

The Last Dance

by
Mitch Hooper

Mitch Hooper,
34, rue Victor Massé
75009 Paris
06 15 92 63 96,
mitchoop@gmail.com

The Last Dance

Before the lights come up there might be some music : « Save The Last Dance For Me » by The Drifters.

Lights up. A balcony or a terrace overlooking the sea. Two seats. Perhaps a door, half open, and windows, the setting sun reflected in the glass. A suggestion of a living room behind this.

Early evening. Suzanne sitting. Sombre. She drinks.

SUZANNE I must have been in love with him at first. I often was back then. When I was young. We met at a party. People had parties then. All the time. Friends, and friends of friends. We didn't do much else, as far as I can remember. We danced. He was a good dancer, I was surprised. I'd noticed him because he was looking at me but not saying anything. He was a bit shy. He stood there slightly aloof, glass in hand, looking vaguely embarrassed, somewhat preoccupied, as if he really had something better to do but was hanging around just to be polite. I was intrigued. Made a change from my pals at the lab. Much more direct, they were. What's your name and straightaway their hand on your bum. Not Peter. He observed me from a distance. Didn't say anything. Not to me nor to anyone else. Rather distinguished though : a sort of presence in the middle of this strange absence. I was curious. He was surprised when I spoke. Flustered, even : he apologised for staring at me. Men don't usually worry about that, they assume they have every right to treat you like a piece of meat. Peter was different. Not quite of this world. He inhabited some other sphere. I wanted him to take me there.

Peter enters.

PETER Are you alright? I wasn't too long?

SUZANNE You were quick.

PETER I went through the woods.

SUZANNE What?

PETER I took the shortcut.

SUZANNE Why?

Pause

No need to take the shortcut. You should have gone along the cliff. You know you like it. It's one of the last days of summer. There won't be many more.

PETER It's pleasant through the woods too. Do you need a pill right away?

The Last Dance

Pause

Do you need a pill right away?

SUZANNE No.

PETER You perhaps shouldn't drink so much...

SUZANNE I'll do what I bloody well like.

Pause

Do you want one?

PETER Bit early for me.

Pause

SUZANNE You mustn't get worked up like that. It won't do.

PETER I'm not worked up.

SUZANNE No need to rush.

PETER I was scared they'd be closed.

SUZANNE There was no hurry, it could easily wait until tomorrow.

PETER No time like the present.

SUZANNE If you get worked up like that every time it's going to get on my nerves.

PETER Sorry.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER I apologise too much. She doesn't like it. I even apologise for apologising. Apologise for being me. She'd like me to get angry. Then we could argue, and fight. She thrives on drama, noise, fisticuffs. I don't. Don't quite see the point. Don't seem to have it in me. She's a volcano, she has to erupt every now and then, she has to spit fire. I must just be an ordinary common or garden mountain. Can a mountain meet a volcano? Well, in this case, yes. Don't know how but straight off we felt an affinity, a closeness, a connection. We were tuned in. And we still are. Not in a superficial way but deep in the heart of us. In the book I'm trying to write, I want to put that into words. There are no words for these things. They have to be invented. The nameless must be named. The invisible made visible. It's my life's work. The words that exist won't work any more. They've lost their meaning. They've been bandied about so much, they've changed hands so often, they've lost their value. They have to be reinvented. They have to be heated up, melted down and coined anew.

The Last Dance

Pause

SUZANNE Did you see Marge?

PETER Marge? Who's Marge?

SUZANNE At the corner shop.

PETER I didn't go to the corner shop, I went to the chemist's.

SUZANNE What about the butter?

Pause

PETER Oh, sod it. What a prat.

SUZANNE Doesn't matter.

PETER No, but it gets on my nerves.

Pause

I'll get some from the newsagent's tomorrow.

SUZANNE Why not from the corner shop?

PETER Because I'll be at the newsagent's for the paper. And then I won't have to listen to that bloody woman who tells me her life story every time I go there.

SUZANNE Marge tells you her life story?

PETER In excruciating detail.

SUZANNE She likes you.

PETER Can't think why. Never spoken to her, except to ask for a pound of King Edward's.

SUZANNE You're still a good-looking man, you know.

Pause

PETER Suzanne, I...

Pause

SUZANNE What?

PETER What do you mean what?

SUZANNE You were going to say something.

The Last Dance

PETER I was...? What was...?

Pause

I've got this tune stuck in my head, can't get rid of it: la la la, la la la, la la la la... what is it?

SUZANNE La la la, la la la, la la la la la?

PETER No :la la la, la la la, la la la la la. What's that ?

SUZANNE Hard to say. Don't you know the words?

PETER It'll come back.

SUZANNE Let me know.

Pause

PETER Pain?

SUZANNE What ?

PETER You winced. Was that in pain?

SUZANNE I'm alright.

Pause

Do you want to work?

PETER Now?

SUZANNE Yes.

PETER It can wait.

SUZANNE Don't worry about me. I'm going to sit here in the sun. Make the most of it while it's still here.

PETER I'll stay with you.

SUZANNE You don't have to.

PETER I know.

Pause

SUZANNE It's quiet in the evening. Nice.

PETER Yes.

The Last Dance

Pause

Mind you, it's pretty quiet in the daytime too. It's hardly a hub of activity here.

SUZANNE Now the holiday people have gone.

PETER Even before. Not exactly Ibiza.

SUZANNE Just as well.

Pause

How's it coming along?

PETER Not too bad. Got a little bit done.

SUZANNE Today?

PETER This afternoon. A little bit.

SUZANNE Do you think you'll finish it some day?

PETER God willing.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE He gets on my nerves with his God. He lives in a blur. I have to have focus. Things that aren't clear annoy me. Upset me even. It's like a stain on the floor. You have to do something. You have to scrub at it. If you scrub at it, it goes away. But God keeps coming back. Like dust on the mantelpiece. You can wipe it clean all you like, you still have to start all over again the next day. Peter's too intelligent to be religious. But he does cultivate the vague. Blurred thinking. The unclear. Sometimes when he talks about it he almost manages to give it shape. Sometimes I feel I'm beginning to get what he means. And then immediately afterwards it's gone, I can't hold on to it. And that annoys me.

Pause

I can't hear the sea any more.

PETER The tide's out.

SUZANNE I know the tide's out. You can see the rocks. But even when the tide's in I can't hear it any more. Even you, if you speak to me from another room I can't hear you. Your hearing's better than mine.

PETER But not my sight.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE That's always been like that. My hearing's new.

PETER Not as new as all that.

SUZANNE Had you noticed it before? Why didn't you say?

PETER How can you be sure that I didn't say when you've just admitted that you can't hear?

SUZANNE Don't be a clever dick. Did you tell me or didn't you?

PETER If you think I can remember...

Pause

SUZANNE We're wearing out, the pair of us. He'd have a lot of explaining to do, your God, if He existed.

PETER It's just the way it is. You've got all the explanations you need, with your science.

SUZANNE My science explains how not why.

PETER Ah, the whys and the wherefores...

SUZANNE Programmed obsolescence, is what it is. They talk about it as if it's something new, but it's all part of God's plan.

PETER Of course, if you only believe in matter...

SUZANNE Life is brief, yes.

PETER If you find it brief, you must be enjoying it.

SUZANNE Oh, I've always enjoyed life. I never said I didn't. You're the one that thinks there's something better than this. For me this is all we've got. And it's not enough.

PETER I don't say there's something better. Just that there's more to it than what we know.

SUZANNE Oh, who cares anyway? Give me your hand and be quiet.

Silence. They look at the sea. And sometimes he looks at her. *Within this silence there might be music: "Knee 05" by Philip Glass (from "Einstein on the Beach"), playing low behind what Peter says, then the spoken part more clearly once he has finished.*

PETER When I look at her I don't see her as she is now. Or not only as she is now. I have to make an effort to see her as she really is, there in front of

The Last Dance

me. There are all these other images of her that get in the way. Snapshots of the past. Little capsules of happiness. Her face, so fine, so expressive. The glint in her eye. The wry smile. Her body, so at ease in stillness or in movement, just... perfect. And all this charged with what I felt on first seeing it, the emotion, the irresistible rise of... of what? The surge of... sap? Of life? Of... of... joy? Suzanne to me is proof that God exists.

Pause

SUZANNE Hungry?

PETER No. You?

SUZANNE Yesterday's leftovers do you?

PETER Fine.

SUZANNE Tell me when you're hungry.

PETER No hurry.

Pause

Marina called.

SUZANNE When? I didn't hear anything.

PETER Not here. On the... the whatyacallit.

SUZANNE She called you on your mobile?

PETER Mobile.

SUZANNE Did you answer? Could you get it to work?

PETER It worked. Inconvenient but it worked.

SUZANNE It's very convenient when you can get it to work. Except when you can't hear the bloody thing.

PETER It rang when I was at the chemist's. I had to go out again to speak. I was talking in the street. It was inconvenient.

SUZANNE Why didn't she ring here?

PETER Perhaps she did. I didn't ask. I was talking in the street, everyone could hear, I kept it brief.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE She rings you on your mobile to avoid getting me.

PETER She sends her love.

Pause

SUZANNE And of course Simon nothing?

PETER What do you mean Simon nothing?

SUZANNE He hasn't rung?

PETER He's in Canada.

SUZANNE I know where he is. I'm not senile yet, you know.

PETER He's not going to keep ringing from Canada.

SUZANNE He never rings.

PETER He rang in June.

SUZANNE They have phones in Canada.

PETER It's expensive.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE I'm choking with anger. I'm in such a rage. I can't bear it. I can't bear no longer being in control of my body. I can't bear feeling only pain. I can't bear being abandoned by my children. I can't bear feeling guilty for having enjoyed life. I can't bear having no more life to live. I can't bear begrudging Peter the extra time he's got. I can't bear being so selfish. I can't bear having hurt Peter, and not being able to say anything. I can't bear loving him so much and doing nothing to show it. I can't bear having taken so much from him and giving nothing back. I can't bear being so unfair. I can't bear being so unbearable. I can't bear leaving him behind.

Pause

Lovely this evening.

Pause

PETER The sun?

SUZANNE The last days of summer. Then they forecast rain. Wind. Storms even.

The Last Dance

PETER Autumn. When do you want to go back?

SUZANNE Not yet. Let's stay as long as we can.

Pause

Please. As long as we can.

PETER No need to go back as long as the weather holds.

SUZANNE We could even stay a bit longer perhaps this year.

PETER If you want. No rush.

Pause

Aren't you bored here? Now you... You don't swim any more. No more walks.

SUZANNE I watch the sun set. I listen to the sea.

PETER But you can't hear it any more.

SUZANNE At least I don't hear the bloody traffic. I hear the silence.

Pause

Do you miss your work?

PETER What do you mean?

SUZANNE The office. Barbara, Dominic... Publishing.

PETER Oh that. No, not at all.

Pause

I've spent my whole life working on other people's books. I'm delighted to have the time finally to work on mine.

SUZANNE Except that I keep you from working.

PETER No you don't.

Pause

I don't need you for that. I can always find an excuse for not getting down to it.

Pause

It was always you before, in a hurry to get back.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE Not any more.

Pause

No-one's waiting for us.

PETER What about your friends?

SUZANNE No-one.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER What we call love is impossible to define. It has a different meaning for each of us. To define it would be to reduce it to something confined, constrained, limited. No-one would recognize it. Whereas in fact it's everywhere, everyone's part of it, it covers everything. Suzanne has spent her life in laboratories. If there's a hypothesis she wants concrete, tangible proof, QED. When she speaks of love she thinks mainly of its physical aspects. She finds it difficult to admit the rest of it. Which of course confronts her with her own contradictions and she can't stand that. But otherwise why would she be here with me? After all this time. With all my flaws and faults... She's never said as much but she sees our relationship as a sort of making do. Hardly ideal but oh well, we make do. She finds it too reasonable. Lacking the essential madness of love. But of course the madness is there, just not where she's looking for it.

Pause

What was your friend's name again?

SUZANNE What friend?

PETER The one who told us to come here. Who had that little house just outside the village. With the bee-hives.

Pause

SUZANNE Roland.

PETER Roland. What became of him?

SUZANNE You know full well what became of him.

PETER No I don't. I may have known in the past. But I don't now.

SUZANNE He sold up. Years ago.

PETER Yes, I know that. We fell out and he left. I remember that alright. Rolando furioso. What I meant was: what became of him after that?

SUZANNE Oh, I don't know.

PETER Have you never heard from him?

The Last Dance

SUZANNE I don't think so. Why are you suddenly so interested in Roland?

PETER Well, it's thanks to him we're here really. Don't you know what became of him?

SUZANNE No.

PETER You two were very close at the time. Have you completely lost touch?

SUZANNE Stop it, Peter.

Pause

PETER And the other one, the funny fellow with the chimpanzee imitation.

Pause

Every time he met up with you, he did his chimp imitation.

SUZANNE Gorilla.

PETER What was his name?

SUZANNE Sebastian.

PETER Sebastian. What happened to him?

SUZANNE He died.

PETER Ah.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE You only live once. You have to make the most of it, don't you? I did. It wasn't to spite him, it was to please me. No spite in it at all. I felt at home in my body. He didn't. Neither in his nor in mine. He was always somewhere else. I wanted to make the most of my body, get some enjoyment out of it. And if a few others could enjoy it too, why not? I wasn't depriving him of anything. I was just sharing out what he didn't want... I like men. Their skin, their muscles, their cock. The clumsy lies, the transparent self-interest, the unquestioning self-belief. The cocky naïveté. That doesn't stop me loving my husband. It's complementary. My lovers always respected Peter. They understood that he was untouchable. One disparaging remark, one smirk, one condescending smile and that was it – I'd have nothing more to do with them. My body has always been a source of pleasure. A pleasure that I've shared with others. That's Christian, isn't it? Whatever the bible bashers say. It's simple, it's healthy, that's what love is. That's what it's all about. I've thoroughly enjoyed living in my body. And now I'm going to die.

Pause

The Last Dance

PETER I saw someone else had died the other day. I saw it in the paper. I thought to myself I must tell Suzanne... who was it?

SUZANNE I don't know. You couldn't have told me.

PETER I saw it the other day.

SUZANNE Who?

PETER I don't know. An actor maybe. Somebody you liked.

Pause

Or maybe not. I can't remember.

SUZANNE An actor who died the other day.

PETER Actually he'd been dead for quite a while. But I only found out the other day. I wondered if you'd heard about it.

SUZANNE Humphrey Bogart?

PETER No, more recent.

SUZANNE Marcello Mastroianni.

PETER No, not a continental.

SUZANNE American?

PETER I expect so.

SUZANNE Paul Newman?

PETER Is Paul Newman dead?

SUZANNE I think so.

PETER Dear oh dear. He was so young.

SUZANNE No he wasn't. Not when he died.

Pause

PETER The problem with actors is they're always on the telly.

Pause

SUZANNE Where's the problem?

PETER You never know when they're dead. They don't even seem to age.

SUZANNE That's true.

The Last Dance

PETER At least with friends you see them getting old. It's less of a shock.

SUZANNE Not always.

PETER No, admittedly not always.

Pause

Are you in pain?

SUZANNE It's alright.

PETER Is that why you're drinking?

SUZANNE I drink because I like drinking.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER I can't bear seeing her suffer. I'd rather it was me. But I've got nothing wrong with me. I'm older than her, I eat fatty food, I don't exercise, I'm always having accidents and falling ill and now all of a sudden there's nothing wrong. It's not right. There must have been a mistake somewhere. They've got the wrong person. She was always so proud of her body, so at ease in it. Whereas mine always seems to belong to someone else. There's always a bit over. An arm too long, a foot that turns the wrong way, fingers that won't do what they're told. Suzanne was always so fit and healthy. How could she imagine her body would betray her? I want to take her pain and keep it for myself. She doesn't know what it is to be ill. She can't understand. She must be so afraid. She must be totally lost.

Pause

SUZANNE What did he look like?

Pause

PETER Who?

SUZANNE Your actor.

PETER Well, he was... how can I say?... I can see his face...

SUZANNE Then you can describe it.

PETER What?

SUZANNE His face, you can describe it to me.

PETER Yes, well, I should say he was... unremarkable.

Pause

The Last Dance

SUZANNE Unremarkable?

PETER Yes. I wouldn't say nondescript but... unremarkable.

SUZANNE Makes you wonder what I saw in him.

PETER Yes... You liked him in that film with whatshisname.

Pause

SUZANNE Yes...?

PETER That big bloke. And then in that... what was it called? ... that period film... with the blonde girl...

SUZANNE Blonde?

PETER Yes, she was in all those... oh, it's going to drive me mad...

SUZANNE Well, we've made some progress. We know he was in a period film with a blonde.

PETER Yes, and another one too... in the country. She was in it too.

SUZANNE The blonde?

PETER Yes, in the country. She was the lead. He was less... there were other actors...

SUZANNE You don't say.

PETER She had a farm.

SUZANNE In Africa? Meryl Streep. Don't tell me Robert Redford's dead?

Pause

PETER No, that's not it...

SUZANNE Well, that's a relief. Robert Redford...

PETER No, I wouldn't have sprung it on you like that. I'd have danced around the subject, tried to soften the blow.

SUZANNE I should hope so.

PETER For dear old Robert, I wouldn't have... Mind you, it's going to happen to him one day...

SUZANNE Don't. I don't want to go there.

Silence. He looks at the sea. She looks at him.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE I'll never see his book. He won't finish it. I'll never know what's going on inside his head. No-one will. When I'm dead he won't be up to writing anything. Perhaps he never was. His thoughts vanish into thin air, he can't put them on paper. If I hadn't have been here he'd have disappeared. He'd have flown off into the blue. I'm the one holding him back. I'm the weight that pulls him down. When I'm gone there'll be nothing left to stop him. He'll finally be free. When I'm reduced to ashes and dust he'll fly away into the sky.

Pause

PETER Anything on telly this evening?

SUZANNE What do you think?

PETER Well, you never know...

SUZANNE Why do you ask?

PETER No reason.

SUZANNE You know we haven't got a telly here. You can't have forgotten?

PETER No no. Just asking.

SUZANNE Make sure you're not missing anything?

PETER If you like.

SUZANNE Do you want to go back?

PETER No no. No, it's just that there might have been a film with thingammybob.

SUZANNE Or the blonde.

PETER Then their name would be in the paper.

Pause

SUZANNE Have we got today's paper?

PETER No, I didn't get it today. But yesterday's would do.

SUZANNE I threw yesterday's out.

PETER Ah.

Pause

SUZANNE You would say, wouldn't you, if you were bored with me?

PETER Not much risk of that.

SUZANNE You would say?

The Last Dance

PETER I could never be bored with you around.

SUZANNE Before maybe. But now...

PETER Now more than ever.

Pause

La la la, la la la... We danced to it...

SUZANNE Ah? When?

PETER That I couldn't say...

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER Sometimes I worry that... everything will disappear. That I won't know anything anymore. That I'll be completely... lost. All my memories erased. My ideas gone. My life a wreck. Maybe that's why I must write this book. Before it's too late. Express everything. Put everything in its place... Of course I won't be able to get it all in. I'll have to boil it down. Put my thoughts in order. Understand how I came to be here. With her. I mustn't play down the wonder of it. Nor understate the negative. Itemize all I've got inside me. All she inspires in me. No sentimentality. Affection, warmth, infinite tenderness, vaulting expectation, reaching for the sky, yes, yes, but also fear, anger, wounded pride, panic, bitterness, frustration, failure, all merging, muddled, tangled up and tied into knots. How to express the magnificent shipwreck of a life shared? I worry that I'll never manage it. I worry that all that will be lost.

Pause

American.

SUZANNE The blonde?

PETER The song. A group of black fellows used to sing it. They had loads of hits. La la la, la la la, la la la la la... You know it...

SUZANNE Hmm...

Pause

Where was she ? Marina ?

PETER They're back, I think. The kids are back at school.

SUZANNE Already?

PETER Oh yes.

Pause

The Last Dance

What's the matter?

SUZANNE Nothing.

PETER There are tears in your eyes. Are you in pain?

SUZANNE No no, it's not that. It's just...

PETER The onset of evening?

SUZANNE Something like that, yes.

PETER I can understand that.

Pause

But I'm here for you too.

SUZANNE Yes. Yes, thank God you're here. Thank you.

PETER No need to thank me. It's no sacrifice on my part. I have no desire to be alone.

SUZANNE I know I'm a bit of a pain at times. And I made you suffer...

PETER When?

SUZANNE In the past.

PETER No you didn't.

Pause

I have a feeling I'm not a man who has suffered much. Compared to some, I think I've got off pretty lightly.

SUZANNE Perhaps I suffered more than you did.

PETER I think you did.

Pause

SUZANNE You're so above everything. You soar above everything. You never touch the ground.

PETER Is that a compliment or a complaint?

SUZANNE A bit of both. It used to be a problem for me. Not now. Now I envy you.

PETER You envy me?

SUZANNE Your serenity.

PETER Ah, that... And I envy your vivacity.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE Not much of that left.

PETER Yes, there is. You've always been full of life. And it's not over yet.

SUZANNE No, but soon.

PETER No no no.

Silence; They look at the sea. Sometimes he looks at her. *Perhaps some music again: Never Let Me Go sung by John Martyn, starting discreetly under Peter's speech, becoming louder once he has finished.*

PETER She's never been ill. She doesn't know what it is. So naturally she exaggerates a bit. A few aches and pains and she thinks she's at death's door... She sees the world in black and white. Everything's either true or false for her. Nothing in between. No shades of grey... And the doctors - doctors always want to cover themselves. It's in their interest that their patients think they're very ill. Then if they don't make it they'll have had fair warning. And if they're cured it's thanks to the doctor... She's never been ill, she doesn't know what it is. She's exaggerating. But she can't die. I don't want her to.

Pause

SUZANNE You're going to have to start getting ready for it.

PETER What?

SUZANNE Life without me.

PETER Don't be silly.

Silence

SUZANNE Here, have a drink, it'll do you good.

PETER Yes, I think perhaps I... Thanks.

Pause

SUZANNE Do you want to eat?

PETER No... but have something yourself.

SUZANNE Not hungry. Cheers.

PETER Cheers... Here's to your vivacity.

SUZANNE You'd do better to pass on some of your serenity.

PETER Oh no, that wouldn't be you.

SUZANNE What? Stop muttering behind my back, it's annoying.

The Last Dance

PETER What would you do with my serenity? Accept everything?

SUZANNE Certainly not.

PETER You've always been a rebel. And a rebel you will stay. That's the way I like you.

Pause

SUZANNE You still like me?

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE He was a good dancer. I was surprised. No sign of clumsiness, or embarrassment. No inhibitions. He let himself go, twisting to the music, I did the same. We were in sync. I thought to myself he'd make a good lover... It's not that I was wrong, it's just that... it didn't seem that important to him. He was tender but not totally there. Yes, I must have been in love with him. He with me, I couldn't say... But it's not being in love that counts. That doesn't last. It's pleasant for a time, then unpleasant for a time, then you move on to something else, you forget. I've had men under my skin often enough. And on the brain. A slight obsession. A sort of superficial dependency. Like a box of chocolates: the first ones taste so good you can't help eating more and more until it's too much and you start to feel sick. You feel a bit ashamed even for having started. With Peter it's different. The dependency runs deep. Peter is the rock on which my life is founded. He puts up with everything. I know that whatever I do he won't hold it against me. He'll never let me down, he'll always be there to buoy me up with this unconditional love. But I give him so little back. I'm ashamed. He's so much stronger than me. If he'd left me I wouldn't have been able to deal with it, I think my life would have just collapsed.

Pause

You should leave a bit of room for the others.

PETER What?

SUZANNE In your life.

PETER I... I don't know what we're talking about.

SUZANNE Never mind. You'd wandered off.

PETER Off? When?

SUZANNE Just now.

Pause

PETER That's rather worrying.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE No it isn't. You've always had your absent moments. Moments when you're not completely there. It used to worry me. Not now.

Pause

PETER How did it worry you?

SUZANNE I got the feeling you weren't really interested in me.

PETER What on earth gave you that idea?

SUZANNE I couldn't hold your attention. It was humiliating.

PETER And not any more?

SUZANNE Your mind wanders, that's all. It doesn't stop you loving me.

PETER No.

Pause

It doesn't stop me loving you.

Pause

SUZANNE You've always had your absent moments.

PETER Perhaps... but now I don't know... it's not...

SUZANNE You're perfectly alright.

Pause

I'm the one who's scared, not you. I have to learn to... let go. I have to learn to give up.

PETER To give up what?

SUZANNE Everything. The ghost. You have to help me. It's so hard.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE My life's collapsing anyway. It's been built on certainties that don't hold water any more. I wanted something concrete, solid, sure. All I've got is ruins. My body's worn out: withered, wrinkled, rotten. I hate it. Pleasure's no more than a stabbing memory. I'm in pain. I was cheerful before. I was intelligent. My thought flowed like water in a mountain stream: fresh, clear, unstoppable. It's turned into a stagnant pond, fetid, full of mud. I squelch about in it. Instead of moving forward I just go round in circles. Always the same old song. I'm going to die. Suffer and die, suffer and die, that's all that's left me.

Pause

The Last Dance

PETER I'll help you if I can.

SUZANNE You help already. A lot.

PETER By example?

SUZANNE Not only.

PETER Not enough.

SUZANNE No-one could do more.

PETER No, but still.

Pause

SUZANNE Did she say anything about me?

PETER Who?

SUZANNE Marina.

PETER We didn't have time to talk.

Pause

I was at the chemist's. I had to speak in the street. I cut it short.

SUZANNE Does she know?

PETER Know what?

Pause

I told her you were having some tests.

SUZANNE She didn't ask for the results?

PETER I hardly spoke to her.

SUZANNE She could have asked.

Pause

PETER What do you want me to tell her?

SUZANNE I don't know. It won't change anything anyway. Don't say anything.

Pause

PETER And Simon?

SUZANNE He never calls anyway.

The Last Dance

PETER We could call him.

SUZANNE No. He'd feel obliged to come over.

PETER You'd enjoy seeing him again, wouldn't you?

SUZANNE Let him get on with his own life.

Pause

Life belongs to the living.

PETER Then it belongs to us.

Pause

You should have something to eat.

SUZANNE Not now. Do you want something?

PETER Leave it.

Pause

SUZANNE Were they a couple?

PETER Who?

SUZANNE The actor and the blonde.

PETER In the films they were. Well, one or two. In real life I don't know.

SUZANNE And you don't know her name either?

PETER It'll come back to me. I don't think they were together. I think she was with that American chap...

SUZANNE But this one's American too, isn't he?

PETER I never said he was American.

SUZANNE Yes you did. Why do you think I've been going through the whole of Hollywood for the last half hour?

PETER I said he was American?

SUZANNE Yes.

PETER Can't think why I said that. Though he might have been. Wouldn't bet my life on it though.

Pause

The Last Dance

SUZANNE Alright then, let's just get this straight: a not necessarily American actor with unremarkable looks that I like and that played in period films with a blonde...

PETER Pretty, the blonde.

SUZANNE Oh well then, why didn't you say that before?

PETER Don't mock the afflicted.

SUZANNE Not Marilyn Monroe?

PETER No no.

SUZANNE So it's not Tony Curtis.

PETER What isn't?

SUZANNE The actor I like. Could have been.

PETER Yes... but no. Is he dead, Tony Curtis?

SUZANNE I should think he must be. Poor soul...

PETER Oh well...

SUZANNE None of us are getting any younger.

PETER We certainly aren't...

SUZANNE Laurence Olivier.

PETER No.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER At first I felt obliged to have affairs myself. Ridiculous really, but somehow I thought it was expected of me. There was no shortage of pretty women. Charming, even. And quite open to offers. But after a while I realized that they bored me. All of them. So I stopped. I came to realize I didn't need it. What I had with Suzanne was enough. She needed something else, but I didn't. She needed reassurance. Not me. I don't have that sort of existential anguish that everybody else seems to be afflicted with. I rather like life the way it is. As long as I've got Suzanne, what more could I ask?

Pause

SUZANNE River Phoenix.

PETER What?

SUZANNE The actor.

PETER What was the name?

The Last Dance

SUZANNE River Phoenix.

PETER Is that an actor?

SUZANNE A young one.

PETER How come you know him then? Sounds more like some place in Nebraska. Or Arizona.

SUZANNE Good looking.

PETER Ah. That explains it.

Pause

It wasn't him anyway. It was someone I knew.

SUZANNE Ah. Cary Grant?

Pause

You must be a bit fed up only seeing me all day.

PETER No.

SUZANNE I stop you from working.

PETER No you don't.

SUZANNE You have difficulty concentrating because of me.

PETER I have difficulty concentrating full stop. I think it's getting worse. My thoughts just evaporate, like morning dew.

Pause

Perhaps because no-one's waiting for it. Apart from me. I promised myself I'd write it but actually I'm the only one who knows it exists. Or could exist. If I don't write a word no-one will be bothered.

SUZANNE I'm waiting for it.

PETER Are you?

SUZANNE You've got to get into a routine. Impose a discipline.

PETER Yes. Like my writers.

Pause

They always need a deadline. Otherwise they drink their advance and produce nothing.

The Last Dance

Pause

Go on holiday, invite their friends out for dinner, have a good time. And the work doesn't get done. Whereas if you bang on the desk and say a hundred and fifty pages by the first of March they do it. Like kids with their homework.

SUZANNE I told you you were missing it.

PETER No, I wouldn't say that...

Pause

SUZANNE Well, I want a hundred and fifty pages by the first of November.

PETER November? That's a bit...

SUZANNE No excuses. You'll just have to get down to work.

PETER It's just that what I'm trying to express is so...

SUZANNE How many pages?

PETER What?

SUZANNE How many pages have you written up till now?

PETER How many...? No, but it's not the writing that's... that could be done in no time once I've...

SUZANNE You'd better get a move on or I'll never see it.

PETER It's like Racine used to say: "I've finished my play. Now I just have to write it."

Pause

No, not Racine – who was it? Feydeau? No... Somebody French...

SUZANNE How many pages?

PETER I've got pages and pages of notes...

SUZANNE But what have you actually written?

Pause

PETER I'm still on the plan.

Silence. They look at the sea. *In this silence perhaps The Book of Love sung by Peter Gabriel, with the words coming between their two monologues.*

PETER I'm still on the plan. I'm never going to finish it. Perhaps I'm never going to write it after all... Still, it has to have a structure. It's a complex work. It has to have a design, it needs order, harmony... Once I've got that, it'll be plain

The Last Dance

sailing, it'll be all downhill from there... Does life have a structure, I ask myself. There's a beginning, a middle and an end alright but apart from that? Rise and fall? If I think of my life, I can't really see... When was my apogee? Highs and lows, yes but... Accidents. Of no particular significance. The only thing that gives meaning to my life is Suzanne. Without her I... If you take Suzanne out of the equation... it all collapses.

Pause

SUZANNE He's still on the plan. So not only will he never finish his book but in fact he won't even have started the bloody thing. And there was I counting on him to leave a trace for posterity... No, to tell the truth I've always known he'd never do anything, so why bear it against him? I wanted to know what was going on in his head. I wanted to know what he felt for me. I wanted something concrete... Perhaps it's all just hot air. A fantasy. A daydream. An idea that was floating in the air and just happened to land on me one day, like a butterfly on a rose. A rose or a tulip, me or somebody else, what difference would it make? A momentary attraction, a fleeting fancy, a whim. I wanted to believe he saw more in me than the others did, that he knew my worth, but that's not it. There's no basis to it. It could have been anyone.

Pause

I never knew what you saw in me. You who like everything to have depth. A superficial little woman like me.

PETER You have a profound spirituality.

SUZANNE I only believe what I see.

PETER Nevertheless.

SUZANNE Perhaps you have a completely false image of me. Perhaps you're just projecting, fantasising on me but in fact I'm not like that at all. Perhaps deep down you don't know me.

PETER I don't know you completely. Of course not. You still manage to surprise me.

SUZANNE But what is it that you actually love? If it's not my body, what is it? My character?

PETER It's more than that.

SUZANNE What then? What does that mean? What do you love? My soul? That's so vague... it doesn't mean anything. I've been horrible to you, how can you love me?

PETER Don't work yourself up.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE I'm not working myself up, I just want to know! I've asked a straightforward question, you're incapable of giving me a straightforward answer. You beat about the bush, you kick into touch, you never actually answer the question!

PETER Alright, I don't love you, is that what you want? I don't love you, God is dead, I can't remember anything and everything's going to disappear, you, me, the actors whose names we've forgotten, the songs we can't remember the words to, everything's going to be sucked up into the void, nothing will survive, everybody's going to die and nothing will be left because life has no meaning, I'll never write my book because there's no point, there's no point to anything and love doesn't exist!

Silence

SUZANNE I'm sorry.

PETER No, it's me.

SUZANNE No it isn't. It's me that gets worked up over nothing, not you. You know that.

PETER Except this time it was me.

SUZANNE Because I upset you by getting upset. It's not your fault, it's mine. Stop trying to be a saint, you're not Jesus Christ, you have the right to react when you're provoked. You're always trying to shoulder the blame, stop it, or you'll get me worked up again.

PETER I'm sorry.

SUZANNE I don't believe it! Don't apologise!

Pause

I'm becoming unbearable, aren't I?

PETER No.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER It can't just be an accident. All this beauty. It's not just here by chance. There's thought behind it. There's a writer. There has to be. Cruel perhaps, pitiless certainly, but a great writer. He knows what he's doing. He's got a design, he has a plan, it's obvious. He's writing a magnificent book... Perhaps he neglects the details a bit? No, all this is leading somewhere. All these feelings... this movement towards her... Cary Grant... Rolando furioso... la la la, la la la, la la la la... All these rivers flow into the ocean.

Pause

Red, the sea. The water's on fire.

The Last Dance

SUZANNE Marvellous.

Pause

I'll miss it.

Pause

Or rather no. I won't miss anything.

Pause

I won't feel anything.

PETER A chariot of fire.

SUZANNE Galloping over the horizon.

PETER It's been found again.

SUZANNE What?

PETER Eternity. It's the sea gone with the sun.

Pause

SUZANNE You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. You make me happy when skies are grey...

PETER La la la la la, la la la la la...

SUZANNE Please don't take my sunshine away.

Silence

It's unbearable.

PETER Yes.

SUZANNE I could scream.

PETER Scream, if you want.

SUZANNE Do you understand?

PETER Absolutely. Go on.

SUZANNE No.

Pause

There's no point.

PETER If it helps...

The Last Dance

SUZANNE It doesn't help anything.

Pause

Nothing helps anything at all.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE Pitch black forever. Never a sound. Nothing... Could be worse, I suppose. At least it won't hurt. Once it's over... It's just the thought of... things going on without me. The sun will come up, the world will go on turning... but not for me. Selfish bitch. Leave a trace? Explain myself to Marina? Talk to Simon? Help Peter through it? Ask his forgiveness? He'll be lost without me... Make way for Marge? Who do you think you're fooling? She'd look after him but he could never love her. She could never console him. Too dim, too ugly. She could never take my place... Glad to hear it. Why pretend? It's not as if I want him to forget me. I want him to suffer. I want him to know grief without end. I want to stick in his heart like a gaping wound. I want him to be inconsolable.

Pause

Do you think I'm a bad mother?

PETER No.

SUZANNE My children hate me.

PETER What are you talking about?

SUZANNE Marina anyway. She's never forgiven me.

PETER For what?

SUZANNE You know.

PETER No.

SUZANNE Because of you.

PETER Me?

SUZANNE Because I made you suffer.

PETER You never made me suffer.

SUZANNE That's what you say. But she doesn't believe it.

PETER And neither do you apparently. But really I don't know what you're talking about.

SUZANNE Yes you do.

The Last Dance

Pause

She saw me in town once. With a man.

PETER So?

SUZANNE So she's never forgiven me. My attitude towards you.

PETER But what difference does that make in your attitude towards me?

Pause

SUZANNE You're not easy to understand.

PETER I'm hardly very complicated.

SUZANNE But you're out of the ordinary.

PETER If you say so.

SUZANNE An ordinary mortal would have been jealous. An ordinary mortal would have given me a good hiding.

PETER And that's what you wanted? Is that what you're trying to tell me?

SUZANNE No.

Pause

I would have allowed it.

PETER You'd have allowed me to hit you.

SUZANNE Yes.

PETER But why?

SUZANNE It would have been proof that you cared.

PETER Funny way of showing it.

SUZANNE No.

PETER Was there no other proof that could convince you?

SUZANNE Yes, there was.

Pause

Ample proof. You went about it differently. You're so much more intelligent than ordinary mortals.

Silence. They look at the sea.

The Last Dance

PETER I must be missing something in all this. All this jealousy business, all this you belong to me, this is my body, this is my country, don't touch this, don't touch that, think my way or I'll kill you... why do they all cling to what belongs to everyone? Apparently if you're a man you have to mark out your territory, fence it off, barricade yourself in and reach for the machine guns... But what a bore! What are they all so afraid of?

Pause

PETER I saw you once too.

SUZANNE What?

PETER With Roland.

SUZANNE What do you mean?

PETER Quite by chance. One winter, I don't know when, we were just here for the weekend. I popped round to his place to nick some wood for the fire. He wasn't supposed to be there. When I got there I saw his car. The house open. I was about to knock when I heard you. The two of you were in the living room, I saw you through the window... I thought it best not to disturb you.

Pause

SUZANNE I'm sorry.

PETER Why?

SUZANNE I didn't mean to hurt you.

PETER But I wasn't hurt. I found it rather... wonderful. If I had to say what I felt, I'd say I was... proud.

SUZANNE What of?

PETER You. You were very beautiful. I was proud to be your husband.

Pause

SUZANNE Why didn't you say anything?

PETER I didn't like to interrupt.

SUZANNE But afterwards?

PETER Afterwards I didn't really feel you'd want me to bring it up. You didn't know I was watching. It was rather indiscreet of me.

SUZANNE How long did you stay watching?

The Last Dance

PETER A little while. To tell the truth it was rather exciting. The peeping tom aspect gave it a bit of an edge.

SUZANNE You should have said. We could have come to an arrangement. We might even have had some fun...

Pause

PETER You don't think we had fun as it was?

SUZANNE Oh yes. We had great fun.

Pause

 And we still do.

PETER We look out to sea, we have a few drinks...

SUZANNE We try to remember dead actors' names...

PETER And American song titles...

SUZANNE How did it go?

PETER La la la, la la la, la la la la la...

SUZANNE You can dance, every dance...

PETER That's it! What is it?

SUZANNE I don't know. You can dance, every dance...

PETER You can dance, every dance... I can't remember what comes next.

SUZANNE Neither can I.

Pause

 But we do have fun.

Pause

 I thought you'd hate me.

PETER I don't think I could ever hate you.

Silence. They look at the sea. She looks at him.

SUZANNE How can he be so sure of himself? I ought to find him arrogant but with him it's not arrogance. It just comes naturally to him. As if everything's in its right place, and all's well with the world. Doesn't he know the world's on its last legs? Doesn't he know I'm going to die and leave him all alone? I'm going to die. Suffer and die... Except that Peter's here. Gentle, calm, benevolent. No,

The Last Dance

not just that... There's something in him that... I don't know what it is. It's a bit vague. I can't quite put my finger on it. But it comforts me. It consoles me. It does me good.

Pause

Nearly gone.

PETER The sun?

Pause

Sinking like a ship.

Pause

Are you warm enough?

SUZANNE I'm alright.

PETER Do you want to go in?

SUZANNE It's nice out here. Give me a drink.

PETER Wouldn't you rather have your medicine?

SUZANNE No.

PETER If you're in pain?

SUZANNE I'm not in pain, I just want a drink. If you won't give it to me I'll get it myself.

PETER Alright...

Pause

SUZANNE I'm getting mean.

PETER No you're not.

Silence. She looks at the sea. He looks at her.

PETER She's getting mean. She's suffering. She's in pain. She's afraid. Are things going to start getting difficult? No. I'll look after her. She'll get used to it. She'll let me in the end. She'll moan, but she'll let me in the end. I'll have to pay attention to details. Washing up, dusting. It won't be easy. I'll have to second guess her... I can manage that. With a bit of effort. She'll be surprised... I'll have to Hoover. But I'll do it for her.

He goes into the house. He puts the lights on inside.

SUZANNE Where are you going?

The Last Dance

PETER Be back.

Pause

SUZANNE I don't doubt it. But what are you doing?

Pause

Be careful when you flush it. If you pull too hard on the thing it never stops.

Silence. She looks at the sea.

He won't remember. He says yes then forgets a minute later. The bill's going to go through the roof. How will he manage without me? With two houses to run? It'll be a disaster. Two ruins. And then he'll pay too much for the repairs. They'll spin him a line and he'll pay over the odds just to be left in peace. It'll be a disaster...

Peter comes back with a plate of food.

PETER Here, eat.

SUZANNE Oh, but...

PETER Eat.

SUZANNE Thank you.

PETER It'll do you good.

PAUSE

SUZANNE You are a love. But you mustn't sacrifice yourself for me.

PETER It's no sacrifice. It's my pleasure.

SUZANNE Then I shan't object.

PETER I should hope not.

Pause

You were hungry after all.

SUZANNE A little bit...

Pause

It's good. Turns out you are capable of looking after me.

PETER I am, aren't I?

SUZANNE If I'd known before, I'd have gone about things differently.

The Last Dance

Pause

I know what it is.

PETER What?

SUZANNE Your period film where she's got a farm. It's an English film.

PETER Yes...

SUZANNE She's got a farm and she marries a rich man but that doesn't work out and she meets a dashing soldier...

PETER That's it!

SUZANNE He runs at her with his sword, he's all in red on the green hillside and he runs at her...

PETER Far From The Madding Crowd!

SUZANNE Beautiful photography, I love that scene...

PETER It's an adaptation of Hardy.

SUZANNE I can see the actor. What's his name?

PETER The soldier?

SUZANNE Yes.

PETER I don't know.

SUZANNE Yes you do. He was in that Italian film...

PETER It's not him.

SUZANNE What do you mean, it's not him?

PETER I wasn't thinking of the soldier. I was thinking of the shepherd.

SUZANNE What shepherd?

PETER After the soldier she ends up with a shepherd. He's the one I was thinking of.

SUZANNE I don't remember that.

PETER I even think they live happily ever after. More or less. Which is rare for Hardy. Not exactly one for happy ends.

Pause

SUZANNE She ends up with a shepherd?

PETER Well, you know, dashing soldiers are all very well for a while...

The Last Dance

SUZANNE That's true. Whereas dashing publishers...

PETER Much harder to get rid of.

Pause

SUZANNE Promise me you'll never leave me.

PETER You know I wouldn't.

Pause

SUZANNE Sometimes I imagine it. I imagine I've been so awful to you that you throw in the towel, you pack your bags and go. Scares the life out of me.

Silence. They look at the sea.

PETER I'll never write this book. No-one will ever know what I have to say... It doesn't really matter. It existed all the same... Perhaps there was never really any need to put it into words. Perhaps it's nature that does the real writing. Perhaps our intentions, our will, our feelings... perhaps all this love flies up and is written elsewhere. In a big book that we don't know how to read. Writing that we can't decipher but that binds everything together, in which the slightest movement, a single breath, a moment of sadness or of soaring joy, the slightest emotion falls into place in the plan, every breath we take, every impulse in our souls comes out as words linked into sentences... A heartbeat turns into the beating of wings, a rose petal flies up in the breeze, a swallow soars up higher and higher in the sky, a cloud moves across the moon, a spacecraft moves towards the stars that are drifting away, it's all moving, all the love within us is in constant expansion, a script that never fixes itself but is forever evolving, in a constant state of flux like the sea, the moon and the stars. And we with our pathetic little understanding, we try to put the universe in a nutshell. We try to catch all the movement and pin it to a wall like a butterfly in a frame. We try to stop time and to distill everything into a photograph. But even in a thousandth of a second the movement is infinite, the photo is always blurred. We catch nothing. Everything escapes us.

Pause

SUZANNE Have we finished the bottle?

PETER Yes.

SUZANNE Do you want some more? You haven't had much.

PETER I'm alright, thanks.

Pause

SUZANNE You didn't have a swim this morning.

The Last Dance

PETER Yes I did. I got up very early, you were still asleep.

SUZANNE Asleep, me?

PETER I didn't want to wake you.

Pause

I just took a towel and off I went. Lovely and calm. No wind. No-one on the beach. Just me, the sun and the ocean. As if the world had just been made. I must have swum for nearly an hour. Bliss.

Pause

SUZANNE You don't actually need anyone else to be happy.

PETER Yes I do. You were part of it all. Tucked up warm in bed. A comforting presence. You made the picture complete.

Pause

SUZANNE But I might have woken up all alone. I might have got scared and gone to look for you. You might have come home and found the house empty.

PETER But I didn't. I came back and you were still sleeping. I brought you your coffee. You opened your eyes and smiled. You touched my hand in thanks.

Pause

Sometimes happiness can be ridiculously simple.

SUZANNE I must have looked atrocious.

PETER I watched you for a while as you were sleeping. So peaceful, like a little girl. A few rays of sun were filtering through the chestnut tree in front of the window. A slight breeze rustled the leaves outside and gently touched your hair in the dappled sunlight. You looked marvelous.

Pause

SUZANNE You still fancy me a little bit then?

PETER You are my whole life.

Silence. They look at the sea.

SUZANNE The pain's gone. And they say alcohol's not good for you. Eating has helped a bit too. Could have done with a bit more salt but I didn't like to say anything. Don't want to put him off... I think that at this precise moment in time I love him more than ever. Best make the most of it. Make it last. It could help later on. When it gets hard, I'll be able to think of this moment. Night has fallen but

The Last Dance

I'm not cold. A quiet warmth. It comes from Peter. He's inside me. We're in sync. I think I'm... happy.

Pause

What made you bring him up?

PETER The shepherd?

SUZANNE No. Roland.

PETER Ah. Oh... by association.

SUZANNE With what?

PETER I don't remember.

Pause

SUZANNE He wanted me to leave you.

PETER Really?

SUZANNE He put his foot down and demanded I choose between the two of you.

PETER Was it a difficult choice?

Pause

SUZANNE No contest.

PETER Poor chap. He was a nice enough fellow.

SUZANNE He wanted to kill you.

PETER Oh, I don't suppose he really meant it.

Pause

La la la, la la la, la la la la... You can dance, every dance...

SUZANNE How can you be so... magnanimous?

PETER Because you didn't leave me.

Pause

I always knew you'd save the last dance for me.

Pause

"But don't forget who's taking you home

And in whose arms you're gonna be."

The Last Dance

SUZANNE " Oh darling..."

BOTH " Save the last dance for me."

He invites her to dance. She gets up and joins him. They dance, singing themselves at first, then we hear "Save The Last Dance For Me" performed by Harry Nilsson. They go inside the house and disappear, dancing. The lights slowly dim to BLACK.

Mitch Hooper

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