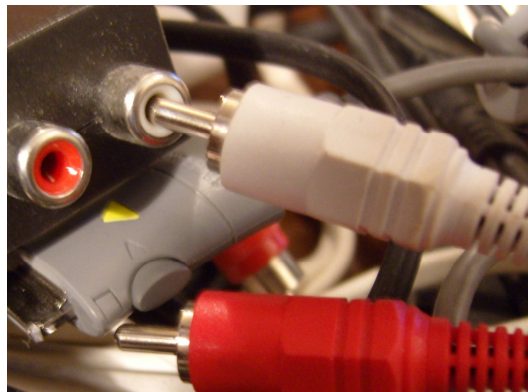


ONLY CONNECT

« only connect »



by

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CHARACTERS

ARIANE – *civil servant, divorced*

CLAIR – *film director, married to Robert*

ELLY – *works for an estate agent, single*

ROBERT – *psychotherapist, European representative of the “only connect” foundation*

FRANK – *Clair’s lover*

DANIEL – *a banker, divorced*

They are all between 35 and 55. Robert is probably the oldest. Frank and Elly are possibly the youngest.

The actors can be of any colour, race or nationality.

THE SET

The stage has several loosely defined playing areas which can change shape and size to suit the action. These areas may at certain times run into or cross over each other. Above this : several large video screens (or any other form of projection), showing now the screens of the various computers, now the texts of e-mails or text messages transmitted by telephone. They can also be used to situate or comment on the action.

A system of sliding screens could be imagined to shape the space and to mask or reveal different parts of the stage at different times (and perhaps to receive the projections above the action). Or not. Fluidity is a priority : the action should flow without interruption.

I envisage a constant flow of words and images, sometimes necessary to understand the scene (and therefore prominent), at other times superfluous (therefore more discreet), an excess of information – impossible to assimilate in its totality – but organized in such a way as to allow the audience to grasp essential information while watching the actors.

Minimal furniture, neutral in its aspect, for use in several different scenes : a big bed centre stage, tables and chairs, a couch. Portable computers.

CHRONOLOGY

Within any particular sequence there may be several simultaneous scenes as well as the texts above the action. (This does not make for easy reading on the page, for which I apologise. The exact timing will be decided in rehearsal, for the time being I can only give an approximate indication.)

The first sequences have a fairly precise time scale. Later time becomes more and more elastic and elliptical.

Act I

1.

The play starts with the actors on stage in darkness. The screens show images of London rooftops with an array of satellite dishes and antennae of all shapes and sizes reaching out to a deep blue sky, shining in the last rays of the dying sun. In this first sequence the characters seem to be coming back to life in the cool of the evening after a day of crushing heat. As night falls weariness sets in, as does a certain anxiety stemming from their solitude.

Lights up on Clair and Ariane talking to each other on the telephone. Neither sees the other.

CLAIR Sugar or spice ?

ARIANE Sweet to start with, but with sort of a salty aftertaste, not unpleasant. Not very thick, quite long, quite smooth, slightly curved – like a big banana really.

CLAIR Not as yellow, hopefully.

ARIANE No, the Chinaman was the week before. A bit on the small side...

CLAIR You make me laugh.

Pause

ARIANE I keep you amused.

CLAIR At least when you say a man has good taste, I can take your word for it. And all this thanks to internet ?

Lights up on the three men. Daniel and Frank are standing with their backs to the audience, Robert is facing the audience, seated, with a computer in front of him.

ARIANE It's like a great big sweet shop, you just go in and take your pick. Gets a bit sickening if you overdo it but if you can learn to be reasonable, you can indulge yourself from time to time and nobody's any the wiser.

CLAIR « Love.com » ?

Lights up on Elly at her computer. She is looking through pages of men on the website « love.com ».

ARIANE No no, that's for the little girls looking for prince charming. No, I go for the crude and rude sites, not for the squeamish but at least they're honest – no hypocrisy, no messing about, everybody knows what they're there for, and most of all for each single girl there are absolutely hundreds of men. The day after I signed up I had two hundred messages. Not two hundred Greek gods of course, there's a lot of dross but still, it's nice to know you're wanted.

CLAIR But how do you find the time to reply ?

ARIANE I don't. Just once in a while when I'm feeling tempted. During the school holidays when Lili is with me I stop completely. Don't even miss it. But during term time I don't see anything wrong in a little fun now and then when she's at her father's. She never sees them. Right now he's taken her to Italy for three weeks. Gives me a bit of a breather. At work they don't know what's hit them, I'm almost good-tempered.

CLAIR You never see them more than once ?

ARIANE Sometimes. I've got my favourites. But it's my decision. As soon as they start getting soppy, I drop them.

Daniel comes up to Elly and stands in front of her for a moment before she notices.

That's why I prefer them married. Less risk. Plus I rather like the secrecy. The transgression is all part of the fun.

CLAIR You behave just like a bloke.

ARIANE Maybe.

CLAIR I mean it's purely physical.

ARIANE No, I like a bit of conversation too. A bit of atmosphere. I'm not just looking for studs. That's why I've given up on the youngsters. 35 to 40, that's my target zone. Before that they've got nothing to say for themselves and afterwards they're looking for the woman to spend the rest of their lives with.

Robert opens a new document and writes: « In the age of the mobile phone, Romeo and Juliet can no longer screw up as stupidly as they do in Shakespeare's play. So how do they screw up now ? »

DANIEL Are you closed ?

ELLY Oh. No. Have a seat.

Elly closes the dating site and comes back to the site of the firm she works for, an estate agent's.

CLAIR Conversation but no feelings ?

ARIANE Seduction but no complications.

CLAIR I envy you.

ARIANE No, you don't.

Pause

You think my life is rich in sensation and completely devoid of emotion. You forget I have a daughter. That's enough for me in that department.

I've been married too, you know. The misunderstandings, the pain, the heart's comings and goings – been there, done that, don't need it any more.

ELLY How big ?

DANIEL I don't know. Normal. Four or five bedrooms ?

ELLY Yes ? Is it for a large family ?

DANIEL No. I'm on my own.

ELLY Yes ?

Pause

Have you a price in mind ?

DANIEL No idea. But it's not that important. I can afford it.

ELLY Yes. So... single. Like me.

Pause

DANIEL I was in structured finance. Got out while the going was good.

ELLY Yes... Well, I'm sure I've got something for you.

Robert reads his sentence about Romeo and Juliet.

ROBERT Hmm. Bit facile but what the fuck, it's for the telly. *(he presses a button on the phone on his desk:)* Myriam ? Has Mrs. Goldsmith cancelled again ? ... Good. She knows she still has to pay for the session ? Good. You can go now, I'm going to work on my text. Thank you, Myriam. See you tomorrow.

He connects to the internet and starts to surf a number of pornographic websites.

Frank comes home, takes off his jacket. He is wearing a holster with a gun in it that he takes off and places next to the computer.

ARIANE Of course, you've got everything. A home with a husband for company and conversation, and restaurants and rented rooms for your rodeos with Romeo. The perfect balance.

Frank opens his computer, looks at his e-mails, sighs. He looks at his watch, takes his phone, punches buttons.

CLAIR Maybe if each played his part, but they don't, they won't, I don't know what they want, they want what I can't give, they wear me out. I'm exhausted.

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ARIANE That's what comes of being greedy. See, of the two of us, I'm the more reasonable.

CLAIR You manage it all with clear-sighted efficiency like the high-ranking civil servant you are. I manage it like the artist I am, or rather I don't manage it at all, it's all a big mess, I'm not up to it.

Pause

ARIANE Are you alright ?

CLAIR I'll get by.

Frank logs into the website «love.com» and looks through the photos of women, occasionally stopping to look at the corresponding file.

ELLY What part of town ?

DANIEL Not South Ken.

A mobile phone beeps near Clair.

ARIANE Someone on the other line ?

CLAIR It's nothing, just a text message on the mobile.

TEXT Can't stand it, must see u tonight. Frank.

ARIANE Which one is it ?

Frank comes across Elly's page, under the pseudo « Onceuponatime ». He clicks on the option « flash ».

CLAIR It's nothing.

Clair sends a message on her mobile phone.

TEXT sorry, no can do

Elly's computer beeps.

TEXT A member of love.com has noticed you and wants to let you know with a « flash ». To consult « doctorsigmund »'s profile, click here.

Elly makes the message disappear.

DANIEL A problem ?

ELLY No no, just the computer up to its tricks.

ARIANE Are you going to choose ?

CLAIR Choose ?

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ARIANE Between the two of them.

Frank receives Clair's message. He starts tapping out a reply.

CLAIR I can't leave Robert.

ARIANE Why not ?

Robert visits a site of webcams for voyeurs.

CLAIR He needs me.

TEXT I WANT U TONITE !

ARIANE But do you need him ?

TEXT Or else it's all over between us ;-)

ELLY You don't like South Ken ?

DANIEL My wife's there.

ELLY Your wife ?

DANIEL I've left her the house. But I don't particularly want to keep bumping into her with...

ELLY Yes, I see. But you don't have any children ?

DANIEL No.

ELLY Neither do I.

Pause

Would you have liked to... ?

DANIEL Sorry ?

ELLY Sorry, none of my business.

DANIEL No, but well... Actually, my wife's ill, she can't... You don't want any ?

ELLY No, I do. Very much so. I have every intention. I've still got time. It's just that for the time being I haven't got the father.

DANIEL Ah, yes. That doesn't help.

Clair reads Frank's message on her phone and taps out a reply as she speaks.

Robert continues to surf pornographic websites.

CLAIR Robert has everything going for him. He's brilliant, seductive, manipulative, selfish. This book he's done on his American thing is really taking off. It's very commercial, it's a bit frowned upon by his colleagues, and admittedly he doesn't have much time left for his patients, but they're fighting to get onto his courses now, he's beginning to get a name for himself in the media, he's invited on all the talk shows... I've set up this documentary series, a six-parter, an hour each, on the evolution of the relationship between men and women, they've agreed to have him present it... But it's not enough, he wants everybody to love him. And to say so and to prove it all the time.

TEXT Your place at 8 – ½ hour no more

ARIANE Why have you never introduced me to him ?

CLAIR Who ?

ARIANE Your husband.

Clair sends an e-mail to Robert.

E-MAIL There's cold chicken in the fridge. I won't be back that late but eat without me. See you. Clair

CLAIR Wouldn't you rather meet Frank ?

ARIANE Do you want to get rid of him ?

Pause

CLAIR I don't know what I want. I'm making him suffer and I don't like it.

ARIANE We choose how we suffer. You've always been straight with him. It's not your fault.

ELLY You'll be lost all on your own in a big place like that.

Pause

DANIEL Yes, well, no children. And no wife. But friends. Some friends. Several of whom live abroad. So at least three bedrooms.

ELLY OK. I'll make a selection, I'll leave you to look it over and I'll be back in a minute. Here.

She fills in some options, passes him the computer and moves away. She consults the file « doctorsigmund » on her mobile phone. Frank's photo appears. Daniel looks at pictures of luxury apartments. Suddenly he stops and holds his head in his hands. Elly returns. He doesn't see her, begins to sob. She turns back, goes out and comes back in again, noisily.

ELLY Found your heart's desire ?

Daniel looks up.

DANIEL What ?

ELLY The flat. In there.

DANIEL I'm sorry. I must be tired. I'll come back.

He gets up and goes out.

ELLY Yes. Do.

Pause
 Wait !

Daniel turns to look at her.

 Give me your card. If something comes in, I'll give you a shout.

DANIEL Ah yes.

ELLY Thank you... Would you like mine ?

DANIEL No, why should I ? I mean, I have the agency's number.

ELLY Oh, alright. Yes but, if ever I'm not in, the others won't necessarily be...
Here, now you've got all you need.

DANIEL Good. Thank you. Goodbye.

ELLY Goodbye.

Robert is watching a naked girl, looking thoroughly bored, on a webcam site. He types « touch yourself » and the words appear on the screen. The girl gets up to read an invisible screen in the room where she is, but before she can react a message appears on Robert's screen : « You have mail. Do you wish to read it now ? Yes. No. » Robert clicks on « Yes » and discovers Clair's message (« There's cold chicken in the fridge »). He closes all the pornographic sites and comes back to the text he was writing.

Clair arrives at Frank's flat.

CLAIR I can't stay, I haven't got time.

FRANK I love you too.

CLAIR No emotional blackmail, please.

FRANK Tense ?

CLAIR I've got to sell the TV channel to Robert and Robert to the TV channel. I just want to direct films. I don't know why I have to go through all this shit.

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FRANK Because if you don't...

CLAIR Nobody else will, ok, I don't mind trying but I'm completely alone in this, do you understand ? Robert's no help at all.

FRANK That's only to be expected.

CLAIR Why ?

FRANK Because Robert is an asshole who only thinks of himself. Give me your feet.

CLAIR You're biased.

FRANK I may be biased but I've got magic fingers.

CLAIR That's true. That's good.

FRANK Does Robert massage your feet ?

CLAIR Let's change the subject, shall we ?

FRANK Do you know what I'm doing now ?

CLAIR You're relaxing me.

FRANK When I run my finger along here, I'm in direct contact with your spine. Your entire nervous system ends up in this little foot. And I can hold it in my hand and do what I like with it.

CLAIR Hmm... Why are you interested in Robert all of a sudden ?

FRANK I'm not interested in Robert. I don't give a fuck about Robert. I'm interested in you.

CLAIR Ooh yes, that feels good.

FRANK Leave him.

Pause

Leave him and come and live with me.

Pause

I do you good and he does you harm. It's a straightforward choice.

CLAIR He needs me. More than you.

FRANK But do you need him ? More than me ?

Pause

Here are your kidneys and here... Can you feel where I'm touching you now ?

CLAIR Not really.

FRANK Ah, there must be something blocking you somewhere... I'm going to have to explore up here.

CLAIR Oh yes. Explore, Frank, explore...

Elly is at home. She is clearing the table whilst eating a yoghurt and speaking on the phone.

ELLY Structured finance... It means he can afford a five bedroom penthouse in central London just for himself... or not just for himself if he's so inclined... No but he didn't really chat me up, not openly, it was fairly discreet. He's one of these reserved types, I could tell he was interested but that's about it really...

Daniel is eating, on his own, in silence.

No, of course not, mum, I'm not stupid. No, I left him the initiative, I think he feels at ease with me, he said he'd like to see me again, I'll let him do the talking, trust me...

She switches her computer on and signs in to love.com.

No. ... No, of course I didn't, I know that scares them off. Anyway we're not on to that yet, I've only just met him... Well, I'm telling you because, I don't know, I've got a good feeling about him, I think he's... sensitive – but I just mentioned it, it might never happen, it's not a problem, there are plenty more where he came from... Oh yes, plenty.

She clicks on « doctorsigmund », studies the photo of Frank, then clicks on « add to favourites ».

... Well, at the moment, there's this shrink running after me... No... Because you think I need one, is that it? ... Well, I just met him at a dinner party... No but he's not bad looking, I might let him ask me out, I'll see...

Clair finishes dressing, at Frank's flat.

FRANK Leaving already?

CLAIR I said half an hour.

FRANK You weren't complaining five minutes ago.

CLAIR I'm not complaining now.

FRANK But you're leaving.

CLAIR Yes, I'm leaving. I'm going back to my husband. That's the way it is. That's the way it's always been. If you can't stand it any more, perhaps we'd better stop.

Frank hits the table with his fist, making the computer and the gun vibrate, and Clair start.

FRANK STOP saying that.

CLAIR Do you have to leave that there ?

FRANK I have to have it for my work, you know that. And you know I'd never hurt you.

CLAIR I know but...

FRANK Kiss me.

They kiss.

And now leave.

She looks at him and leaves.

Ariane comes and sits in front of her computer.

ARIANE Lili ? Light out now please, it's late.

She switches the computer on.

Daniel is getting ready for bed, on his own.

Frank is seated in front of his computer. He consults Elly's file again. He clicks on « leave a message ».

Ariane signs in to the site « consentingadults ». She enters a password and reads on the homepage : « Good evening exquisitemoments, you have 37 unread messages ». She starts reading her mail : the first message contains a smiley and some abbreviated obscenities. She goes onto the next but then gets bored and clicks on a search engine : she enters the name Robert Berenson and looks at the results. The first link sends her to a site presenting Robert's book « Only Connect (or How To Be OK In Chaos) ». She reads a little, clicks on a photo of the author to enlarge it, then comes back to « consentingadults » and consults a file : under the pseudo « lephilosophedansleboudoir » she finds Robert's photo.

Robert is working on his text in his flat. Clair comes in and stands behind him. She caresses his neck.

CLAIR Going well ?

ROBERT Useless. Bullshit.

CLAIR They should like it then.

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ROBERT You're scared I won't go through with it, is that it ?

CLAIR Not at all. I trust you.

ROBERT You're a bad liar.

CLAIR Come to bed.

ROBERT Later.

Frank, alone, is watching television, zapping with the remote control. He seems to turn out the light on each character, one after the other.

Clair moves off, then turns to look at Robert. He goes on working in the blue light of the computer screen. Clair turns back and goes to bed.

Elly, alone at home, is tidying up and getting ready for bed.

Daniel thinks for a moment, takes the telephone, hesitates, punches a number.

DANIEL Yes, it's me... No, just to see how you are... I'm fine, fine, I've decided to take a bit of time off before I um – I'm looking for a flat, I'm going to do a – actually, no, I'm not... oh, am I bothering you ? ... Ah, yes, well, no matter, there was nothing er... Right, right, good, ok, bye.

He hangs up.

Elly is about to go to bed when her computer beeps. She runs over to look. The screen shows « doctorsigmund has left you a message ».

Ariane switches her computer off with a sigh.

Frank turns off his television.

BLACK

2.

Autumn. Morning. Elly is getting ready for work. She takes Daniel's card out and looks at it.

ELLY Bloody idiot, why doesn't he ring ?

Frank comes home, takes off his jacket and puts his gun down beside the computer. He switches the computer on.

Lights on Ariane lying on a couch.

ARIANE I'm a member of this sort of sect. And when you're a member of this sect, and you're a woman, you have to obey any man who's in it. You don't have any choice. You have to submit to their will, you can't resist in any way. The men don't even have to speak, you just recognize them

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straightaway and you know instinctively what they want. It's a secret society, nobody else knows about it. The members go about in the world and mix with normal people who have no idea of any of this...

At the same time as Ariane is speaking, Elly contacts Frank through a chat.

ELLY *hello*

FRANK *hi*

ELLY *how r u ?*

FRANK *knackered*

ELLY *sleep badly ?*

FRANK *just back from work*

ELLY *how come ?*

FRANK *Shit, who is this one anyway ?*

ARIANE *I feel funny telling you this.*

Lights on Robert sitting behind her. She turns to look at him.

ROBERT *Go on.*

ARIANE *I'm not embarrassing you ?*

He gestures to her to turn round.

Alright, if you insist...

The exchange between Frank and Elly continues on the screens between Frank's spoken remark (« Shit... ») and the exchange between Ariane and Robert ending with « if you insist ».

FRANK *what u doing ?*

ELLY *I was in the bathroom*

FRANK *naked ?*

ELLY *towel on my hair*

FRANK *put ur cam on*

ELLY *naughty – off to work. Bye bye Bobby.*

FRANK *Bobby ? Oh yeah... Oy oy oy.*

Robert is listening to Ariane.

ARIANE ... I'm at this cocktail at this swish hotel with the minister and all the gang. There's a delegation in from Taiwan, we've been negotiating for months, we've nearly reached an agreement, we're giving them the red carpet treatment to make sure we pull it off. The minister's in his Sunday best, I'm in my Chanel, everyone's a bit tense, a bit uptight, nobody dares touch the petits fours before the Taiwanese arrive.

Daniel is having his breakfast. Elly phones. He answers.

DANIEL Hello ?

ELLY Yes, hello, it's Elly from Galveston Properties.

DANIEL Hello.

ELLY How are you ? Are you well ?

DANIEL I'm alright, thank you.

ELLY You do remember me ?

DANIEL Er, well, I've been to several estate agents...

ELLY I've got this fantastic product just come in, I immediately thought of you.

DANIEL Ah ?

ELLY Three bedroom penthouse, two bathrooms, jacuzzi, luminous living space, facing south, big bay windows looking out onto the Thames, sound good ?

DANIEL Maybe...

ELLY Are you free today ?

DANIEL Well, actually I'm starting a...

ELLY Best not to waste any time, we're not the only ones on this.

ARIANE I'm not boring you I hope ?

Ariane is still on the couch. Robert is listening, absently fingering his mobile phone.

ARIANE ... the minister turns on the charm, they're loving it. We remind them why they're there, they agree to everything, everything's going as planned. Except that in their delegation is a short squat man, very ugly, keeping slightly apart from the others, not saying anything. I haven't been introduced, I don't know what he's doing there, maybe he's a body guard, I don't know. But at a certain moment I can feel him looking at me. And I know. Straight away. It's immediately clear to me that this

man is a member of the sect. I leave the minister behind and go to him. He looks me up and down without a word. I know what he wants, I can feel his desire, I have to give in to his will. So right there in front of the minister, the delegation from Taiwan and my colleagues from the ministry, I kneel down before the little man, I undo his flies, I take his cock out and give him a blow job.

She turns to look at him. He gestures to her to turn round.

Shall I stop there or do you want the sordid details ?

Clair is setting up a camera on a tripod. She receives a text message :

*TEXT Stuck with a patient. Film them without me. I'll speak afterwards.
 Robert*

ARIANE Alright. Quite accomplished, the blow job, though I say so myself. But naturally that's not enough. He pulls me up by my arms, turns me round, hikes up my skirt, pulls down my knickers and takes me from behind. People are looking on without saying anything. I'm bent over the table with my bum in the air and my tits crushing down on the foie gras on toast and the strawberry tarts. Suddenly he thrusts a little harder, throws himself over me with a sort of neighing sound and the table collapses under me. We fall flat on the floor with the food oozing and dripping all over. After he's come, he sits on my back and takes me round the room on all fours, offering my behind to anyone who's interested. The people from the ministry don't say anything. Some of them look a bit embarrassed but the last thing they want is for the deal to fall through so they fuck me anyway, with varying levels of enthusiasm. I'm completely humiliated, I'm devastated, and scarlet with shame but I have orgasm after orgasm, I come like I've never come before.

Pause

So there you are. Is there a cure for it, doctor ?

Robert shifts in his chair. She turns to look at him.

Daniel is looking into Clair's camera.

DANIEL I just signed up because the firm owed me a training course and I didn't want to let them save the money.

Pause

CLAIR Is that all?

DANIEL It's part of the golden handshake I negotiated with them... What else do you want me to say ?

CLAIR You have to sell yourself.

DANIEL Why ?

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CLAIR You each present yourself as you see fit. But the idea is, we show it to the others and then make up the groups according to your affinities. If you don't make the others want to be with you, you'll end up with the least interesting people.

DANIEL What about you ? You're just here to film us ?

CLAIR Robert Berenson will be here this afternoon. He'll explain the structure of the course and how the groups work... So ?

DANIEL I don't see what else I can say.

CLAIR Alright, forget the camera for now. Tell me about yourself.

ROBERT Come and sit here in front of me.

She does so.

ARIANE Have I done something wrong ?

ROBERT *(on the phone)* Myriam, you can take your lunch break now, thank you.
(to Ariane) I'm not going to continue with the therapy.

Pause

ARIANA Am I a desperate case ?

ROBERT Here's the name of a colleague who's no doubt better qualified to help you.

Pause

ARIANE Did I shock you ?

ROBERT Of course not.

ARIANE Am I too complicated for you ?

ROBERT Not at all.

Pause

The problem is not you. It's me.

Pause

I have a lot of other activities now, I have less and less time to offer my patients.

Pause

But to tell the truth that's not really the problem either.

Pause

The problem is the role I have to play in connection with you. With you I don't see myself in the role of therapist.

ARIANE No ?

ROBERT With you I see myself more as... a member of your sect.

Pause

ARIANE I knew it.

ROBERT Then you know what you have to do.

DANIEL You know, I've never really felt the need to open up to others. I've always been pretty much self-sufficient. I realise now that I'm not like most other people. People around me are all more or less neurotic, traumatised by their childhood and trying to compensate, looking for something they're missing. They may be aggressive, or seductive, or whatever, but they're all trying to fill a hole, to find something that they've always lacked. That's what makes them dynamic. That's what makes them reach out to others. I had a happy childhood. There was nothing I lacked. When I look around me, I find I'm the most stable person I know. But consequently I'm not dynamic. Nothing makes me reach out to others, I wait for them to come to me. They've always come, up until now. My parents, my teachers, my bosses, I've always been part of a pretty solid structure. I get on with everyone. I don't inspire hatred. At the most a bit of jealousy. But they come to me less and less. It must be my age. I've got some bad habits. Without meaning to, I've become isolated. And with my divorce I finally realised how alone I am.

Pause

CLAIR You see : you're not as shy as all that.

Frank takes his phone and calls a memorised number.

DANIEL You've asked me questions. But you haven't told me anything about yourself.

CLAIR I'm not doing the course.

Clair's phone rings.

DANIEL Do you know this Berenson guy well ?

CLAIR Excuse me.

She moves away and answers.

CLAIR I can't speak now.

FRANK Come over. I want you.

Pause

CLAIR I can't. I'm working.

FRANK Come.

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FRANK I can't live without you any more.

Pause

Come.

CLAIR I can't. I can't.

She hangs up.

FRANK Bitch.

CLAIR Excuse me.

DANIEL You're welcome. And thank you.

CLAIR What for ?

Ariane is getting dressed. Robert is watching.

ARIANE Thank you, doctor. That's therapy enough for me.

Pause

You're not saying anything.

Pause

What's the matter ?

ROBERT It stops there, does it ? That's enough for you ? One more for your collection and on to the next one ?

ARIANE I didn't say that.

Pause

Do you want to see me again ?

DANIEL Have you got other people to film now ?

CLAIR No, that's it. We start again at half past two.

DANIEL Would you like... ? I mean, what would you say to... ?

CLAIR He's my husband.

DANIEL On the phone ?

CLAIR No. Robert Berenson. I'm his wife.

DANIEL Ah, yes, I see. Yes, please excuse me. No but anyway, I was forgetting, I have an appointment.

CLAIR Try internet.

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DANIEL Pardon ?

ARIANE You mustn't get stuck on me.

ROBERT No risk of that.

ARIANE I won't tie myself down. I need my freedom.

ROBERT We'll see about that.

ARIANE What does that mean ?

CLAIR I have a friend who meets men like that. It's just a game, it's not to be taken seriously, but if you want my opinion it might not do you any harm to lighten up a little. « Consentingadults.com », try it, and let me know how it goes.

DANIEL You mean you think we'll see each other again?

ROBERT We could leave it as it is. It would be perfectly insignificant.

ARIANE But we're not going to.

ROBERT Aren't we ?

ARIANE Kiss me.

ROBERT No.

Elly is waiting for Daniel in the penthouse. He arrives breathless.

ELLY Look.

DANIEL What ?

ELLY Well, not at me – the flat.

ROBERT I don't need you.

ARIANE Just as well. I'd run a mile.

ROBERT I'm not asking anything of you.

ELLY I think they'd come down a little.

DANIEL Yes ?

ELLY You don't seem all that keen.

DANIEL Yes I am.

ONLY CONNECT

ARIANE I know you're married. You know I see other men. I suggest we play it straight. No stories. We tell each other everything. Alright ?

Pause

You have a hell of an advantage over me. I've told you my secrets. You haven't told me anything. I don't know who you are.

ROBERT Are you interested ?

ELLY You don't look it.

DANIEL No really, I'm interested. I'll buy it.

ELLY Oh but that's great ! I'm so happy for you.

DANIEL Why ?

ELLY Well because... Right, come on, there's a pub downstairs, I'll buy you a drink to celebrate.

DANIEL You're very kind but I have to get back to my course.

ELLY Ah.

ARIANE The minister is waiting.

ROBERT Let him wait.

ARIANE Weren't you going too ?

Pause

I've just got dressed.

Pause

Alright...

ELLY Is it going well ?

DANIEL What ?

ELLY The course ?

DANIEL It's rather surprising. I've just told the story of my life to a stranger.

ELLY A stranger ?

DANIEL This woman. She filmed me and it's going to be shown to all the others.

ELLY She tricked you ?

DANIEL No. It's the same for everyone. No, she was just... She listened. I think she was sincere.

ELLY I'd be careful if I were you.

ONLY CONNECT

DANIEL A remarkable woman.

ROBERT Anna...

ARIANE I know what you want...

ROBERT I didn't say anything.

ARIANE Your eyes are saying it. It's not that I don't want to but...

ROBERT I want your body. That's all.

ARIANE You want my body. But that's not all. Your eyes are sad.

They kiss.

ROBERT Now fuck off.

ELLY You haven't got time to come by the agency then ?

DANIEL Not now. This evening.

ELLY I don't think I'll be there this evening.

DIDIE Ah. But surely someone will ?

ELLY Surely.

Robert is speaking to the participants on his course, including Daniel. Clair is filming him.

ROBERT « Only Connect » - two words meaning what exactly ? An international foundation, originating from the U.S., which I represent here in Europe and whose objective is to improve companies' internal and external communication. So far I don't think I've told you anything you didn't know. But it's much more than that.

During Robert's speech, Elly and Frank communicate via the chat.

ELLY Have u met many girls like this ?

FRANK Some

ELLY But u haven't found the perfect fit

FRANK I'm an awkward size

ROBERT Vernon Fitzpatrick borrowed those two words from E.M. Forster, the English novelist from the early twentieth century. What Vernon Fitzpatrick said – and it was a revolutionary idea in its time – is valid for our private life as well as in our work : a transaction can be seen as successful from both sides. It works better if everyone gets what they

ONLY CONNECT

want. It's not a question of dependence or independence, what we're aiming at is interdependence.

ELLY *I'm very disappointed with this site. Lots of liars.*

FRANK *No ?*

ELLY *They hide behind their screen and think they can just say anything. They all say they're cultured and refined and when u meet them they only want one thing.*

ROBERT I think I'm closer to Forster when I say that we must also – and first of all – make connections within ourselves. It's not always easy but let's try to start by connecting our head and our heart – and then we'll be ready to connect with others.

ELLY *I'm not here for a one-night stand. I'm looking for a lasting relationship.*

FRANK *Me too.*

ROBERT The Americans understand this message. In Europe there is resistance. I see you smiling : you recognize that old world scepticism we all know and love, which we like to think of as clear-eyed realism but which all too often is basically just a fear of the unknown.

ELLY *Apparently lots of men are scared of me.*

ROBERT You at least have got past that stage : you're here today to see for yourselves what it's all about. That might not look like much to you but it's a big step. In a society that is timid, unadventurous and closed in on itself, you could be seen as pioneers, or even rebels. You've taken that first step, and we're going to help you take the next.

ELLY *I'm an honest person. I speak it like it is. Not everybody likes that.*

FRANK Yes love, that's all very well but I'm beginning to get a tiny bit bored here.

FRANK *When can we meet ?*

ROBERT You've held out your hand. We're going to take that hand in ours, accept the contact, facilitate an exchange. That's what's called a connection.

Daniel looks at Clair. She smiles.

Elly is talking on the phone at home.

ELLY We speak the same language, if you know what I mean. I think he's honest... No but I'm beginning to know my way around. I can spot the sickos.

Daniel goes to the « consentingadults » site and looks at the files of women.

By the way don't tell mum I do it through internet, no point in scaring her, she wouldn't understand...

Frank walks up and down in his flat, takes out his phone, looks at it, puts it back in his pocket.

Clair eats an apple, absently. She sighs.

Well, I let them talk, I draw them out, sooner or later they give themselves away – is that Nicolas I can hear in the background ? He's so cute... What does he want ? ...

Daniel stops at Ariane's file under the pseudo « exquisitemoments ».

What ? No no, not the banker, the shrink. I haven't told you about the banker – must have got that from mum...

Robert is sitting at his computer. He thinks, then writes.

TEXT

Sex has become not only a consumer product like any other, but also the primary sales argument for all the other products they are flogging us – even washing machines and insurance policies. We are subjected to constant stimulation. Our libidos are endlessly titillated to the point where our appetites can never be satisfied. We are all perpetually hungry and nevertheless overfed. Desire has become a drug that we can't do without.

Daniel clicks on « Leave her a message ».

No, nothing happened, for a moment I thought it might, but he was impossible, completely clammed up, never had anything to say... As I talk all the time it took me a while to realise but there was something seriously wrong with him, he was autistic if you ask me, a real zombie. I don't mind making an effort but when you're stuck opposite a bloke who never speaks what do you do ? Well, I can tell you : you get bored out of your skull.

Ariane, alone at home, remains lost in thought a moment, then goes and gets Robert's book and starts to read.

So that leaves the shrink. At least he talks to me. He's not like I expected, he makes me laugh... Well, I might. What would you do if you were me ?

Frank takes his gun, puts it in its holster, puts his jacket on and goes out.

BLACK

Act II

Ariane is with Robert, in her flat.

ARIANE When I left my husband, all my girlfriends out there thought I was mad. I came back here with my child in my arms. I had nothing. I had to find a job, a flat, a school, everything. I had my qualifications but I'd lost time. I had to go back to zero. So I did. I don't regret it.

Pause

But emotionally I screwed up. I thought I needed a man in the house, I threw myself into a relationship. A disaster. It didn't last long but it took me years to get over it. I'd lost belief in myself, he'd destroyed my confidence.

ROBERT Who was he ?

ARIANE An asshole.

Pause

I haven't solved my problem with marriage. Marriage doesn't work. It can't work. I dream of it sometimes but I don't have any expectations any more. If you don't mind compromise, lies and hypocrisy, you can get by. But I hate all that...

She takes a piece of paper, writes on it, hands it to Robert.

Here. My real telephone number. The other is a card I use for the site, I'm not going to renew it.

Pause

I have a confession to make. Two lies. I'm four years older than it says on the site. And Anna is not my real name. I'm not ashamed of what I do but I'd rather they didn't know about it at the ministry... In real life –

ROBERT Your name is Ariane. I saw it on your mail... Does this mean I'm part of your real life ?

Pause

Another step into the labyrinth of your intimacy. Will I ever find the way out ?

Pause

Ariane's pretty too. But I prefer Anna. It's very sensual, Anna. And perfectly symmetrical. Soft on the outside but hard in the centre. It's like you : fragile and tough at the same time. Like a fantasy of femininity. It's the name Freud gave to his daughter.

Pause

ARIANE We've seen a lot of each other recently.

Pause

A bit too much perhaps, don't you think ?

Pause

Clair hasn't said anything ?

ONLY CONNECT

ROBERT Are you getting bored ?

Pause

ARIANE On the contrary.

ROBERT Why tell me all this if you want us to stop ?

ARIANE I didn't say I wanted us to stop.

ROBERT Why deprive ourselves ? It's necessarily ephemeral. It's not as if you're capable of loving anyone. It's just a bit of fun.

Pause

ARIANE You scare me when you look at me like that.

ROBERT Like what ?

ARIANE Like that.

Pause

ROBERT What are you scared of ?

ARIANE You. Me. It's too much.

Pause

Why do you say I'm incapable of loving anyone ?

ROBERT Why do you say it's too much ?

Pause

ARIANE I can't stand the idea of being dependent on someone.

ROBERT You're not.

Pause

Financially you make a very good living, you don't need me. Socially you've got your daughter, your mother, your friends. Sexually you're not dependent. You've got your lovers. Haven't you ?

ARIANE Yes. Well, in theory. Less.

ROBERT Less ?

ARIANE Yes, less.

Pause

Do you want me to stop ?

ROBERT I'm not asking anything of you.

ONLY CONNECT

Pause

ARIANE If you're asking me, I'll stop.

ROBERT I'm not asking anything.

ARIANE Why ?

ROBERT Why ?

ARIANE Why are you not asking anything of me ?

ROBERT Why are you scared of becoming dependent ?

Pause

ARIANE I can't stand it. Don't ask me why. If ever I feel I'm becoming dependent I'll leave you like a shot.

Pause

ROBERT Why do you never mention your father ?

Pause

You often talk about your mother. You talk about your childhood, your adolescence, your first boyfriends. You talk about your marriage, your daughter, your husband, your lovers. You have no problem talking about all that but you've never said a word about your father.

ARIANE I thought with me you didn't see yourself as a therapist ?

Pause

Do you think you can explain everything with a few squalid revelations about my childhood ? What right have you to judge me ? I hate shrinks. You're so full of yourselves, so arrogant, so pretentious... You have no respect.

Silence

We've seen a lot of each other recently. A bit too much perhaps ? Don't you think ?

ROBERT Are you free for the weekend after next ?

Pause

ARIANE I'll make myself free.

Frank arrives in a café and sits at a table. He receives a text message on his mobile phone.

TEXT Client late. With u in 10-15 mins. Elly

Frank makes a call and starts reading a newspaper.

Robert and Clair are at home, looking at the computer. Robert is drinking whisky. Clair's mobile rings. She glances at it and turns it off.

On the screen, the video made by Clair during Robert's course is being fast-forwarded.

ROBERT Further on.

CLAIR You don't think you might be just a little bit paranoid ? Who would pay someone to infiltrate your course ?

ROBERT There, stop. That's him.

CLAIR Him ? He was a nice guy.

ROBERT He's poisonous. Listen to him.

Daniel's presentation filmed by Clair appears on the screen. Robert and Clair watch on the computer.

DANIEL *My name is Daniel and I work in – no, sorry but I feel like I'm in Alcoholics Anonymous. I'm not ashamed, you know. I'm a banker and I'm not going to apologise for it.*

On the soundtrack we hear a little laugh from Clair and on the screen Daniel smiles at her. Robert looks at Clair who has taken a phone and punched a number.

CLAIR *(over Daniel's speech)* That reminds me...

ROBERT *(To Clair, over Daniel's speech)* Listen, listen to him...

Ariane answers the phone.

ARIANE Yes ?

DANIEL *... I just wanted to make some progress in... communication. I could have done something else, I suppose, but I chose this.*

CLAIR *(To Robert, over Daniel's speech)* He's harmless. *(To the phone)* Am I disturbing you ?

DANIEL *I wanted to... I think I'm in control of a lot of things – figures, sums, risks, mathematics, economics, I'm at home with all that...*

ARIANE No no.

CLAIR I was just thinking of you, so...

ARIANE Ah ?

DANIEL *But if there's one thing I'm less in control of it's people. Human beings. I think sometimes I miss out on... I don't even see what's happening.*

ONLY CONNECT

CLAIR I'm here with Robert, we're looking at a video I did for his course, there's this guy, Robert can't stand the sight of him but I found him rather touching –

ROBERT Touching ? Him ?

DANIEL *So for my work I said to myself: chaos management, coaching, team building, why not ? And even...*

ARIANE What did Robert say ?

CLAIR ... Oh, he says this guy's group has grown very critical, he thinks they're getting at him... he didn't contact you ?

ARIANE Who ?

CLAIR No, because I don't know why, speaking to him, I thought of you, I mentioned that website you told me about.

DANIEL *Even for myself...*

ARIANE You told Robert ?

ROBERT Who are you talking to ?

DANIEL *Well, as I'm supposed to talk about me... my life is not so bad...*

ROBERT Prat.

CLAIR No, not Robert, this guy on his course, I told him about you. He's a banker, I think, rather sweet, he didn't contact you ?

DIDER *I want for nothing – well, I mean materially. My wife left me last year.*

ROBERT Good for her.

DANIEL *... after 17 years. It's not the end of the world but it came as a bit of a shock. Not that I was still in love with her or anything.*

ARIANE I don't really go on that site any more.

DANIEL *She was ill. She had been for years.*

CLAIR What's up ?

DANIEL *That was why I couldn't leave her myself. I can't really say I was satisfied. I denied myself a lot of things but well, that's not such a big deal either.*

ARIANE I've been meaning to tell you but... I think I've done something stupid.

ONLY CONNECT

DANIEL *I made the best of a bad job. The way you do. I wasn't complaining. And then she left me. For her doctor...*

Robert laughs out loud.

CLAIR *(low, to Robert, over Daniel's speech)* No but it's interesting, what he says afterwards.

DANIEL *I don't hold a grudge. Against her, I mean. The doctor is another matter.*

ARIANE I don't quite know what I think.

DANIEL *But anyway now I'm free. Free to start again. Everything. I think that things are going to change for me now.*

CLAIR And it's a man that's...

DANIEL *What I'd like really is to learn how to let go. To be in my life instead of above it. Outside of it. Not to control everything any more. To reach out to others. Open up to people.*

CLAIR You don't mean to tell me you're in love ?

ARIANE No, I... I don't know. I'm not indifferent.

CLAIR Who is it ?

DANIEL *It's not going to happen overnight but I'd like to start moving in that direction. So this course has come just at the right time...*

ARIANE It's complicated.

CLAIR If you'd told me it was simple I wouldn't have believed you, so...

DANIEL *You know, I've never really felt the need to open up to people. I've always been pretty much self-sufficient. I realise now that I'm not like most other people.*

Robert stops the video.

ROBERT Who does that asshole think he is ?

ARIANE Is that Robert ?

CLAIR Yes, don't pay any attention, he's in a bad mood, he's not saying anything interesting. Go on, tell me about it.

Pause

ARIANE I can't talk about it now, I'll ring back later.

CLAIR Are you alright ? Do you want to meet up ?

ARIANE I'm alright.

They hang up.

ROBERT Who was that ?

CLAIR A girlfriend. You don't know her.

Ariane walks up and down in her flat with no apparent objective. She stops, sits down, on the verge of tears. She picks up her phone, hesitates, puts it down again. She switches on her computer, logs in to « consentingadults », consults her messages. She discovers Daniel's, and looks at his file which appears under the pseudo « onlyconnect ».

Elly comes up to Frank sitting in the café.

ELLY Is it you ?

FRANK Looks like it.

ELLY The photo was a bit fuzzy.

FRANK True to the original then.

ELLY You recognized me ?

FRANK No. I've no idea who you are. But well, now you've engaged me in conversation...

Pause

Joke. I'm not to be taken seriously, you'll have to get used to it.

ELLY You're not at all how I imagined a psychiatrist.

FRANK I left the couch at home. Bit heavy to lug about.

Lights up on Daniel, seated.

DANIEL I always avoided getting involved. Or perhaps I'm just not capable of it. I preferred to use call girls. Goes with the job, I suppose : risk minimisation. They're pretty, they do what you ask, they don't make scenes. It was all very tidy. And I felt I was being faithful to my wife. An ordered life. Everything in its place. But it was rotting from the inside. I was like a ghost. I didn't realise but I'd disappeared. I was an empty shell. Even at work, with my wife, anywhere, I wasn't there. And then one day I went on this training course, for work – well, I'm still on it actually, we work in groups, once a week –, I started off thinking it was bullshit but really it's just common sense. And at least it made me think a bit. So I thought a bit. And I realised I wasn't connecting. Neither with individuals nor with the world at large. Not through work, not through conversation, not through sex. I was lost. So I said to myself it's time for a change.

Lights up on Ariane, seated at a table opposite Daniel.

ARIANE I don't know how you ended up on that website. You're not typical.

DANIEL What's typical ?

ARIANE I'd more or less decided not to meet anyone else, but your message intrigued me. So I thought why not ?

Pause

And here we are.

DANIEL And I'm very glad to be here.

ELLY It's a bit awkward, meeting like this, isn't it ? A bit strange. Well, I think so anyway. I haven't had much luck, with internet. Mind you, I never had much luck before either. Married men, liars, machos, hopeless cases. I'm wary now. That's why I didn't want to meet you straight away. Nothing personal, it's just that I prefer to chat a bit first, see what I'm getting into. You seemed nice, so... You've got a sense of humour – that's good. I like a sense of humour in a man. Well, I look at his appearance as well, obviously, I'm not saying I don't. You look very fit, do you do a lot of sport ? I do a lot of sport. It'd be good if we could go to the gym together, don't you think ? I like people who take care of their bodies. Well, it's important, isn't it ? I don't like men who let themselves go. I had a bloke once who never did any exercise. Worked in an office, took the tube, watched telly all evening. Never did anything else. Didn't feel like it. I ended up not letting him touch me. Didn't feel like it. Not bad looking but no life in him. I don't know how I put up with him so long. I don't like it when they've got no life in them. Apart from him I've always been with men who did a lot of sport. I was with a rugby player once. Big bloke. Well built. But a brain the size of a pea. I'm no intellectual but I do like men who have something to say. Or at least something other than the next match or the one they've just played. He was really really stupid. And the welsh accent just made it worse. I like your voice. It's sort of sensual. Sometimes you see a bloke, he's well dressed, seductive and all that, and then as soon as he opens his mouth it's just impossible. I'm very choosy with voices. But I like yours. I like deep voices. It's reassuring. I need to be reassured from time to time. I'm a bit anxious, I don't know if you've noticed. That's why I talk all the time. I'm scared of silence. I'm scared of lots of things. I'm a bit of a scaredy cat. So I talk all the time, all the time, even if I've got nothing to say. I expect it's getting on your nerves ? Is it ? If I'm getting on your nerves you must tell me, don't be shy, all my boyfriends always end up telling me to shut it, otherwise they can't get a w – oh !

He kisses her.

DANIEL I get fits of tears sometimes. For no reason. I think something inside me has melted. It makes for a lot of water. I think I'd put my heart in the freezer. And now I've turned the power off.

Pause

ARIANE You're a funny guy.

DANIEL And you're a very beautiful woman.

Frank and Elly are in bed.

ELLY You certainly know how to shut me up.

FRANK I know how to make you scream too.

ELLY Ooh look at him, like the cat that got the cream.

FRANK What about you ? Aren't you pleased too ?

ELLY Very.

ARIANE Do you know you're very charming ?

DANIEL No, I didn't know that.

Pause

ARIANE Was it you that asked for the divorce ? Or her ?

DANIEL Her.

ARIANE What does she know that I don't ?

DANIEL She knows my inner poverty.

ARIANE Oh well, that's not too much of a problem, for my purposes.

Pause

I don't believe in your inner poverty.

Pause

You're very moving.

DANIEL I'm very awkward. I'm anything but a seducer. But I'm surprised too.

ARIANE Surprised ?

DANIEL By this. You. I was expecting something rather exciting, sensual, but no more. Like with my call girls, only cheaper. I wasn't at all expecting this sort of... understanding.

ARIANE Yes, I feel good too.

Frank gets up and gets dressed.

ELLY Are we going to do this again ?

Frank looks at his mobile phone and finds a message.

TEXT *Not poss tonite. Sorry. Clair.*

FRANK Might well do.

ELLY I told you I was looking for a lasting relationship. I'm not in it just for one night stands.

FRANK I think I've got the message.

He comes back to her and kisses her.

Robert is putting his shoes on, in Ariane's flat. She comes up to him and kisses him.

ROBERT Who was it ?

ARIANE What ?

ROBERT Your phone rang.

ARIANE Oh that... It was nothing.

ROBERT Nothing ?

ARIANE Yes.

ROBERT You mean nobody.

AIANE What ?

ROBERT Your phone rang but there was nobody there. Is that it ?

ARIANE That's it.

ROBERT I thought you weren't going to renew the card.

ARIANE I haven't renewed it.

ROBERT And yet it rang. Did you answer it ?

Pause

May have been a wrong number.

Pause

No ?

ARIANE May have been.

Daniel is with Elly at the estate agent's.

DANIEL But if the sale doesn't go through they get an apartment that's been decorated at my expense. The risk is all on my side. What's their problem ?

ELLY You weren't very warm towards them.

A beep is heard. Daniel consults his phone.

TEXT *Thinking of you. Anna*

ELLY A problem ?

DANIEL On the contrary.

Pause

Do you think I'm cold ?

ELLY Me ?

DANIEL It's the impression I seem to make. I don't mean to. I don't even realise. With you, for example, first of all I thought you rather liked me. I don't know why. And then I got the impression that I'd made you angry. I don't know how.

ELLY Me, angry ? Not at all.

DANIEL No ? Well, good.

Pause

ELLY You've changed.

DANIEL I'm trying.

Pause

You've changed too. You're more relaxed.

ELLY Am I ? Well, I know what that's down to : it's love.

DANIEL Ah. Well it suits you.

ELLY Thank you. It's too late now but thank you anyway.

DANIEL Too late for what ?

Pause

ELLY I'll try and convince them for the decorating.

Robert is sitting in Ariane's flat. Ariane is getting ready to leave.

ARIANE I'm late. You too, no ?

Daniel is writing an e-mail.

E-MAIL *Your message filled me with a feeling of immense, disproportionate, unreasonable joy. I'd like to see you again. I'd like to spend some time with you. I'd like to pick up our conversation where we left off, talk about me, listen to you. I'd like to go on finding out about you. I'd like to find out about myself. I'd like you to talk about your life, your childhood, your loves, your family, your friends, your lovers. I'd like to spend hours listening to you, caressing you, kissing you. I'd like to make love to you.*

ROBERT I'm fed up with always being in a hurry.

Pause

Aren't you ?

ARIANE Aren't I what ?

ROBERT Don't you wish we had a bit more time together ?

Pause

ARIANE Hurry up, I've got to go.

She goes to the door. Her computer beeps, signalling the reception of an e-mail. Robert looks at her. She stays by the door, waiting for Robert to go out.

E-MAIL *I'd like to hold you in my arms until you fall asleep. I'd like to watch you sleep. I'd like to wake in the morning to feel the touch of your lips on my sex. I'd like to run my hand lightly over your body. I'd like to go out with you. I'd like to come home with you. I'd like to go on holiday, swim in the sea, eat in a restaurant with you. I'd like to take your hands in mine, hold you tight in my arms, keep you close to me. I'd like to uncover your body, your spirit, your soul. I'd like to fall in love with you.*

Clair is getting ready to go out. Robert is drinking whisky.

ROBERT Can we try this thing for the telly ?

CLAIR What now, this evening ?

ROBERT Why not ?

CLAIR Have you finished it ? I thought it wasn't ready.

Ariane is writing a text message.

TEXT *I don't know how to tell you.*

She sighs, thinks, then erases what she has just written. She summons her concentration to start again.

ROBERT You don't want to do it now ?

CLAIR I can't this evening, I've got a dinner.

ROBERT You've got a dinner ?

CLAIR Yes.

Robert discreetly reads a text message on his phone.

TEXT *I don't know how to tell you. I think I love you...*

ROBERT You don't want to give it a try ?

CLAIR I haven't got time. And anyway it's better to do that sort of thing in the morning when you're fresh rather than after a day's work.

ROBERT You think I'm fresh in the morning ?

CLAIR Our ideas are clearer in the morning.

ROBERT You think my ideas aren't clear in the evening ?

CLAIR I think in the evening you're usually half pissed and you get aggressive.

ROBERT So right now you think I'm aggressive ?

CLAIR Right now it's not my problem because I'm going out. Goodbye, Robert.

She goes to the door.

ROBERT The truth is you want me to screw up this thing for the television.

She stops.

We hear Ariane's voice, without seeing her.

ARIANE *(off)* He so needs to be loved. You can feel it, you can feel the need. It's fierce. Every second you spend with him you feel accused. There's this tacit reproach : « why don't you love me ? »

Lights up on Ariane in bed with Daniel in her flat.

ARIANE I don't want to belong to a man. I need to feel free. He doesn't understand that. His head understands but not his heart. Do you understand ?

DANIEL Sounds reasonable.

ARIANE I'm sorry, I'm going on a bit. I haven't quite got over it.

DANIEL No tacit reproach here.

Frank is getting dressed. Elly is watching him.

ELLY I'm looking for the man who'll be the father of my children. Does that scare you ?

He looks at his phone. There is a text message.

TEXT *I'll be a bit late. Clair*

FRANK Me ? I want four of them.

ELLY Four ?

FRANK Alice, George, Henry and William.

ELLY A girl and three boys ?

FRANK Preferably. Otherwise the names will sound odd.

ELLY But what if it doesn't go as planned ?

FRANK I'll settle for Alan, Georgina, Henrietta and Wilhelmina if need be.

ELLY Wilhelmina sounds a bit funny.

FRANK Then you'll just have to give me a William like I asked you to. Right, that's settled then. Any other questions ?

He is ready to leave.

Robert addresses Clair's camera.

ROBERT We've known it since Darwin. Einstein confirmed it for us. Without exception every single piece of research, great or small, continues to provide us with further proof : life is not simple. It's true at one end of the scale when we examine atoms and particles and it's true at the other when we come to consider the immensity of the cosmos. And it's also true at the more modest level of human life. Our interaction with others is subject to endless complexification. Our... Alright, I can see you there – I know it's simplistic, I know it's corny, I hate this shit, but that's what they want, isn't it ?

CLAIR Oh yes, absolutely. No, it's just the choice of words that...

ROBERT What words ?

CLAIR « Interaction », « complexification ».

ROBERT What's wrong with them ? It's perfectly good English. « Complexification » means what it says.

CLAIR Alright, I didn't say anything.

Pause

ONLY CONNECT

ROBERT What have you got against « complexification » ?

CLAIR I just prefer simple words, that's all.

ROBERT Simple words suit simple concepts. When speaking of the development of human relations, it seems to me perfectly justifiable to use a word that describes their tendency to become more and more complex – « complexification ». But maybe I'm wrong.

CLAIR Not at all. Point made. I withdraw my objection. Go on.

Pause

ROBERT The human brain is a little technological miracle that neuroscience has not yet... You've put me off. Fuck... I'll have to start again.

ARIANE I know he loves me. It happened very quickly. I got scared. I wouldn't commit. I have a problem with commitment. Little by little I was getting there. I started loving him. I made concessions. I was prepared to make sacrifices. But he didn't trust me. He wouldn't believe me. Can you explain that to me ? He refuses to believe that I'm capable of loving him. Why ?

DANIEL Perhaps he doesn't love himself.

ARIANE Well, don't say you haven't been warned. Loving me is a risky business.

DANIEL I know a lot about risk. And I'd say this is definitely a risk worth taking.

Pause

ARIANE Make love to me.

ROBERT The human brain is a little technological miracle : neuroscience has yet to reveal the full extent of its complexity. Fortunately we don't need to monitor all the connections involved in lifting a hand or in looking at an object but believe me, it's not as simple as it seems. So imagine all that's going on when two of these little beauties start to communicate between themselves : to all the richness of language developed over thousands of years, add the multiplicity of signals both codified and not, all the expressions of... What ?

CLAIR Nothing.

ROBERT I can't do it with you looking at me like that... If you've got something to say, say it.

CLAIR No, it's alright.

ROBERT Thank you. Very constructive.

ONLY CONNECT

CLAIR But it's fine. Perfect for television.

Pause

If you don't want to do it you just have to say, no-one's forcing you.

ROBERT You really take me for a fool, don't you ?

CLAIR No, Robert. I don't take you for a fool. I take you for an extremely gifted individual, capable of extraordinary things, unique, but who might just screw everything up because he has no self-belief.

ROBERT I'm screwing everything up, is that what you're saying ?

CLAIR But do you even listen to what I say ? You only hear what's negative.

ROBERT I only hear what's sincere.

CLAIR You're going to drive me mad.

ROBERT You don't really want me to succeed.

CLAIR It's you ! It's you that doesn't want to ! You're afraid of succeeding.

ROBERT You want me to stay in the comfort zone of mediocrity, it reassures you, you have your place there.

CLAIR No, I want to help you express yourself, I want to set you free, I want you to spread your wings.

ROBERT You want to set me free ? Now I think we're finally getting somewhere – yes yes, we're touching on something here, I do believe I detect a sliver of truth in there : what do you mean by spread my wings ?

CLAIR I want you to leave me in peace !

ROBERT And there it is. You've said it. You want me to leave you in peace. You want me to fuck off.

Pause

You never did believe in me.

CLAIR Yeah, that's right.

ROBERT You're looking for an excuse to leave.

CLAIR I don't need an excuse, you give me all the reasons I could ask for.

ROBERT Then why do you stay ? Out of goodness of heart ? Out of pity ? You think I couldn't make it on my own ? Who do you think you are ? I don't need you. You're holding me back. I feel your judgment weighing me down. You have no generosity. You pretend to give. You give nothing. You drag me down. Do you imagine you're a help to me ? You're a dead weight. Do you think I don't know you're sacrificing yourself for me ?

But I'm the one who's struggling under the weight of your sacrifice. I'm the one who has to carry your cross. You put my career before yours, huh? You looked after my children instead of making the film of the century. Do you think I don't hear the reproach you're so careful to keep out of your voice? Do you think I don't see the contempt in your eyes? « So this is what I sacrificed myself for? This impostor? » Do you think it's easy for me to put up with your frustration? Your disgust? Do you think you keep it hidden? Do you think you're a good actress? That I can't tell when you're pretending to sleep? That I don't notice that slight movement of recoil when I come close to you? Do you think it's easy to have any self-belief after that? Do you think you're a saint? That you're the one who puts up with everything? You don't put up with anything. You let me feel your disappointment and leave me to get on with it. Do you think I'm grateful? I hate you. You won't let me breathe. You stifle me. You castrate me, then complain I've got no balls. You pluck my eyes out, then tell me to look for them. You saw my legs off. You knot my guts. I wake up in the morning with the urge to vomit. I go to bed at night with the urge not to wake up. Why are you crying? You should be pleased. I'm giving you your chance. I'm freeing you of the crushing weight of my presence. I'm dispensing you of your sacrifice. I'm leaving.

Silence. They stare at each other for a long while. Then Clair goes to the door.

CLAIR I'll be back late. Don't wait up.

ROBERT Who's it with, this dinner?

She goes out. Robert watches her go, then takes his phone and makes a call.

Ariane's mobile phone rings, forgotten in the empty bed.

Robert looks at the text message on his phone.

TEXT *I don't know how to tell you. I think I love you...*

He presses a button and discovers the rest of the message.

TEXT *But I don't feel able to give you what you're looking for. Don't try to contact me, please. I need to think. Ariane*

Robert reads the message and begins to laugh – bitter, disillusioned laughter.

DANIEL *(off)* Come on.

ARIANE *(off)* You're crazy. Where are we going?

On the screens there appear views of London by night, seen from a bridge over the Thames. Daniel and Ariane appear.

DANIEL Up on the bridge. Come on.

ARIANE Don't you think we were better off in bed? It's a bit nippy out here.

DANIEL I'll warm you up. Look at that.

ARIANE Alright, it's pretty but still...

DANIEL « Earth hath nothing to show more fair ». Strictly speaking that's Westminster bridge but I like it here too. We're right in the centre of things and yet somehow removed from them. From this distance you can see things that little bit more clearly. The whole damn city laid out before you. And the boats going by beneath. Can't you just feel the power? Exhilarating, isn't it? All those buildings they've put up. All those offices, all those flats they've built, look at all the windows, the lights in the windows. Behind each window there's a person looking out, searching, scanning the city, and hoping. Can't you feel it? For every light a heart is beating. And sending out energy. Imagine what would happen if we could harness that hope, create the right connections, channel all that energy into a force for good. We could save the world, couldn't we? There's so much waste. We could resolve all the problems on the planet. Look over there. Can you see the three windows at the top with no light on? There. That's the flat I've just bought. The decorating's behind schedule but soon I'll be able to take you there and we'll put the light on. Thanks to you I'm going to start hoping again. I wanted to share this with you. When I stand up here with this great shuddering city spreading its legs beneath me I can really believe I'm the king of the world. And I want you to be my queen. Because it's the same. The crazy power of the river rolling under me and the wind whistling round my ears, it's the same feeling I get with you. You've rocked my heart. You've set my soul on fire. I want to laugh all the time. I want to sing – don't let me, I could make a cat cringe. I'm lighter than air. Hold me down, I'm going to fly away. I'm rising above the tower blocks. I'm walking on clouds. It's giddy. I could trample down mountains. You've given me this incredible strength. I'm seventeen years old. My name is Christopher Columbus. I'm going to conquer the world armed only with the love you've liberated in me. Perhaps Plato was right. Perhaps I've spent my life looking for my other half. And I've found it in you. I can't get over it. It's a miracle. I want to be a part of you. I want to be you. I love you, Anna. I love you and I'm ecstatically happy and I want you to share that with me. I want you to share everything with me. Now and forever and for all eternity. I want our hearts to explode and our souls to merge and all our particles to unite and beam through the universe into infinity.

Ariane looks at him in silence, then turns round and runs away.

Clair is with Frank, in his flat.

CLAIR What are you thinking?

Pause

Tell me.

FRANK Why have you never introduced me to your girlfriends?

Pause

CLAIR No but that's got nothing to do with you. That's the same with Robert.

FRANK I've never met a single member of your family. Do they know that I exist ?

CLAIR I don't like mixing my sex life with my social life. But that's got nothing to do with you.

FRANK It's got everything to do with me.

Pause

I think you're using me.

Pause

I think you're using my body but as I'm not an artist you're not interested in what goes on in my head. Nor in my heart. What I feel is of no interest to you. I think you come here like you go to the gym. I'm just part of your personal hygiene.

Pause

CLAIR Then why do you care about me ?

FRANK Why do I care about you ? Good question. I must be a bit stupid.

CLAIR I care about you too.

FRANK Really ?

Pause

If I left you, what would you feel ?

Pause

CLAIR Why do you ask me that ?

FRANK To get an answer.

CLAIR Do you want to leave me ?

FRANK Do you want me to leave you ?

Pause

If I met somebody new, you'd basically be relieved, wouldn't you ?

CLAIR Have you met somebody new ?

FRANK I said « if ».

CLAIR You have the right.

ONLY CONNECT

FRANK I know I have the right. And I know you know I do. That's not what I'm asking. What I'm asking is, if I were to choose to exercise that right, how would you feel about it ?

CLAIR How would I feel ?

FRANK How would you feel ? If I fucked another woman, for example, would you feel hurt ?

Pause

CLAIR Of course I would.

FRANK You would feel hurt ?

CLAIR Yes.

FRANK So you'd rather I didn't ?

Pause

CLAIR You can do what you like.

FRANK I know that. But you for your part would rather I didn't ?

CLAIR I'd rather you didn't.

Pause

FRANK Maybe that's why you've never introduced me to your girlfriends.

CLAIR That must be it.

FRANK Yes, that must be it.

Pause

CLAIR Have you got something to tell me ?

FRANK No. What about you ?

Pause

CLAIR Do you think we've come to the end ?

FRANK The end of what ?

CLAIR Us.

Silence

FRANK Why are you waiting for me to leave you ? Why won't you take the decision for yourself ?

Pause

CLAIR I don't want to hurt you.

FRANK What do you think you're doing now ?

Frank fetches Clair's shoes and puts them on her feet.

CLAIR What are you doing ?

FRANK You want me to take the decision ? There, it's done. You've got your shoes on, now you can leave.

He pushes her towards the door.

Daniel, alone on the bridge, is writing a text message on his Blackberry.

TEXT *I know. Nobody could expect you to fall as quickly and as deeply as me. I'm a patient man. I'll wait.*

Elly comes and goes light-heartedly in her flat, switches on the computer.

Frank walks up and down, switches on the computer, goes and gets a beer.

Ariane comes into her flat looking at her phone which is beeping. She doesn't read the message. She finds the other phone in her bed. She takes it and looks at it. There is a message :

TEXT *This correspondent tried to reach you without leaving a message :*
ROBERT

Clair is sitting at home watching Robert come and go putting his things into a bag. During what follows he packs the bag and then goes out without a word, without looking at Clair.

Frank drinks his beer, looks at the computer. A chat message appears.

ELLY *Hello there*

Frank moves away bad-temperedly. The phone rings. He hurries over to answer it.

While he is speaking on the phone, Elly continues to send him chat messages.

ELLY *R u there ?... U not there ? ... U not there. Let me know when ur there.*

FRANK Yes ? ... Oh, dad... Yeah yeah, fine. Fine. ... Nothing special. Did you see United ? ... No, not this year... You really think so ? ... Yeah... yeah, maybe, I dunno... yeah... No no, you're right... Mum alright ? ... Good, say hello for me. G'night, dad.

Frank stands still for a moment with the telephone in his hand, then slowly goes over and puts it down on the table. He goes as if to hit the table but holds back and then slowly sinks to the floor writhing in pain.

ONLY CONNECT

Elly turns her computer off and remains staring at it absently.

Ariane gets into bed with the telephone in her hand.

Daniel is seated, staring vacantly in front of him.

Robert arrives at his consulting room. He lies down on the couch.

Clair hasn't moved. She remains seated, not moving.

The six characters are all visible, each in his own space, isolated, still.

BLACK

END OF PART ONE

ACT III

1.

A telephone rings.

TEXT *The price to pay for the fabulous development of the human brain is the dissociation of the individual from the group, the wall erected between his self-consciousness and the rest of the world, and the feeling of solitude that ensues.*

CLAIR What time is it ? ... Ah already ? ... No, not yet but then I haven't got much reason to... No, nothing. Nothing doing...

Lights up. Clair, alone in bed in half darkness, is speaking on the phone.

CLAIR He's doing it – but without me. I may have originated the project but the only thing the TV channel are interested in is your father's celebrity... Oh, but it's a well-known fact : he's the world's leading expert on love... We're divorcing, yes... No, you're a bit hard on your father, I'm not blameless either, you know... Oh, no, if I stick up for myself it'll be total war and it's really not worth the worry. I'm leaving him everything, I'm not going to fight for a flat and a few bits of furniture... Nothing... At least I'm free. No work, no money, pretty soon no home, alone... but free... No, I know, but I just don't seem able to hold it against him. The worst of it is I still worry about him... He has this self-destructive side, it scares me... Oh, nothing much... No, that's kind of you but... Thanks for ringing... No but don't worry about me, dear. I'm pretty tough, you know. Pretty tough...

Clair hangs up, looks around her, lies down on the bed.

Robert is writing on Ariane's computer.

TEXT *Modern man is an orphan, an exile, a fallen being seeking desperately to escape his isolation and to return to his paradise lost.*

Ariane is in Clair's flat. Clair speaks to her from another room.

CLAIR I can't see it. You'll have to ring him and ask him where he put it.

Pause
Why didn't he come himself ?

ARIANE He doesn't know I'm here.

Clair comes back to Ariane and looks at her.

ARIANE Forget the book, it's just an excuse to see you.

CLAIR Well, now you've seen me. Happy ?

Pause

ONLY CONNECT

Pause Have you got something to say ?

Pause Don't ask for forgiveness, please. I might just lose my temper.

Pause

ARIANE I didn't want him to leave you.

CLAIR You preferred sharing ?

Pause

ARIANE I don't think it will last.

Pause

Pause I'd like it to but... I just feel I could never give enough. He wants to swallow me whole.

Pause He wants everything and its opposite. I have no idea what he wants.

CLAIR If you've come for the user's manual, you're out of luck. I've lost it.

Pause

Pause Are you really hooked ?

Pause Be careful.

ARIANE He says you manipulated him. That it was you who wanted the divorce.

CLAIR I didn't manipulate him. Any more than I asked you to seduce him.

Pause

Pause I was very hurt when he left. More than I would have thought. I fell into this black hole. But even then I knew I would come out of it better than him. It's over now. We can't go back. He'll have to live with it. You too. You wanted him, now you've got him.

Pause

ARIANE Are you angry with me ?

CLAIR Yes.

Pause

Pause But anyway... Look after yourself. And him.

Pause

Pause Ariane ?

ARIANE Yes ?

CLAIR Don't tell him about Frank, please.

ARIANE I haven't said anything.

ONLY CONNECT

CLAIR I know. But if he asks. Even if he seems to know. Don't talk to him about that. He couldn't take it.

ARIANE At least someone's happy.

CLAIR Who ?

ARIANE Frank.

Frank is looking at photos of Clair on his computer.

Robert is writing.

TEXT Love is the meeting of two neuroses. The love object is a screen on which we project our fantasies and desires.

On hearing Elly approach, Frank closes the dossier with the photos and turns to her. She comes and sits on his knees.

ELLY Are you happy here with me ?

FRANK It's alright.

ELLY Bastard.

She kisses him.

TEXT The reality never truly corresponds to the image we project but a few concordant details are sufficient to blind us to all the rest.

Daniel and Clair come into a café.

CLAIR No no, I remember... but I'm surprised you recognized me.

DANIEL Oh, that wasn't hard. For a start you're beautiful. And then you also changed my life.

CLAIR Did I ?

DANIEL I followed your advice.

CLAIR I gave you advice ?

DANIEL I tried internet. With spectacular results. I fell in love. For the first time in my life.

CLAIR No ? That's wonderful.

ARIANE It wasn't mutual.

CLAIR Ah.

DANIEL She wasn't at all my type. She was in love with someone else. But what the hell...

CLAIR If you can do it once...

DANIEL Exactly : it was a first step, I'm not going to stop there.

Pause

I'm glad I've found you again.

TEXT Nevertheless, once we start to see clearly again after the initial bedazzlement, we realise our mistake and are disappointed.

ELLY Do you always tell me the truth ?

FRANK Why ?

ELLY Just because.

FRANK What about you ?

ELLY Well, me, no, actually. I lied to you.

FRANK Ah ?

Robert continues writing while he speaks to Ariane.

TEXT This disenchantment returns us inevitably to our essential solitude and can be accompanied by various reactions : anger, revolt, bitterness, melancholy, dejection, depression – in short, by all the precursory signs and all the preliminary states of despair.

ROBERT Why should I lie to you ?

ARIANE Lili's not interested in my mail. It can only be you.

ROBERT You think it interests me ?

Pause

ELLY I'm three years older than what it says in my profile.

Pause

How do you feel about that ?

FRANK I sleep with you, not your profile.

ELLY No but...

FRANK How do I feel about sleeping with a liar ?

ELLY Yes.

ONLY CONNECT

FRANK I'd have to sleep with a woman who tells the truth to compare.

ELLY No you don't ! You're mine now.

FRANK Am I ?

ARIANE I think you're jealous. I think it hurts you to think I'm not yours and yours alone. Whatever you say, I think you love me. And I want you to admit it.

CLAIR That was the big difference between us... I often lose heart, I ask myself a lot of questions, I'm never sure of anything, but basically I believe we can change things, change our lives, evolve, move on, progress. Robert likes to charm people, so he often talks as if he believes that too, but in his heart he believes that man is basically stupid and fundamentally evil. That any attempt to raise ourselves up is bound to fail.

DANIEL But he helped me enormously.

CLAIR Really ? You should tell him. He doesn't believe it. He doesn't see the good he does.

ELLY Do you forgive me ?

FRANK No way.

Pause

Course I do, it's not important.

ELLY It is important.

FRANK Why ?

ELLY Because it means you've got three years less to give me kids.

CLAIR I mothered him. I raised his two children and became a mother to all three of them. Somehow it suited him. But little boys always end up leaving the nest.

DANIEL Even me.

ARIANE I admit it. I've fallen in love with you. I'm prepared to compromise. I'm prepared to make sacrifices. I'm prepared to change my life for you. But you have to tell me what you want.

ROBERT I don't want anything.

Pause

ELLY What are you thinking ?

ONLY CONNECT

FRANK Nothing.

ROBERT Or else I want everything.

ELLY What are you feeling ?

FRANK What am I feeling ?

DANIEL A sort of lightness, a bubbling up inside, a tendency to laugh, and sing. I usually have very little to say, I'm a man of figures not words, but all of a sudden I waxed poetic. I was spouting all sorts of rubbish. I think I even mentioned Plato.

ROBERT I want sex. I want company. I want dreams. I want someone to talk to. I want someone to listen to. I want someone to share my bed, my opinions, my meals, my problems, my flat, my anxieties, my colds, my imagination, my hope. I want the impossible. I want someone to love me.

ELLY How would you describe your feelings for me ?

FRANK Honestly ?

ELLY Obviously honestly. Otherwise what's the point ?

ROBERT So I might as well say I don't want anything. I'm not asking anything of you. I'm not asking you to love me.

FRANK Honestly I like you a lot but right now you're beginning to get on my nerves.

DANIEL It was like a bubble that blew up bigger and bigger... and then burst. And disappeared.

CLAIR Did you suffer ?

DANIEL Hardly at all. A bit at the time but even that was rather a pleasant sort of pain. And now all that's left is a sort of benevolent warmth.

CLAIR And you can't wait to start again. I'd like to go through all that again too. But I'm wary.

DANIEL Of what ?

CLAIR Of me. Of you. Of us.

Pause

DANIEL Would you like to see the flat I'm buying ?

ARIANE What I like in love is the beginning. The desire. The giddy rush. Once you come back down to earth, I find it difficult to manage what follows.

Pause

But I love you.

ROBERT No, you don't. You love an illusion. You love an image you've made of me. It has nothing to do with reality. You can't stand my reality. You can't even stand my presence.

ELLY You haven't answered my question.

FRANK What question ?

ELLY Have you always told me the truth ?

FRANK I didn't lie about my age.

ELLY What did you lie about ?

FRANK Well, I was going to tell you anyway : there's this stupid thing...

ELLY Yes ?

Pause

The woman you were in love with ?

FRANK What ?

ELLY You said she was the one who was married and didn't want to leave her husband, and you were free and in love with her ?

FRANK Yes.

ELLY Not the other way round ?

FRANK The other way round ?

Clair and Daniel arrive in Daniel's new flat.

CLAIR It's very big.

DANIEL It's very empty.

ARIANE I think we'd be better off each in his own apartment. Don't you ? You're not comfortable here. I need some breathing space. I don't know how other people manage.

ROBERT Other people ? They bite each other's heads off. They destroy themselves by degrees. Or else they love each other.

ELLY In our agency's files there's a couple called Berenson. Like you.

Pause

ONLY CONNECT

Same spelling. They're selling their flat. She's looking for something smaller, for him they've found a big flat that he can use for his work as well. He's a psychiatrist. They're divorcing.

Pause

FRANK Have you seen them ?

CLAIR I'll be lucky if I find myself a one-bedroom flat in some unfashionable part of town. Robert's not going to help me.

DANIEL Come and live here.

Pause

I'm serious.

FRANK They're divorcing ?

DANIEL What's the problem ? Your husband ? Are you still in love with him ?

CLAIR I have a great deal of affection for him. Even if he exasperates me. But I haven't been his wife for a very long time.

DANIEL And now ?

CLAIR Now ?

Pause

I don't know. I loved another man. In parallel. For years. But that's finished too. So now... I'm free.

ARIANE I need to breathe, that's all. I need air.

ROBERT I'll give you air.

Pause

CLAIR Well. I've had a very nice time. Thank you for keeping me company.

DANIEL But I'm not letting you go just like that. I made you an offer.

ELLY Why didn't you say you were married ?

Pause

Why don't you say now ?

Pause

I know I'd never have accepted to meet you if I'd known. But now I have...

Pause

Now you've left her, you can tell me, can't you ?

FRANK She's getting divorced ?

ARIANE But I want us to go on seeing each other.

CLAIR Let's do things in order, shall we ?

ROBERT No.

DANIEL Alright.

ELLY What's the matter ?

ARIANE Why not ?

ROBERT Because I don't go in for half-measures. I hate the lukewarm. I don't want a part-time love affair.

DANIEL May I ?

Daniel goes up to Clair and embraces her.

ELLY What are you doing ?

Clair takes Daniel's head in her hands and kisses him.

ARIANE You mean it's all or nothing ?

ROBERT Absolutely.

ELLY Where are you going ? Robert !

Frank goes out.

ARIANE Then it's nothing.

BLACK

2.

Elly rings at Robert's new flat. He opens the door.

ELLY Excuse me, I'm looking for doctor Berenson.

ROBERT Yes ?

ELLY Robert Berenson.

ROBERT That's me.

ELLY No.

ROBERT What do you mean « no » ?

The phone rings, the answering machine comes on.

ONLY CONNECT

ELLY Do you work with him ?

ROBERT Who are you ?

We hear Ariane's voice on the loudspeaker.

ARIANE Robert ? Are you there ? Pick up the phone, please.

ELLY There's no point in protecting him, he'll have to show himself sooner or later.

ROBERT You'd better come in.

ROBERT Protecting him from what ? From you ?

ELLY Where is he ?

ROBERT What has he done to you ?

ARIANE Why have you fired your secretary ? She said you weren't well. I'm a bit worried.

ELLY This is him.

She shows him a photo of Frank on her phone.

ARIANE I know you still love me. You're protecting yourself because you don't want to suffer but I won't make you suffer... I just want to make you happy.

Robert gives Elly her phone back, turns off the loudspeaker on his and shows her a copy of « Only Connect ».

ROBERT Look.

ELLY Is that you ?

ROBERT Alright the photo's a bit out of date but you can see it's me, can't you ?
It's not him, is it ?

Pause

ELLY You wrote this book ?

ROBERT How did you meet this chap ?

Pause

ELLY Are you really a shrink ?

Frank and Clair are in a pub.

FRANK It wasn't too late. Even now it's not too late.

His phone rings. He looks and rejects the call.

Elly, at home, looks at her phone, perplexed, and starts to call again.

Ariane is on the phone to Robert's answering machine again : she waits before speaking.

ARIANE Robert ?

Robert, alone now, listens to Ariane on the loudspeaker. He doesn't answer.

FRANK Why didn't you say anything ?

CLAIR Because it doesn't change anything for us. What's over is over. There's nothing we can do.

FRANK We can if we want.

CLAIR But we don't want.

Pause

We can't go back in time.

Pause

You meant a lot to me. You were there when I needed you. But I didn't make you happy and the more we went on the more it wore us both out. We couldn't go on like that. You know that.

Frank's phone rings again. He doesn't take the call.

ARIANE Robert ? Pick up the phone, please.

FRANK What wore us out was having to hide. Change that and everything changes.

CLAIR Maybe if it had happened earlier. But now...

FRANK Because you decided. You didn't ask me.

ARIANE Answer ! ... Look, I... I'm not doing too well.

CLAIR It's not easy for me either. I'm sad. But you have to see things as they are.

Frank's phone rings again.

ARIANE Robert ?

This time Frank answers.

FRANK FUCK OFF AND LEAVE ME ALONE !

ONLY CONNECT

ARIANE I know you're there.

Robert takes a discreet look out of the window but the street is empty.

ELLY Wait a minute – who the hell do you think you are ?

FRANK Haven't you twigged ? I don't want to see you again. Find some other poor bugger to knock you up, I've got better things to do !

During what follows Elly starts knocking over furniture and breaking objects around her, then slides to the ground and sobs.

Frank turns his phone off and puts it angrily away.

CLAIR Who was that ?

Daniel makes a call on his phone.

ARIANE I miss you. I need to talk to you. Pick up the phone.

Robert picks up the phone and hangs up immediately. Then he heads for the door.

Clair's phone rings. She looks at it, then answers. Frank watches.

CLAIR I can't speak to you now. I'll ring you back.

Robert comes out of his front door and is about to lock it when he senses a presence behind him. He turns and sees Ariane waiting for him on the landing. They look at each other in silence. Then Ariane rushes into his arms. They kiss.

FRANK You really took me for a ride, didn't you ?

CLAIR No.

FRANK You never had any intention of committing to me. Live together, have kids, you never even thought it might have occurred to me. You were up for a quiet fuck on the side but as soon as you didn't have to hide any more you were out of there. Is that what you call love ? You used me. And then you threw me away like a used condom. You wiped away the come from between your legs and you walked away as if nothing had ever happened. I mean nothing to you.

CLAIR That's not true.

Frank jumps to his feet, banging the table. Clair starts.

FRANK You've had a better offer, that's all. Watch out. If I see him, I'll kill him.

Frank leaves.

ARIANE Fuck me.

Robert opens the door and pushes her inside.

ROBERT I hate you.

Frank is looking at the profiles on love.com while drinking a beer, but grows bored and starts to surf porn sites. He comes across a site called « My ex is a whore » in which members are invited to upload intimate videos of their ex-girlfriends as revenge for their leaving them.

DANIEL I've been offered a job in a German bank. I think I might take it. But before I start I thought we might get away for a bit. Somewhere hot.

CLAIR But I can't. I'm working.

DANIEL You could take a couple of weeks off, couldn't you ? Your work's not that important.

Pause

Is it ?

Pause

Have I said something I shouldn't ?

CLAIR You can't understand.

DANIEL I could always turn the job down.

CLAIR You're not going to turn the job down because of me.

DANIEL I could stop completely, you know... If it weren't for my pension scheme...

CLAIR I'm going out with a guy who worries about his pension scheme ?

Robert is doing up his trousers. Ariane is lying on the floor, quietly crying.

ROBERT You disgust me almost as much as I disgust myself.

ARIANE We could be happy together. What's wrong with that ?

CLAIR I'm not like you. I can't keep everything separate : business, pleasure, money, love, leisure time, the meaning of life. You categorise everything. With me everything's moving, all the time. Nothing stands still. It's all mixed up because everything's connected, it's the same thing, it's my life, I can't isolate one element and say there, that's done, now I'll move on to something else. Nothing's ever done. I'm never on holiday. I'll never retire. If you want to love me, you have to love my work.

Pause

DANIEL I like it when you talk like that.

CLAIR Like what ?

DANIEL With passion.

Pause

CLAIR What about you ? When do you speak with passion ?

Elly is recording a presentation video for her profile on love.com.

ELLY Hello there. Do you like children ? Me too... Maybe a bit too direct...

Clair is writing a screenplay on her computer.

TEXT

HER

Art used to make love sublime. In the current mood of nihilism, the artist who succeeds is the one who cheapens love and diminishes it, the one who transforms beauty into ugliness, romanticism into cynicism, eroticism into pornography.

CLAIR Oh come off it, you sound like Robert...

She erases what she has just written.

DANIEL I'm off. How's it coming along?

CLAIR It isn't.

He looks at the blank page on the screen.

DANIEL Let me read it when you've written a bit more.

He leaves. Clair looks at her blank page and sighs. A message appears : « You have mail. Do you wish to read it now ? Yes. No. » Clair clicks on « yes » and discovers an e-mail from Frank.

E-MAIL *You had a good laugh at my expense. Now it's my turn.*

There is a link at the end of Frank's e-mail : Clair clicks on it and discovers the site « My ex is a whore ». Amidst an array of vulgar and ugly photos, she sees her own face. She clicks on it and discovers images of her lovemaking with Frank, who is filming with his telephone. Unlike the other images glimpsed on the site, this little film is rather tender and playful. Clair stops it and phones Frank.

CLAIR How could you do that ? Do you hate me that much ? That you need to humiliate me ? It's like a rape – is that what you want ? To make me feel soiled ?

FRANK Look...

CLAIR No. I don't want to look at anything else, thank you. And I don't want to see you ever again. You've betrayed what we had together. You've

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dragged it through mud. If your objective was to make me wish I'd never met you, you have succeeded.

She hangs up.

Frank throws his phone away in a gesture of impotent rage. Then he sits down and takes his head in his hands.

Clair's phone rings. She picks it up.

CLAIR And don't ring back to ask forgiveness because it's unforgiveable. Get out of my life and stay out. I don't want to hear from you ever again !

ROBERT Well... that's a warm welcome I must say. What else can I do for you ?

CLAIR Oh it's you. I'm sorry, I thought it was someone else.

ROBERT Glad to hear it.

CLAIR How are you ?

ROBERT Why do you ask me that ?

CLAIR Because I'd like to know how you are.

ROBERT You'd like to know how I am ? That's rich coming from you.

CLAIR How are you getting on with the television programme ?

ROBERT I'm at the point where I'm beginning to wonder whether I can present something that has been emptied to such an extent of all possible meaning...

CLAIR But you're going to do it.

ROBERT And you're going to criticize me for it... Who did you think it was just now ? Is it a man that's got you all worked up like that ?

Pause

CLAIR How's Ariane ?

ROBERT You didn't lose any time... Who is he ?

CLAIR I don't want to talk about it.

Pause

Is there a problem with Ariane ?

ROBERT Don't come the innocent with me. Please credit me with a little intelligence. She's fulfilled her mission, you got what you wanted, now she's dumping me, as planned.

ONLY CONNECT

CLAIR Listen, Robert. Don't try to reverse the roles. You're the one who cheated on me, you're the one who left, you're the one who wanted the divorce.

ROBERT God, you're good at this game, aren't you ? You've got a conscience made of Teflon. Nothing sticks to it. It's all down to me, is it ? You're clean, are you ? Don't worry : when I die, you can wash your hands of me once and for all.

CLAIR What does that mean ?

Pause

Robert ?

He hangs up. He thinks a moment, then goes to an internet provider to consult e-mails. He types Clair's address and tries several passwords before finding the right one. He discovers Frank's e-mail to Clair. He clicks on the link, discovers the site « my ex is a whore » and the film of Clair and Frank making love. He gets up and walks away apparently disgusted but comes back to look again. He uses the pause button to isolate Frank's face.

BLACK

ACT IV

1.

Elly is speaking to her camera.

ELLY Hullo there. You're married, you can't commit, you don't like sport, you have no sense of humour, you're less than six foot tall and you don't like children – don't waste your time with me... Too negative.

Daniel and Clair come out of a show.

DANIEL Does me good to have a bit of a laugh. Loosens me up.

CLAIR It's stressed me out. How could you find that funny ? There's no enjoyment there. The actors pull faces and people laugh... but it's just mechanical, it's empty, it's a pavlovian reaction. It reminds them of something they found funny once but it's an imitation, a memory, it's not true, it's not alive. I just find it depressing.

DANIEL I think you're being a bit harsh.

CLAIR No. You can feel the actors are unhappy because they're acting badly and they know it, even if they don't admit it, even if nobody's asking anything more of them... and the audience is unhappy because even if they don't want to admit it either they're not satisfied and they feel they don't have the right to ask for anything more. It's just like love really.

Pause

DANIEL Could you say that again ?

Robert goes to love.com and creates a profile. He identifies himself as a woman and chooses the pseudo « exquisitemoments ».

CLAIR We so want to fall in love, so need to, we tell ourselves this is it, we're in love, we're good together, we're happy. But it isn't true.

Pause

DANIEL Are you talking about us ?

Pause

CLAIR What do you think ?

DANIEL I actually thought we were good together.

CLAIR We are good together but...

Pause

I don't feel as though you really need me.

DANIEL You're wrong.

CLAIR I know you like me – but are you really in love ?

Pause

DANIEL I'm not much of an expert in these things. It's not like last time but...

CLAIR I feel your affection. Your desire. But nothing more. Do you think that's enough ?

Pause

DANIEL Alright, it's not that clear cut. But is love always clear cut ? It doesn't always take the same form, does it ? I'm not dazzled like I was before. I know what I'm doing. But that's what I like about it. This time it's less superficial, deeper, truer.

CLAIR Maybe.

DANIEL Isn't it ?

CLAIR I want to be more demanding than before. Before, I told myself I didn't have the right to ask anything more, I let things flow, I made the most of what I'd got, but it always ended up turning against me. I'd have done better to have spoken out.

DANIEL So now you're speaking out.

CLAIR Yes.

DANIEL But what are you trying to say ? That you're not happy ? You don't want us to stop, do you ?

Pause

Ah.

Frank is consulting profiles on love.com. He receives a message.

TEXT *A member of love.com has noticed you and wants to let you know with a « flash ». To consult « exquisitemoments »'s profile, click here.*

He clicks on it and discovers a profile with a photo of Ariane.

ELLY Hullo, you're free, you like sport, you're pretty good looking, you love life, good times, fun, laughs, cuddles, travel and children – get in touch. Oh and if you're into DIY that's a plus. If you're broke do not apply. Unless you're very very cute... If you're tight-fisted do not apply, is better. That's what I'm going to say.

Daniel comes back to his computer, finds a message from « exquisitemoments » on consentingadults.

TEXT *Back on the market ?*

Daniel sits down and starts to reply.

Robert is drinking whisky in a bar. Frank comes in and sits at the bar near Robert.

ROBERT Hi.

Pause

Expecting someone ?

FRANK I've got a date.

ROBERT Me too. Been waiting half an hour. Don't think she'll turn up now.

Pause

Too good to be true.

Pause

She picked me up on the internet but looks like virtual reality was all she wanted... Pity, I prefer the real thing.

FRANK Me too.

Pause

Love.com ?

ROBERT You know it ?

Pause

Don't tell me you too... ?

Pause

Was it her idea to meet here ?

FRANK You too ?

ROBERT What was her pseudo ?

Pause

Don't tell me it was « exquisitemoments » ?

Pause

FRANK Fuck.

ROBERT Bitch.

FRANK She's set us both up.

ROBERT Certainly looks like it. Whiskey ?

FRANK I think that's all there is left for it.

ROBERT Cow.

Clair is writing.

TEXT

How are you ? HIM

CLAIR That's better.

TEXT

Fine. HER

CLAIR I love it... but will everyone get the subtext ?

Daniel is with Ariane, in her flat.

ARIANE Are you angry with me ?

DANIEL My manly pride took a bit of a knock. But I'll survive. You were hurt. Have you seen him ?

ARIANE We started up again. But it could never work. Have you found someone ?

FRANK When I started, I was with this married woman, she wouldn't leave her husband, she was never free, it was getting to me, so I started chatting a bit on the...

ROBERT A married woman ?

FRANK She was never free.

ONLY CONNECT

DANIEL I met a wonderful woman. And then I lost her.

ARIANE Oops.

ROBERT What did her husband do ?

FRANK I dunno, the husband doesn't count.

ROBERT Doesn't he ?

FRANK He was a shrink, that's all I know, she never wanted to talk about him. I just started –

ROBERT Why not ?

FRANK She said it was none of my business... I just started with the –

ROBERT She didn't want to talk about him ?

DANIEL Let's talk about you, shall we ? You're looking very lovely.

ARIANE We have to keep up appearances. Especially when the inside's in ruins.

DANIEL You're not feeling so good ?

ARIANE He's demolished me. He's driven a bulldozer over my heart. Other than that I'm fine.

FRANK He was cheating on her too.

ROBERT She knew that ?

FRANK She told me.

ROBERT But she didn't want to leave him ?

FRANK No.

ROBERT So you weren't enough for her ?

Pause

FRANK Guess not.

Pause

I just started with the chat, and then one day, I forget, I'd had enough...

ROBERT Of the married woman ?

FRANK Good woman but well, bit complicated. She kept standing me up, driving me crazy, so I started up with this girl I'd found on the net...

Clair is writing.

TEXT He looks at her. A tear runs down her cheek. He reaches out and touches her face with his hand. Through the window of the café we see a man with a deformed body begging in the street.

HER

We have it easy. Do we have the right to be unhappy ?

DANIEL Do you need consoling ?

ARIANE Do you want to visit the ruins ?

FRANK Nice girl. Good fun. I could have been alright with her. But I did this stupid thing. I took the husband's name, when I started chatting with her. I told her I was the shrink.

ROBERT Why ?

FRANK Dunno. Didn't wanna be me.

ROBERT And she believed you ?

Pause

FRANK And then afterwards I had to go on lying.

ROBERT You took her for a ride.

FRANK It was stupid. I could have been alright with her.

DANIEL I feel like licking your wounds.

ARIANE Then I'll see what I can do for your manly pride.

FRANK You know what I'd like to know ?

ROBERT What ?

FRANK I'd like to know what it all means.

ROBERT All what ?

FRANK All this. Love. Men and women. The whole shebang. What's it all about ? Can you tell me ? Why does it never work ?

TEXT

HIM

I don't understand what you want. What does love mean to you ?

ONLY CONNECT

ROBERT Why should it mean anything ? It's just your brain trying to put some order where there isn't any. It's the same mess everywhere. Chaos. Even in the laws of physics. Why should it be any different for us ?

FRANK But... the universe, all that... I mean, the physicists know how it works, don't they ?

ROBERT They've just understood that it's more complicated than they thought. You have to learn to be OK in chaos.

FRANK You mean... the universe has no meaning ?

ROBERT Not for us anyway.

FRANK Shit.

Pause

But I mean, even if the universe has no meaning... Hot, isn't it ?

ROBERT Take your jacket off.

FRANK No.

ROBERT What's that ?

FRANK None of your business. That's for my work.

ROBERT What's your line ?

FRANK What's with all these questions ? Have I asked you questions ?

ROBERT You have, actually. You asked me the meaning of the universe. What's your line of business ?

FRANK Security.

ROBERT Social security ?

Daniel and Ariane are in bed.

DANIEL There was a genuine exchange. I opened up like never before. But it wasn't enough. She wanted more.

ARIANE What did she want ?

TEXT

HIM

What are you looking for exactly ?

FRANK Even if the universe has no meaning... there's nothing to stop us giving it one, is there ?

ROBERT Is that what you think ?

FRANK Is there ? Even if all this means nothing at all, we can give our life meaning, can't we ? When you love somebody... that gives your life meaning. Doesn't it ?

ROBERT Do you really think so ?

DANIEL Do you really think it's possible to go further ? Beyond sexual attraction, esteem, affection ? To come together on another plane, find a new meaning ?

ARIANE A new meaning ?

TEXT

HER

A path to take together. An encounter that's not a collision but a step forward. Not an absolute, definitive solution, not static, something dynamic, changing, nebulous, dealing with the present but turned towards the future. You move forward with the same step, or first one then the other, pushing each other, helping each other forward, without reservations, without regrets, without fear.

Clair erases what she has just written and instead writes:

TEXT She looks at him and smiles.

ROBERT You mean the married woman gave your life meaning ?

FRANK Er... yeah.

ROBERT Aren't you the lucky one ?

FRANK Except I've lost her.

ROBERT She gave you meaning and you lost it ?

FRANK That's worse, isn't it ? Makes me want to cry.

ROBERT Don't mind me.

Pause

Another bottle ?

TEXT

HER

I'd like to believe it's possible...

DANIEL A path to take together... Do you think that's possible ?

ARIANE Maybe not for me. But I'd like to believe it. Need to, even. Don't you ?

ONLY CONNECT

DANIEL It doesn't seem possible to me. But actually, with her... Maybe I missed something...

FRANK And you know what ? In the end she left her husband. At the same time as me. Without telling me.

ROBERT That must be a bit hard to swallow.

FRANK Too right, mate.

ROBERT You know what ?

FRANK What ?

ROBERT You've really been had.

Pause

ARIANE Can I give you some advice ?

DANIEL Of course.

ARIANE Find her.

DANIEL Too late. She wants more than I can give.

ARIANE No proof of that. Tell her what you want. Express yourself. Expose yourself.

ROBERT How long did it last ?

FRANK What?

ROBERT The married woman.

FRANK What's it to you ?

ROBERT Just curious.

FRANK About seven years.

Pause

ROBERT Ah yes, I see. Seven years.

FRANK No but I really loved her, you understand? She's the one.

ROBERT The married woman?

FRANK She took me for a ride but fuck it, I can't help it, I can't forget her, she haunts me...

ROBERT She's the one?

FRANK I can't forget her...

Pause

Fuck it. I'm going for a piss.

He gets up, sways and collapses on the floor. Robert gets up and leans over him.

Daniel is ready to go.

ARIANE You can stay the night, you know. No-one's coming to take your place.

DANIEL I need to walk a bit. Think things over. It's done me good to see you again. We'd left things unfinished, unresolved. It's better now. I'm in peace. Thank you.

He kisses her. The phone rings.

DANIEL You spoke too soon. Answer it. Be happy.

He leaves. Ariane answers the phone.

ROBERT Come to me.

ARIANE Where are you ?

ROBERT In this swingers' club. 'Slovely. Full of slags on heat, made me think of you. Got any coke you could bring me ? There're some big black fellas, really wild, should be worth your while.

ARIANE You're not being funny, Robert.

ROBERT I'll give you the directions. Know what I've got in my pocket ?

ARIANE No, and I don't want to know. Go home, go to bed and try to sleep.

ROBERT It's not time to sleep. There'll be a time for that later on. It's time to make a fool of myself ! I've got off to a good start but there's lots more to do before morning comes. Don't you want to make a fool of yourself with me ?

ARIANE I've done that enough already.

ROBERT Come on, you'll love it, I'm gonna start a fight with some of these pricks, come on, let's have a few laughs.

ARIANE If I come, it'll be to take you home. Give me the address.

ROBERT Don't forget your whip.

Daniel is walking through empty streets. He stops on a bridge and looks at the Thames.

Ariane helps Robert to his front door.

ROBERT I hate you.

ARIANE I know. Give me your keys.

ROBERT Hey but you must really love me to look after me like this.

Pause

ARIANE But I do really love you, Robert.

ROBERT I'm gonna be sick.

ARIANE Wait till we get inside.

Daniel comes to a decision and moves off at a determined pace.

Elly rings Robert's doorbell. Twice.

Robert and Ariane are asleep in bed. Robert wakes up. He finally opens the door.

ROBERT What are you doing here ?

ELLY I've got an appointment.

ROBERT Have you ? Come in.

ELLY Had you forgotten ?

ROBERT No no no.

He goes and shuts the bedroom door.

ARIANE What is it ?

ROBERT Sleep.

Daniel is writing an e-mail.

*E-MAIL Clair,
I've thought it over. And I've come to the conclusion you're mistaken. My
love for you is not as lukewarm as you think. I miss you terribly. You
criticize me for not knowing what I want, or for not wanting it enough.
But I know what I want now. All of a sudden it seems very clear.*

Elly is on the couch. Robert is listening to her while discreetly consulting his e-mails.

ELLY When I was seventeen I had an abortion. I liked the boy but my mother
said I was too young. She said I would ruin my life. She took charge of

everything. She took me to the hospital. After that I didn't love the boy any more. I never spoke to him again... At twenty-four I started again.

E-MAIL Trouble with your erection ? Cialis and Viagra at cost price.

ELLY This time I was really in love with the boy. Deeply. My mother didn't get involved. I don't think I told her. It was between the boy and me. He liked me a lot, he said, but he didn't want children. Ever. He didn't want to get married. He was an artist, a painter. He didn't want any family, he wanted to channel all his energy into his art. So I had an abortion. Afterwards he changed. His eyes changed. He didn't see me in the same light. Or maybe it was me. Maybe it was me who didn't see him in the same light. Anyway we split up. I ran into him a few years later, he was working for an advertising agency, married with three kids. He looked miserable.

A chat message appears on the screen.

TEXT Clair has just signed in.

ELLY I'm not the sort of girl they want to have kids with. I don't know why. I'm not the sort of girl they want to live with. They don't mind going out with me, dancing with me, sleeping with me. But nothing more. I don't know why. That's how it is. I have a lot of love to give. But men don't want it. Perhaps I should have a child on my own.

Robert gets up.

ROBERT Excuse me. I won't be long.

Robert goes out, taking the computer with him. He sets it up in the next room.

Frank comes home, takes off his jacket and holster – which is empty.

Robert opens the door to the bedroom and looks at Ariane asleep. He takes his jacket, comes back into the other room, closes the door and sits down in front of the computer. He puts his jacket down next to the keyboard.

Clair is reading an e-mail from Daniel.

E-MAIL You criticize me for not knowing what I want, or for not wanting it enough. But I know what I want now. All of a sudden it seems very clear. I want to see you. I demand it, even. I want to take you in my arms and keep you close to me. For the rest of my life. I want to take care of you. I want to produce your film, pay your bills, organise your holidays. I want to make you happy. I want you to call me up immediately to tell me that you'll let me love you.

Robert contacts Clair on the chat. He switches on his webcam. His head appears in close-up, slightly deformed.

Clair interrupts her reading to reply.

ROBERT *Put your cam on.*

Clair and Robert communicate by webcam, speaking into a microphone.

CLAIR Are you alright ? You don't look too hot.

ROBERT I was out on the town last night. Had a pretty good time. Met a friend of yours. Lovely guy. Real sweetie.

CLAIR Who ?

Frank walks up and down in his flat as he calls Clair.

ROBERT He talked a lot about you. I think you made a big impression on him.

CLAIR What was his name ?

ROBERT He gave me a present. Lovely guy.

Clair's phone rings. She looks but doesn't take the call.

CLAIR What was the present ?

ROBERT A philosopher. I could tell there had been a great intellectual connection between the two of you. I was a little bit jealous.

CLAIR Was it Daniel ?

ROBERT How many of them are there ?

Pause

Anyway I couldn't help noticing you'd had a profound influence on his thinking. He owes you a lot.

Frank walks up and down talking to Clair's answering machine. Clair can't hear him and talks only to Robert. Frank speaks at the same time.

FRANK Listen, I know you don't want to talk to me but listen to me.

CLAIR Where did you meet him ?

FRANK I met your husband last night. Your ex-husband. He didn't tell me who he was but I figured it out for myself. He's crazy.

ROBERT For my part I must admit I never quite surrendered to the force of your argumentation. Your positive thinking. But I was wrong.

FRANK I don't know what he was playing at, I don't care, but the mad fucker's got my gun.

ONLY CONNECT

ROBERT You're right, you know, mankind has taken a great leap forward. What progress!

FRANK I don't know where he went. I don't know where he lives now. You've got to tell me.

ROBERT Look at telecommunications. We're in different parts of town but we can see and hear each other as if we were in the same room. And if you get on my nerves I can always turn you off and switch on the telly.

CLAIR What are you playing at, Robert ?

ROBERT What a life we live ! All of us, except for the odd outcast here and there – the poor, the old, the whole of Africa, nothing to worry about, nobody who counts... What a world we live in ! So much to do, so much to eat !

FRANK And if he gets in touch with you, you refuse to see him, ok ? You call me immediately and tell me where I can find him. I promise I won't do him any harm. As long as he doesn't do anything stupid.

ROBERT Look at our food.

CLAIR Can you hear me ?

Robert takes Frank's revolver out of his jacket pocket and puts it down by the keyboard without interrupting his speech. The revolver remains out of range of the webcam, so cannot be seen on the screen.

ROBERT You can choose from thousands of pre-cooked dinners that all have the same taste of plastic. Because of course – and this is perhaps the domain where we've made the most progress, where things have really moved forward – woman is no longer chained to the kitchen.

Elly, still waiting in the next room, is beginning to get restless. She gets up and looks around her.

ROBERT She's left the pots and pans behind. Whereas men have remained pretty much the same – abject, blind, obtuse – women have come on in leaps and bounds. Where they used to be generous, altruistic, capable of giving without asking anything in return, women have managed in the space of a few short years to become as selfish, greedy and vicious as us menfolk.

Ariane wakes up in bed and sees that she is alone.

ARIANE Robert ?

ROBERT Woman has banished pity from her vocabulary. And as for sex, well, what more can be said ? Man just isn't up to it any more. The female orgasm has become the be all and end all of all commerce between the sexes.

CLAIR What is this rubbish you're spouting ?

Elly walks around the room, examining it, trying to hear what is going on beyond it.

ROBERT The female of the species no longer requires a mate for procreation. All you need for that is a few wankers, some test tubes and a fridge. And woman can take her pick.

Ariane gets out of bed.

ROBERT The female eunuch has turned things around and made the male her sex toy. Of course there are still a few romantic old fools like me stuck with their dreams of fusion, trying to escape their own egocentricity to merge with their partner. But they won't last long. What I had failed to understand – and it's you, Clair, that have cleared me up on this and I shall be forever in your debt... you might have told me a bit earlier – seven years ago for example, but hell, better late than never – what I had had trouble grasping was that romance is dead.

Clair picks up her phone and consults the answering machine. She listens to Frank's message.

Ariane comes out of the bedroom looking for Robert.

ROBERT Dreams of union between men and women have no place in the 21st century. It's pretty grotesque after all to try to unite with another person to free oneself of one's self-awareness.

Ariane opens a door and startles Elly.

ARIANE Oh, sorry.

She closes the door.

ROBERT There's a much easier way. And it's your chum who's helped me realise it. Your lover. It was listening to him whining on about the woman of his dreams that I realised just how ridiculous I was myself.

Ariane hears Robert's voice and heads for the room he is in. The door is closed.

ARIANE Robert ?

Clair calls Frank.

Ariane listens at the door. Robert has not stopped speaking.

Frank, in his flat, rushes to the phone as it rings.

CLAIR 24, Aubrey Road. Go now.

Frank runs out.

ROBERT So if you see your bloke thank him for me, will you ?

CLAIR Robert, listen to me !

ROBERT It's thanks to him I can finally see you for what you are. We passed like ships in the night. No contact. No connection. Any more than with your girlfriend who thinks she's in love with me. She's asleep in the next room. I haven't even fucked her, the poor girl.

Ariane puts her hand on the doorknob, hesitates.

Clair takes her phone again and rings Ariane.

ROBERT She's going to wake up with a start any minute now. You might have to console her a bit. I won't be able to. Because there's only one way to escape my solitude.

Ariane's phone rings in the bedroom. Ariane takes her hand off the doorknob, hesitates, then goes back to the bedroom.

ROBERT That's the present your bloke gave me. He thinks you've given his life meaning. Open to doubt, that. But anyway he's given me the means to give meaning to mine. I've understood how to connect myself to the cosmos. I'm going to stop lying. I'm going to quit pretending. I'm finally going to be truly ok in chaos.

Ariane finds the phone and answers.

ARIANE Yes ?

ROBERT Because for me progress stops here.

He takes Frank's revolver, puts it in his mouth and pulls the trigger.

CLAIR NO !!!

Robert falls backwards, out of the webcam's field of vision, as blood spurts onto the wall behind him and the lens.

Ariane hurtles down the corridor, opens the door and screams.

Elly comes running up.

Clair remains motionless in front of the computer for a long time. Her phone rings. She answers.

FRANK What's the door code ?

CLAIR It's too late.

She hangs up. Then she picks up her phone again and calls Daniel.

DANIEL Clair ?

CLAIR It's not what you think, but come. I need you.

Pause

DANIEL I'll be right over.

BLACK

2.

Ariane and Clair are standing side by side during the funeral service. They do not look at each other. Ariane is crying. Without looking at her, Clair discreetly takes her hand in hers.

BLACK

3.

Elly is consulting her « favourites » on love.com as she speaks on the phone.

ELLY Are the little monsters in bed now ?

Ariane, in her flat, sits down with a remote control in her hand.

ARIANE Lili ? Lights out now, please darling. It's late.

ELLY ... Oh but whenever you want... I'll take them for the weekend if you like...

Clair takes a remote control and puts the television on.

DANIEL Are you sure you want to watch ?

On the screen we see Juliet killing herself on stage after discovering Romeo dead.

Ariane switches on the television with the remote. She stares at the television for a moment, then takes a phone and calls.

ARIANE Yes, it's Anna. Can you speak ? ...

ELLY No, I shouldn't worry about that... Nothing doing there...

DANIEL Clair ?

CLAIR Yes ?

DANIEL It wasn't your fault.

On the screen Romeo and Juliet are dead but we hear a phone ring. Robert walks onto the stage, picks up the phone, turns it off and speaks to the camera.

ROBERT *In the age of the mobile phone, Romeo and Juliet can no longer screw up as stupidly as they do in Shakespeare's play. So how do they screw up now?*

DANIEL *I can't compete with a ghost.*

Daniel goes out. Clair switches the television off and goes back to work on her screenplay.

Ariane turns the sound down. We no longer hear Robert's commentary.

ARIANE *Good... No, she's here till tomorrow, then with her father till Monday, this weekend I'm free as a bird... What did you have in mind ? ...*

Frank is studying diagrams of the nervous system of the human body on his computer. A message appears : « Clair has just signed in ». He hesitates, then sends her a chat message.

FRANK *Clair ?*

Clair opens the file containing her screenplay, then looks at the rectangle that has appeared on her screen with Frank's message, his name and photo. She hesitates.

Clair finally replies to Frank's message.

CLAIR *How are you ?*

FRANK *Fine*

FRANK *Do you forgive me ?*

Clair reads and hesitates.

ELLY *No but living with someone, a genuine love story, I don't even think about that any more...*

CLAIR *I accept the mitigating circumstances. What are you up to ?*

FRANK *I've changed jobs. I'm in Manchester.*

CLAIR *With your parents ?*

ELLY *Well, I thought I might ask someone just to...*

ARIANE *I don't care about that. You tell your wife whatever you like, it's not my problem...*

FRANK *I needed a change of air. I found a job here. Masseur. I'm training and working at the same time. I like it.*

CLAIR *Are you happy ?*

ONLY CONNECT

ELLY No but not just anyone, someone I know, who'd do it for me... out of friendship for me... Well...

FRANK *I've met someone.*

CLAIR *I'm happy for you.*

FRANK *What about you ?*

ARIANE That's better, say something stupid, that's what I like... In the water ?
Hmm...

Ariane is listening to the phone but watching the television, moved.

ARIANE Naughty boy...

ELLY No, I was wondering, if it was alright with you, if perhaps Jeremy...
Don't laugh... Yes, I'm serious. There wouldn't be any ambiguity...
No... Don't be stupid, I've never fancied Jeremy...

Clair hears footsteps and goes back to her work on the screenplay, causing the chat messages to disappear. Daniel brings her a cup of tea and caresses her neck.

TEXT

HER

I'd like to believe it's possible...

HIM

We live in fear and anxiety, so we often feel as though love has disappeared...

CLAIR I don't feel it's my fault. He helped thousands, maybe even millions of people, but he always refused the help that was offered him.

While Daniel is speaking, Clair finishes the speech in her screenplay.

TEXT

HIM

We live in fear and anxiety, so we often feel as though love has disappeared, but it hasn't.

ELLY Alright, forget it, I never said anything... It was just an idea, forget it, forget it... Forget the whole thing.

DANIEL Going well ?

CLAIR Useless.

ARIANE Yes, you've got two days, keep that up and you'll be twisting me round your little finger... *(she laughs)*

DANIEL Do you want to help me ?

CLAIR To do what ?

TEXT

HIM

The waves keep on circulating. They never die.

DANIEL I know I'm awkward, I've got no social skills, I don't know anything about art, I don't make you compliments and I don't know how to seduce you but I'm trying to reach you. You're hiding. You seem open and relaxed but underneath everything's locked away. You've withdrawn, you've closed up shop, you've curled up into your shell.

Pause

I could give up and look for someone else. But how much time and effort would it take to find something as good as what I've got with you ? I don't know if I've got the strength to start again. With you, there is a real connection.

Pause

TEXT

HIM

They may pass into another dimension, but their force remains with us, we can use it, if only we want to.

FRANK How r u ?

FRANK r u still there ?

Frank waits a moment, then goes back to his diagrams of the nervous system.

ARIANE Well, I'm going to my lonely bed to dream of that until tomorrow... Yes. See you then.

She hangs up and turns up the sound on the television.

ROBERT *By multiplying the means of communication we have above all succeeded in distracting ourselves, in turning away from what is essential. The human condition is too frightening. We shy away from looking ourselves in the face. Anything that can distract us from the poor forked animal we see in the mirror is more than welcome.*

ELLY But I've seen a shrink ! ... Oh yeah, great : I told him all about me, he said nothing, got up, went out and put a bullet through his brain ! ... You can laugh, you weren't there. It was all over the wall, it was disgusting...

ROBERT *Look up. Look at all those antennae stretching their crooked fingers towards the sky.*

We see the pictures of antennae seen at the beginning of the play.

We hear Robert's commentary at the same time as Daniel's, Elly's and Frank's speeches that follow.

ROBERT *The new Tower of Babel rises up right to the satellites orbiting round our planet, transmitting messages of love throughout the universe : wishes, desires, vows, prayers, supplications, requests, complaints, claims, pleas, summons, demands, ultimatums that drown each other out in an unintelligible hubbub that no-one is listening to.*

DANIEL I'm trying to go down the same path as you. You're right to be demanding. We can't just be content with what we've got. You taught me that. You held out your hand. I came. Now you're the one that's lagging behind. Come on. Follow me.

Pause

Trust me.

Pause

You're not listening to me.

ELLY No, I'm alright. Don't worry about me... Yes, yes, drop them off before lunch... OK, see you tomorrow.

She hangs up, closes the love.com window, opens a search engine and types the words « artificial insemination ».

At the end of Robert's commentary, Ariane zaps with the remote control. Like Frank at the end of the first sequence, she seems to put out the lights in each of the various spaces occupied by the characters on stage.

FRANK Sweetie ? Are you asleep ? I'm coming to bed.

Frank closes his work and comes back to the chat. He looks at the exchange between him and Clair.

FRANK Clair ?

He waits a moment then turns off his computer.

Clair finishes the line of dialogue in her screenplay.

TEXT

HIM

Love is never lost. It's the best investment you can make.

CLAIR Like a pension scheme in fact.

DANIEL What ?

Pause

Do you want me to stay or would you rather I went home ?

Pause

CLAIR Stay.

ONLY CONNECT

DANIEL What's the point ? You're not here. You weren't listening to me. I made you an offer. But apparently you don't believe it's possible.

Clair finishes the scene in her screenplay.

TEXT

HER

That's possible...

CLAIR No. I don't know if I can do it. But I believe it's possible.

They look at each other.

BLACK

THE END