



The Nymph Dies

The subject of this play (originally presented as *Tristan and Iseult: a play about love and death*) is one of the most complex European myths – that of romantic love. But Flisar's Iseult says, "God wasn't kind to us when he gave us desire." Dissatisfied with things as they are, she starts to long for what-could-have-been. "Why shouldn't Desdemona strangle Othello?" she asks at the start of her search for an alternative reality. Tristan, her man, can slip into most roles she finds for him, but he cannot become what she needs – a hero, a knight. That is why Iseult – through a web of games designed to alleviate the boredom of everyday life – draws them into a dance of deceptions, pretenses and lies that eventually escape her control and ruin them both.

The lovers know that they are acting a comedy which cannot produce heartfelt laughter – it is the laughter of the grotesque, in which the joy of life has been killed. The visits of imaginary lovers eventually come to an end and in the second act a new function is introduced – playing with real jealousy and a real possibility of betrayal. The lovers' playing field had turned into a battlefield, their love into a war of the sexes.

By making Iseult dream of Ireland and Mark/Minstrel of India, the author confronts two typical romantic myths of the Western man – one from the 12th, the other from the 20th century, both concerned with man's search for love as the highest meaning of life: the first with finding eternity (God) in another human being, the other with finding eternity (God) within oneself. With this new situation, the theme and the plot of the play are lifted from the erotic level to the existential one.

The centerpiece of the second half of the play is a deconstruction of the basic existential conundrum: crossing the line behind which life begins afresh. Moving from the world of Iseult the Fair to the world of Iseult of the Earth is catastrophic for both our protagonists, for both have lost their projection field – and they are incapable of (or unwilling) to accept a world robbed of illusions. Because they cannot enter into the life beyond ideals, their death, too, cannot be more than theatrical. That is why Tristan and Iseult will continue to rise from the dead and play their roles on the world stages night after night – there is no end to their reincarnations. The play is telling us that the myth of romantic love is – despite its destructiveness – indestructible.



What the critics said

“Grab hold of air and climb up it to heaven, Tristan throws at Iseult in one of their confrontations, which multiply day by day like epileptic seizures. With this double metaphor Flisar strikes at the heart of his “play about love and death”: it is a play about expanding emptiness, the big Nothing, the great disillusion. This is quite simply a play about the death of love, not just any love, but the Great Romantic Love – the one that tries to recreate the ideal indelibly scorched into our consciousness by traveling minstrels of the Middle Ages... It must be said that Evald Flisar has written another excellent play, this time rapidly descending from the pure laughter of comedy into farce, grotesque, theater of the absurd, and cruelty...”

Milan Dekleva, *Dnevnik*, 1994

“Evald Flisar, I deliberately exaggerate, is a Slovenian Howard Baker... What both playwrights have in common are a high degree of metaphorical content, masterly dialogue, comical effects and spatial-temporal leaps... Both are very successful (by this I mean mainly the number of awards they receive), and both are highly productive, although Flisar has reached Baker’s norm of two plays a year only recently... And both have – for the fast and optimal presentation of their work – established their own theaters – Baker the Wrestling School, Flisar Slovenian Chamber Theater...”

Simon Kardum, *Slovenske novice*, 1994

“Flisar’s play is full of wit, irony and sarcasm, but also bitterness at the realization that all attempts by Tristan and Iseult to lift off and stay in the air are doomed to failure. The dialogue is brilliant, resounding, suggestive, fresh,



oblique, the conversation is realistic, tangible and yet full of deeper meanings (not merely a means to discuss problems, but a normal, natural, smoothly flowing speech which, however, consistently alludes to deeper layers of the text)..."

Lojze Smasek, *Vecer*, 1994

"The story about the unhappy love (and death) of Tristan and Iseult is present in European literature from the 12th century onward, most visibly in the Romantic period, when it was also given a dramatic form. Evald Flisar uses the myth merely as a starting point and develops an original look at the games of contemporary lovers... exploring mostly the darker tones of a declining passion... The main characteristics of the script are playfully witty dialogue and the author's uncanny ability to create a range of moods and emotional states..."

Jernej Novak, *Slovenec*, 1994

"Flisar's play has many layers of meaning and form, success-fully blending a number of styles and genres; the characters move through many different psychological and metaphysical states. But its central and most telling juxtaposition derives from the symbolic and mythological connotations of Ireland and India. This divides the play in two halves which, although structurally and stylistically separate, are really inseparable, with each being given its true role and meaning only by the other. There is a ten-year gap between the first and the second act – in the meantime the world as well as the psychology of the characters have markedly changed. The first half is livelier, the second more sombre; in the first, there are more stylistic leaps. Especially in the first act, there are scenes that even Feydeau would have been proud of writing."

Vili Ravnjak, introductory essay, 1994



The Nymph Dies (*Tristan and Iseult*), Slovenian Chamber Theater, 1994
Violeta Tomic as Iseult
Directed by the author and Branka Bezeljak Glazer





THE NYMPH DIES

Characters:

Tristan
Iseult
Mark/Minstrel



The Nymph Dies was first performed at the Slovenian Chamber Theater in Ljubljana, Slovenia, on February 13, 1994, as *Tristan and Iseult: a Play About Love and Death*. It was directed by the author and Branka Bezeljak Glazer with the following cast:

Tristan
Iseult
Mark/Minstrel

Boris Kerc
Violeta Tomic
Sreco Spik





THE NYMPH DIES

Act One

(The set consists of “room” and “office.” The room contains a double bed, a chair and a small table with an old-fashioned typewriter. The “office,” marked by two chairs, moves clockwise around the “room” until it returns to its starting position, which should be a little to the front and left of the “room.”)

(The play begins with Tristan and Iseult dead, lying in bed. Their hands are joined, their faces are covered by a black veil. The bed is surrounded by flickering candles. Smell of incense hangs in the air. Funeral music is heard. Minstrel invites the audience to take their seats. He directs them to form a line and circumnavigate the lovers. He gives some of them candles to light. The procession ends with the last member of the audience taking his or her seat.)

1.

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: “My lords and ladies, if you would hear a high tale of love and death, here is that of Tristan and Queen Iseult; how to their full joy, but to their sorrow also, they loved each other, and how at last, they died of that love together upon one day; she by him and he by her.”

(He brushes the strings of his harp. Tristan and Iseult remove the veil and sit up. Minstrel takes Iseult by the hand and leads her to



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the small table. He places her hands on the typewriter keyboard. He brushes the strings of his harp again. Tristan lies down and begins to snore, Iseult begins to type. Minstrel collects the candles and takes them out.)

ISEULT (*typing*): ... she by him, and he by her. (*She looks at Tristan. Gets up and approaches the bed.*) Hey, what would your wife say if she found you in bed with me?

(Tristan, pretending to be asleep, snores loudly.)

ISEULT (*shakes him*): Oooooooooiii!

TRISTAN (*opens his eyes*): She'd hit me on the head with her typewriter.

ISEULT: I didn't know she could type.

TRISTAN: My wife has the fastest finger in the Northern Hemisphere.

ISEULT: How d'you know?

TRISTAN: People keep turning up at the police station, reporting gunfire.

ISEULT: All right, she can type. Can she cook, though?

TRISTAN: Look at my fingers. Licked to the bone. My wife cooks like Elisabeth Schwarzkopf sings. Not to mention her comic genius. Every time she opens her mouth the Earth wobbles on its axis, so that –

ISEULT: – there's an earthquake in China. Ha ha. (*Seductively.*) What about my...?

TRISTAN: What?

ISEULT: Protuberances.

TRISTAN: They don't protuberate as much as I'd like to, and the nipples have too many spots, but I'm grateful the whole thing's not even worse.

ISEULT: Pig.

TRISTAN: Far from the trough, alas.

ISEULT: What about... this? (*She lifts her nightie, exposing a thigh.*)

TRISTAN: Oh no! You're breaking the rules of the Geneva Convention!

ISEULT (*climbs next to him under the blanket*): Okay, you have two minutes to mobilize.

TRISTAN: There's no need. My heavy artillery's ready to strike at a moment's notice.

ISEULT: Oooooooooohhhh...

TRISTAN: Shall we play by the rules or can I expect an ambush?

ISEULT: Let's see how the event unfolds. It'd be nice if we could both win – at the same time.



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TRISTAN: That means no early surrender.

ISEULT: I want to be... conquered!

TRISTAN: Promise you won't tell my wife.

ISEULT: Luckily I'm not in the habit of talking to myself.

TRISTAN: Wonderful! A woman who can keep a secret from herself is worth ten of those who can keep it only from their husbands!

(Confidentially.) Ssshhh.

ISEULT *(impatiently)*: What?

TRISTAN: Mustn't be late for work.

ISEULT: Well?

(Blackout.)

2.

(Spot on Minstrel, who is changing – into Mark.)

MINSTREL/MARK: My lords and ladies, fate has entrusted me with two roles, of the one that I am in reality, and of the one from a distant past, who embodies our longing for everything that reality cannot be. "God loves good singers; their voices and the sounds of their harps touch people's hearts, awaken sweet memories and help them forget many a pain and evil." Above all, they remind them of all that might have been.

(Lights on "room." Mark sits down on one of the two chairs that represent "office," opens his briefcase, takes out a pile of documents and a pocket calculator, starts to work. Tristan, out of breath, staggers in.)

MARK: Delayed ejaculation?

TRISTAN: I'm sorry, Mark, I know you're my boss, I know I'm never on time, and if you think I'm lazy or that work means nothing to me –

MARK: What worries me is the way you rush through life. As if trying to make the most of a fast-melting ice-cream.

TRISTAN: And yours – has already melted?

MARK: Another month and you, too, will come through that door like a shadow each morning.



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TRI STAN: How can a vehicle propelled by God ever crash?

MARK: Then you must be special indeed.

TRISTAN: I am. *(Pause.)* No, I'm not. Without Iseult I'd just be a boring young fart. She's the one who's miraculous and unique. Most of my qualities are simply a reflection of hers. We swore we'd be different even before we got married.

MARK: "Swear you'll never turn into a boring young fart!"

TRISTAN: Which I solemnly promised.

MARK: "Our love will never die!"

TRISTAN: "And if it suffers an accident," she added, "we won't try to cure it in other people's beds, but will jump hand in hand off the nearest bridge!"

MARK: Can you swim?

TRISTAN: Mark, you've no idea what a woman my Iseult is. She's short-sighted and wears rather peculiar glasses, but that – simply –

MARK: – enhances her exceptional charm.

TRISTAN: Our tiny flat is a model of tidiness. Not once has it happened that I wouldn't find a freshly ironed shirt in the wardrobe –

MARK: – or a can of beer in the fridge.

TRISTAN: – or a can of beer in the fridge.

MARK: She's ripe for the Servant-of-the-Year Award.

TRISTAN: Not at all. Everything she does is an expression of joy. When peeling potatoes she sings, when dusting and vacuuming, she recites Byron. When ironing sheets, she whistles an aria from *Traviata*. When typing scripts for the theatre, she amuses herself by commenting on the text –

MARK: You've married a combination of –

TRISTAN: – Sharon Stone and Woody Allen! Together we're – divine!

MARK: In other words: oh God!

TRISTAN *(looks at his watch)*: Oh God indeed! When I think that till the end of the working day there's still –

MARK: – an entire working day –

TRISTAN: – my heart sinks. Mark, what are we living for?

MARK: Is that a philosophical question, or would you like to hear my personal view?

TRISTAN: We're living ... I'm sorry, Mark, yes, I would like to hear your personal view.

MARK: Haven't got one. All I have is the answer to your question.
(Offers him a handful of documents.)



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TRISTAN (*reads*): "Work out the average rental per square foot of office space in the last quarter..."

MARK: Well?

TRISTAN (*sits, opens his case, takes out a calculator*): The average rental per square foot... (*Begins to calculate.*) Fortunately our love not only consumes a lot of energy, but also creates it... Not a day goes by without Iseult thinking of something new... (*Mark plugs his ears.*) D'you know what we feel like? Like two children of the Sun God, blessed with brilliant imagination and an unequalled capacity for enjoying the gift of love... Three hundred and twenty... (*Mark unplugs his ears.*)... divided by eleven point five... And so on the one hand our marriage is a peaceful haven of bliss... (*Mark plugs his ears once more.*)... while on the other hand...

(*Lights fade to blackout.*)

3.

(*Lights on "room." Iseult is typing. The phone rings. She answers.*)

ISEULT: Not now, Mother, can't you hear I'm typing... Of course we'll soon be well off, but until then I have to contribute some effort as well, so we don't end up on the street... I know I could've had any man I wanted... I wanted the one I have... You're right, Mother, sex isn't everything, but right now it's the only thing that interests me... You're what?... You're dying... Liver?... No, liver was last time... Gall bladder?... Chest pain... A heart attack, no doubt... You poor thing – and now I must carry on with my work.

(*She replaces the phone and resumes typing. The phone rings again. Iseult answers.*)

ISEULT: This is the local fire brigade. There's no one here, I'm afraid, we're putting out fires, ring again in a week or two.

(*She replaces the phone and resumes typing. Tristan enters, puts his briefcase on the bed, tiptoes closer and leans forward to look over Iseult's shoulder. He is followed by Minstrel, who sits on the bed.*)



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ISEULT (*typing*): “My downright violence and storm of fortunes may trumpet to the world, my heart’s subdu’d even to the very quality of my lord...” (*Thoughtfully.*) Storm of fortunes?... Storm’s abating, and so is Iseult’s mating...

TRISTAN: What’s happening?

ISEULT (*startled, but recovering instantly*): Nothing. Two chaps had an argument and for the last two minutes haven’t said a word to each other.

TRISTAN: Well, how would you develop the plot?

MINSTREL: Make one shoot the other?

ISEULT: I’d make one shoot the other.

TRISTAN: Imagine you’re writing a play for a more demanding audience.

ISEULT: Then I’d make the other shoot the one.

TRISTAN: That’d be the same.

ISEULT: Oh really? Would it be the same if Desdemona strangled Othello? I think we’d have a different play, a much better one in my opinion, because the silly old fool deserved to be strangled.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT: All he could think about was jealousy!

TRISTAN: He had no choice, such was Bill’s will.

ISEULT: That’s why literature isn’t nearly as interesting as life. Those famous personages in books and plays always play the same roles. Why shouldn’t Julia betray Romeo with his friend?

TRISTAN: In life, too, we’re given roles to play. You’re Iseult and I’m Tristan, and that’s what we shall remain.

ISEULT: Why? We’re not inventions of some overwrought playwright. If tomorrow you start playing Othello –

TRISTAN: Actually I’d prefer to be Iago.

ISEULT: Why not Pinocchio? Or Pipi Langstrumpf? When we’re fed up with that we can become Faust and Mephisto.

TRISTAN: What about Joseph and Virgin Mary?

ISEULT: Don’t you think we’re a little too young for immaculate conceptions?

TRISTAN: What about... what about...?

(She trips him. He falls and lands on his back.)

ISEULT (*straddles him and begins to tickle him*): What about this?

TRISTAN: No... Izzy... Please... Stop... No... Help... (*He laughs hysterically.*)



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ISEULT: I'll tickle you to death. Then I'll tickle you back to life and you'll tell me what it's like to be dead.

TRISTAN: I know, I was dead before we met. You brought me back to life, it was a tickle-back-to-life at first sight.

ISEULT: Why aren't you rowing, then? Come on, quick.

TRISTAN: Are we in a boat?

ISEULT: Come on, Tristan, don't you feel we're sinking, look at the sea, and those hooooorrrrrible waves, and the boat's leaning this way, and that way, and this way...

TRISTAN: Oh... My stomach...

ISEULT: The weather's getting worse. An even bigger storm is approaching. The storm of our destiny. We're going to sink.

TRISTAN: No!

ISEULT: Look at that wave, it must be twenty feet high... it's coming towards us!... please hold me... vvvvbbrrrrhhhhhssshhhh... vvvshhhhrb-hhrhhssshhh – and now this way, and that way again...

TRISTAN: We won't survive this storm.

ISEULT: We will – if we turn the raft into a sailing boat.

TRISTAN: How?

ISEULT: By erecting a mast and hoisting a sail. We can use my pullover as a sail, okay? – (*She takes off her pullover and lifts it into the air, Minstrel takes it from her.*) – and my bra can serve as a flag, okay? – (*She takes off her bra and lifts it up, Minstrel takes it from her.*) – and you'll erect a mast, okay? – and I'll hold it so it stays upright, okay? – and then the wind will throw us into the eye of the storm, and through it into another life – and we can use my skirt as a second sail, shall we? – and then the wind will throw us into the eye of the storm –

(*Blackout.*)

4.

(*Spot on Minstrel.*)

MINSTREL: "Stay and return if still you can! But oh! that path has no returning. For already Love and his strength drag you on and now henceforth forever never shall you know joy without pain again..."



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Violeta Tomic as Iseult, Sreco Spik as Mark/Minstrel, Boris Kerc as Tristan
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for through me and in that cup, you have drunk not love alone, but love and death mixed together. “

(Lights on “room.” Tristan and Iseult stand immobile. Minstrel brushes the strings of his harp and brings them to life.)

TRISTAN: “Good Madam, let me see your face.”

ISEULT: Face?

TRISTAN: Show me the secret behind that... curtain.

ISEULT: “You are now out of your text; but we will draw the curtain and show you the picture. Look you, sir: It’s not well done?”

TRISTAN: “Excellently done, if God did all.”

ISEULT: “It is in grain, sir, ‘twill endure wind and weather.” Touch it.

TRISTAN: “It is beauty truly blent, whose red and white nature’s own sweet and cunning hand laid on –”

ISEULT *(touches her breasts)*: What red and white?

TRISTAN: “Lady, you’re the cruell’st she alive, if you will lead these graces to the grave and leave nothing to my hand.”

ISEULT: “Fate, show thy force: ourselves we do not owe; what is decreed must be, and be this so!”

TRISTAN *(embraces her)*: Aaaaaaaaah!

ISEULT: Oooooooooohhhh!

(Blackout.)

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: Shakespeare was followed by Anna Karenina, which was followed by Madame Bovary, and then by Lady Chatterley’s Lover. Iseult began to frequent the local library. Her visits became so regular that the librarian asked her if she had taken up the study of comparative literature! They did eighty-nine major scenes from the classics, at first faithfully, but then increasingly in line with Iseult’s understanding of art.

(Lights. Tristan and Iseult are motionless. Minstrel brushes the strings of his harp and brings them to life. He exits.)

TRISTAN: “Don’t talk like that, Marguerite. I can’t bear to have you laugh at serious things any more.”



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ISEULT: Ha ha. Ho ho. "I'm not laughing any more."

TRISTAN: "Tell me."

ISEULT: "What?"

TRISTAN: "Would you like to be loved?"

ISEULT: "By whom?"

TRISTAN: "By me."

ISEULT: By you, Armand? Ha ha. Ho ho. "And then?"

TRISTAN: "To be loved deeply, eternally."

ISEULT: "Eternally?"

TRISTAN: "Yes."

ISEULT: "And if I suddenly were to believe you, what would you say?"

TRISTAN: "I would say..."

ISEULT: "You'd say what everyone says of me. What does it matter? If I am to live a shorter time than others I have to live more quickly. But never mind, however brief my life is to be it will outlast your eternal love."

TRISTAN: Not true.

ISEULT (*offers him an imaginary flower*): Take this.

TRISTAN: For me?

ISEULT: Camellia.

TRISTAN: Ooooooh!... My lady! Marguerite!

ISEULT: Armand!

TRISTAN: Marguerite!

ISEULT: Armand!

(They slap each other.)

(Blackout.)

5.

(Lights on "office." Mark is practising boomerang throwing. Tristan enters, lost in thought. He sits, opens his briefcase, takes out papers and a pocket calculator; starts to work.)

TRISTAN: Nine five by seven three, kitchen... plus ten by eleven, bedroom... my goodness, you can even put a bed in there, not only a wardrobe... "Yet they say we are almost as like as eggs; women say so."



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MARK: I can give you the name of a good psychiatrist.

TRISTAN: Why, is he selling a flat?

MARK: You've got a leak in the brainworks.

TRISTAN: What about you, is it normal, pretending to be a windmill?

MARK: Never seen a boomerang?

TRISTAN: I've seen kangaroos, but that doesn't mean I wouldn't find it unusual to have one somersaulting over me in the office.

MARK: I'm training for the world championship in boomerang throwing.

TRISTAN: Isn't it time you wrapped your hand round something softer and warmer?

MARK: I leave that to eternal youths.

TRISTAN: You find boomerang more –

MARK: Less... dangerous.

TRISTAN: I see. The worst that can happen if you throw it badly is that you have to sacrifice a month's pay for a new set of teeth.

MARK: Nothing compared to what can happen to you.

TRISTAN: And what might that be?

MARK: If you swell up like a balloon you can be emptied by a single prick of the pin.

TRISTAN: I'm not empty, Mark. I'm – I'm –

MARK: – full.

TRISTAN: Yes, full of longing. For the –

MARK: – bliss.

TRISTAN: – yes, the bliss of the first days of our marriage.

MARK: Which is gone.

TRISTAN: Which has – ever so slightly –

MARK: – faded.

TRISTAN: Happiness is a full-time job, it does one good to have a rest every now and then.

MARK: The way you talk about this happiness makes me wonder if the whole thing wasn't only in your head.

TRISTAN: Where d'you want me to feel happy, in my big toe?

MARK: These games of yours. I don't think they were a result of an innocent desire to "celebrate the joy of your marital bliss," but of your fear that –

TRISTAN: – we've received our bliss on loan, and will have to repay it by suffering?

MARK: If you put it like that.



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TRISTAN (*confidentially*): Shall I tell you how it was? (*Mark sits down to listen.*) Once we realized how special we were... we felt the need to protect our Paradise. Unlike Adam and Eve we knew we could be chucked out without notice, and wanted to prevent that. Unfortunately...

MARK: Yes?

TRISTAN: ... we failed to realize that among the joyful days of the week, there lurked a devious enemy. (*Pause.*) Sundays.

(*Blackout.*)

6.

(*The phone rings. Lights on the "room." Iseult, unkempt and distraught, wearing a dressing gown, is lying on the bed, sucking a thumb. Reluctantly, she gets up and answers the phone.*)

ISEULT: No, Mother, my voice is normal, something's wrong with your ears... You're in pain... Kidney?... Where exactly?... Just under your stomach... That's lungs... Probably cancer... Lunch? With you?... (*Tristan enters. He, too, is wearing a dressing gown and looks depressed.*) ... Have a word with Tristan... (*Passes the receiver to Tristan and sits on the bed.*)

TRISTAN: We had lunch with you recently... Well, a year ago, but it seems like yesterday... Hullo?

(*He replaces the phone, looks at Iseult. He sits on the bed next to her. They stare into space. Minstrel enters and sits on the chair.*)

ISEULT: Why aren't Sundays like other days?

TRISTAN: Because on the seventh day God ran out of imagination and rested.

ISEULT: I don't like this silence, Tristan, when everything's so... it frightens me.

TRISTAN: Pity we can't treat days like undesirable guests. Shut the door in their faces and yell: "Go back where you came from, you bore!"

ISEULT: Maybe we can. One, two, three.



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TRISTAN, ISEULT (*shouting*): "Go back where you came from, you bore!"

(*They stare into space.*)

MINSTREL (*shouts through the door*): "Go back where you came from, you bore!" (*He shrugs and sits.*)

ISEULT: Think of something.

TRISTAN: What about... a walk... in the rain... through deserted streets? Which might... fill us... with...

ISEULT: What?

TRISTAN: A quick dash round the block? Correspondence course in philosophy?

MINSTREL: Suicide?

TRISTAN: Sex?

ISEULT: Something new, Tristan, something that'll...

TRISTAN: Let's go to church.

ISEULT: God doesn't love us. Go to the window.

(*Tristan goes to the window. Minstrel follows.*)

ISEULT: What do you see?

TRISTAN: Houses, apartments, gardens.

ISEULT: Don't you see some kind of... mist? Cold, icy mist, which is entering through the gaps, making its home in the room, here, between us?

TRISTAN (*feeling around*): No.

ISEULT: Don't you feel the presence of someone who can change all that? Help us?

TRISTAN (*feeling around, nearly touching Minstrel*): No.

ISEULT: For some nights now I've been dreaming about an unusual land. So green. Soft and damp. Across the sea.

TRISTAN: Ireland. The land of drunkards and an occasional genius.

ISEULT: Take me there, please. That's my home.

TRISTAN (*turns away*): Too far. Too expensive. Of no use.

ISEULT: Tristan, I'm afraid.

TRISTAN (*produces a bottle of shampoo*): Doesn't it smell nice?

(*Iseult gives the bottle a cursory glance and looks away.*)



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TRISTAN: You've got to wash your hair. It looks like a bird's nest. And put some clothes on every now and then.

ISEULT: Do you mind if there won't be anything special for lunch today?

TRISTAN: As long as it isn't bacon-and-eggs again.

MINSTREL: It is.

ISEULT: Can you make it yourself?

TRISTAN: With pleasure. *(He exits. Kitchen sounds off. Tristan slips and falls.)* Bloody hell!...What's this milk doing on the floor? I'm lucky not to have killed myself... And egg shells, what're they doing on the floor? And this...

(Sounds of collapsing crockery.)

ISEULT *(indifferently)*: What are you doing?

TRISTAN *(emerges wearing an apron)*: Getting ready for the umpteenth repeat match against the Invincible Eleven.

ISEULT: I'll do the dishes tomorrow.

TRISTAN: Leave it, it's enough you do them once a year, I hate this middle-class obsession with cleanliness.

ISEULT: Do you mind if I go to bed? I don't feel well.

(She climbs under the blanket and turns her back to Tristan. He approaches, sits on the edge of the bed, leans over her.)

TRISTAN: Izzy... I know we've already talked about this, but why, why, why won't you see a doctor?

ISEULT: I'm not ill.

TRISTAN: You are. *(He shakes her violently.)* You're ill!

ISEULT: No, Tristan. I'm dead.

(Blackout.)



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7.

(Spot on Minstrel)

MINSTREL: The ship of destiny ploughed the waves, carrying Iseult into darkness ahead. Bur farther she got from the shore, greater became her sadness. Whither is she driven by these storms of love, to meet what sorry fate? Whenever Tristan came close to console her, she pushed him away, and her heart was full of despair. But then, one day, she ceased to resist, and she took balm for her aching wounds.

(Lights on the "room." Tristan on the phone.)

TRISTAN: No, Mother, I didn't say you were a hypochondriac, all I said was that your daughter was more and more like you... She's eaten too much of the cake of marital bliss and ruined her stomach... Maybe she's too greedy...

(Iseult enters, walks up to Tristan and holds out her hand.)

TRISTAN *(continuing)*: Of course we're worried about your health... There's hardly anything else we talk about... Old people's home? You? Never... You'd like what?... Visit us... I don't think this is the right moment... Ideal time would be around Christmas... in about two years' time... Hullo?

(He replaces the receiver. He looks at Iseult's open hand and shrugs.)

ISEULT: Vali.

TRISTAN: Valley?

ISEULT: U.

TRISTAN: You?

ISEULT: M.

TRISTAN: Am?

ISEULT: Vali. U. M.

TRISTAN: Valley? You? Am? Valium! Isn't it in the bathroom?

ISEULT: Give me. *(Reaches inside his pocket, pulls out a bottle of pills, puts it in his hand.)*



THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN (*gives her a pill*): Why is this in my pocket?

ISEULT (*swallows the pill*): So I wouldn't take all at once.

TRISTAN: Izzy, don't frighten me. (*Puts the bottle back in his pocket, rises, gently ushers Iseult towards the bed.*) You have to rest.

ISEULT: I have to work. (*Sits down at the typewriter.*)

TRISTAN: That can wait.

ISEULT: I have to earn money.

TRISTAN: What you earn isn't so important that you'd have to – I mean to say –

ISEULT: Thank you.

TRISTAN: I mean to say – whatever you manage to earn by typing is of course a crucial contribution to the family budget, but on the other hand not so crucial that you'd have to – what I mean is that – (*Iseult thrusts a script into his hand.*) – it's only fair and proper for me to help you... Where are you?

MINSTREL (*reading from sheet in typewriter*): U chu chu chi –

TRISTAN (*looking through the script*): Oh yes... Followed by: U chi chu chi chu chu... (*Iseult types.*)... U chu chu chi... (*Iseult types.*)... What's that?

MINSTREL: A play.

TRISTAN: No, that funny smell.

ISEULT: That's me, slowly rotting.

TRISTAN (*sniffing*): Is there something in the oven?

ISEULT (*rises*): I forgot. It's your lunch. (*Goes out.*)

TRISTAN: Lunch?

ISEULT (*re-enters*): Your favorite dish. Aren't you glad? (*Goes out again.*)

TRISTAN: What is my favorite dish?

ISEULT (*returns*): Leg of lamb, rather burnt, I'm afraid.

TRISTAN: Leg of lamb? You know perfectly well we have no money for luxuries.

ISEULT: I bought it with my typing fees.

TRISTAN: Oh, Izzy... Why?

ISEULT: To make you happy.

TRISTAN: But I am, I'm relatively – I mean of course enormously –

(Iseult bursts into tears. She throws herself on the bed and pummels the pillow with her fists. She rolls about, shouting and moaning. Tristan tries to calm her.)



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TRISTAN: Iseult... Stop this... Please!

(Abruptly, Iseult falls silent, sits up, seizes Tristan by the lapels of his gown.)

ISEULT: Hit me. Kick me. Pull out my hair.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT: Because I want to, because I'd like to! Come on, Tristan, slap my face!

TRISTAN: I can't.

ISEULT *(slaps his face)*: Be a hero! Be a knight! *(She slaps him once more.)*

TRISTAN: *(shocked)*: Iseult... *(Produces the bottle of Valium.)* Take one more –

ISEULT *(grabs the bottle)*: Close your eyes... *(Tristan obeys.)* Open your mouth...

(Tristan obeys. She rams the bottle between his teeth. He nearly chokes. Iseult throws herself on the bed and cries bitterly.)

(Blackout.)

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL *(sings, plays the harp)*:

Be a hero! Be a knight!
Lance and sword,
'Scutcheon and bow,
To cast stone quoits,
To leap wide dykes,
To hate each lie and felony,
To keep your word,
To sing and play the harp,
To do the hunter's craft.



THE NYMPH DIES

8.

(Lights on "room." Iseult behind the typewriter, slowly typing. Tristan enters with flowers in his left hand and a box of chocolates under his arm. He coughs. Iseult responds by coughing in the same manner, without turning. Tristan coughs once more, with Iseult again responding in the same way.)

TRISTAN (*conspiratorially*): Iseult...

ISEULT (*imitating him*): Tristan...

TRISTAN (*as if over a long distance*): Iseult...

ISEULT (*imitating*): Tristan...

TRISTAN: What have I got in my left hand?

ISEULT: A bunch of flowers.

TRISTAN: Under my arm?

ISEULT: A box of chocolates. (*Continues typing.*)

TRISTAN (*disappointed*): How did you know?

ISEULT: Because it's Tuesday.

TRISTAN: So?

ISEULT: On Tuesdays I get flowers and chocolates, on Wednesdays flowers and cookies, on Thursdays perfume and soap, on Fridays flowers and stockings, on Saturdays I'm taken to a concert or a movie, on Sundays you make me lunch, and on Mondays – oh yes, on Mondays we're free – you from the feeling of duty, I from the need to feel grateful.

TRISTAN (*dejected*): I'm not trying hard enough.

ISEULT: Tristan, you're trying so hard I can't keep up with you.

(Takes the flowers and the box and goes out.)

TRISTAN: Iseult... Don't, by any chance, start cooking.

ISEULT (*re-enters*): Why not?

TRISTAN: Because... Come, sit here for a moment... (*Iseult sits on the bed.*)

Although my Sunday lunches don't rank among the greatest culinary achievements, I've decided to take over the entire family catering.

From now on I'll cook, wash up, vacuum and do the shopping.

ISEULT: Are you giving up work?

TRISTAN: In addition to work.

ISEULT: Poor Tristan. Why?

TRISTAN: Because I want you to be happy.



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ISEULT: Happy because you're going to vacuum these few square feet of our den once a week?

TRISTAN (*confused*): I'm going to carry out my plan anyway, and if that doesn't work I'm going to think of something else.

ISEULT: Why not think of something else now?

TRISTAN: I'm running out of ideas. No! – that's not true! I have so many ideas I don't know where to begin. But why don't you just tell me what you want?

MINSTREL: She doesn't know what she wants.

TRISTAN: Would you like –

ISEULT: What?

TRISTAN: Tea?... No. I know. Coffee.

ISEULT: No thank you.

TRISTAN: Well, I'll have some. (*Goes out.*)

ISEULT: I don't understand how you can drink coffee without sugar.

TRISTAN (*off*): White sugar is deadlier than black mamba.

ISEULT: That means I'm slowly poisoning myself, what a relief! (*More to herself than to him.*) Bring me a cake. Bring me two.

TRISTAN (*enters*): Seriously?

ISEULT: Actually there's only one thing I want. To be a beautiful flower, visited every day by hundreds of curious bees. And at least ten bumble-bees. With huge stings.

TRISTAN: Two cakes. Anything special on top – marzipan, chocolate?

ISEULT: Tristan, don't be silly. Come here. (*Tristan joins her on the bed.*) Let's imagine it's Sunday.

TRISTAN (*rises, horrified*): No!

ISEULT: Why not?

TRISTAN: The devil himself has invented Sundays to have an entry point into our lives, and to use them to infect our Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays...

ISEULT: Have you forgotten the strategy you invented for fighting Sundays?

TRISTAN: Me?

ISEULT: On Sundays you amuse me by imitating well-known people.

TRISTAN: Have I ever shown you how Stalin masturbated?

ISEULT (*laughs*): No.

(Tristan stands with his legs apart, leans slightly backwards, spreads his arms wide and slowly moves them up and down. Iseult laughs hysterically.)



THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN: What about –

ISEULT: Show me an Irishman coming home from a pub... No! – a Welshman spoiling for a fight!... No, do an Australian who's trying to seduce a shy, middle-aged English school-teacher!

(Tristan removes his jacket and rolls up his shirt sleeves. He sits next to Iseult on the bed.)

TRISTAN *(heavy Australian accent)*: I wouldn't say this is the best pair of legs in the world, but I've seen worse. *(Iseult laughs.)* And where is the rest of you, have you nothing to eat? And what's this you're wearing? You need a guy that'll feed you and clothe you properly."

(Iseult rolls about with laughter. Tristan is laughing, too. Iseult's laughter abruptly stops. She sits up and looks at him icily.)

ISEULT: Stop playing the clown. Stop bringing me flowers which I have to keep throwing away. I hate flowers.

TRISTAN: I'm sorry. I thought –

ISEULT: How dare you trivialize my pain? *(She starts to cry.)*

TRISTAN: Izzy...?

ISEULT: Don't you understand?... Don't you understand?

(She cries bitterly.)

(Slow fade to blackout.)

9.

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: Now that Sundays had infected Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, now that all days had become vehicles of the devil's conspiracy against joy, this was neither life nor death, but life and death together. They had lost all hope, and it seemed they had reached the end of their journey. – But did they?



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(Lights on "room." Iseult, neatly dressed and combed, wearing a mini skirt, sits on the side of the bed with a hand mirror, painting her eyebrows. The phone rings. She goes to answer it.)

ISEULT: I can't spare a second, Mother, I'm expecting a visitor... A young gentleman caller, a student, I was told... No, Mother, I'm not giving lessons, have you forgotten I've inherited your intelligence?... He's coming to ask me about my sexual fantasies... He told me over the phone... Why! – because a well-known magazine is doing a survey about it... Why a student! – because they need cash, they're hungry... Bye!

(She replaces the receiver, returns to the bed, resumes painting her eyebrows.)

(Lights on "office." Tristan, disguised as a "student." Mark is helping him.)

TRISTAN: This tie is going to strangle me.

MARK: Do you need it? Ties like this were fashionable ten years ago.

TRISTAN: It goes with the suit.

MARK *(brushing his shoulders)*: Be careful she doesn't ruin the wig. It's expensive, imported from Italy. I'm not sure the moustache is a good idea, either. Too pointed.

TRISTAN: Don't you think it completely transfigures my face?

MARK: It does. You look like a sea lion who's not sure if he is his own son or father. Got everything you need?

TRISTAN: Paper, questions, your briefcase – don't worry, I'll take care of it. D'you think I should have a drink?

MARK: I'd limit myself to a bottle of vodka.

TRISTAN: Mark... I hope you understand me. My motives are –

MARK: – noble.

TRISTAN: Hundred percent. I'd like to –

MARK: – find out how quickly she'll jump into bed with the first one that asks her.

TRISTAN: That's not true!

MARK: What about the ring?

TRISTAN: Ring? Aaaah, the ring! *(Removes his wedding ring and gives it to Mark.)* Don't lose it.



THE NYMPH DIES

MARK: Do you have any identification marks, a scar maybe?

TRISTAN: I had an appendectomy.

MARK: Stick a plaster on it. Tell her you cut yourself shaving.

TRISTAN: Mark, listen –

MARK: You listen to me. In the last few weeks you've graduated from naivety to imbecility. Now you're touching the edge of madness. And all because of a paranoid belief that life without passion isn't worth living.

TRISTAN: It was you who gave me the idea.

MARK: Me?

TRISTAN (*picks up Mark's boomerang*): And your boomerang. You said you were too used to each other.

MARK: So?

TRISTAN: You said you had to fool it into believing it was being thrown by someone else.

MARK: And these words, which I threw into the air as carelessly as I throw the boomerang, have already been elevated into a grand theory for saving the world.

TRISTAN: Even more – into a strategy for a successful fight against Sundays!

MARK: You've played hundreds of games –

TRISTAN: Those were different. This time Iseult remains Iseult. And she isn't expecting me, but a stranger.

MARK: Are you sure?

(Lights on "office" out. Iseult is finishing her eyebrows. There is a knock. She takes a deep breath and goes to the door.)

TRISTAN: Good afternoon.

ISEULT: Survey? (*She pulls him into the room.*) You're late. Sit down.

TRISTAN: I hope I'm not intruding.

ISEULT: What's the matter with your voice? It was different on the phone. Sore throat?

TRISTAN (*coughs*): No. I mean to say, yes. Or so it seems.

ISEULT: You remind me of an actor friend of mine. Except that he's better-looking. Sit down.

TRISTAN: Thank you. (*He sits on the edge of the bed, keeping the briefcase on his knees.*)



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THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT (*goes to the door*): Tea? Coffee? Anything else? Anything of the other?

TRISTAN: Coffee, please.

ISEULT: I like men with imagination. (*She goes out.*)

(Tristan takes a deep breath, pulls a handkerchief from his pocket and dabs at his forehead.)

ISEULT (*off*): Sugar?

TRISTAN: No thank you. White sugar is deadlier than black mamba...

(He cuts himself short by pressing a hand to his mouth.)

ISEULT (*off*): How many?

TRISTAN: Ten.

ISEULT: Are you mad?

TRISTAN: Nine. Five's even better. Four? Two?

ISEULT (*off*): My husband says white sugar is deadlier than black mamba.

TRISTAN: Really? (*Relieved, he reaches up to twirl his moustache – which comes off in his hand.*)

ISEULT (*off*): Do you know my husband?

TRISTAN: No. (*He quickly sticks the moustache back on.*)

(Iseult returns. She is followed by Minstrel, who is carrying a tray with two cups of coffee. He puts the tray on the coffee table. Iseult stares at Tristan.)

ISEULT: Just a moment. (*Goes out.*)

(Minstrel picks up Iseult's hand mirror and holds it in front of Tristan's face. Tristan discovers that he's stuck the moustache back on the wrong way, with the ends pointing upwards. Quickly, he reverses it and assumes a pose of emphatic innocence. Iseult returns, rubbing her glasses with a soft cloth. Puts them back on and looks at Tristan.)

ISEULT: That's better. Glasses often make me see things upside down.

(She sits next to him on the bed.)

TRISTAN: But they suit you, they make you – how shall I say – very...

MINSTREL: Sexy?

ISEULT: Sexy?



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TRISTAN: Yes, they make you look very sexy.

(Minstrel, who sits on the bed behind them, offers each a cup of coffee.)

ISEULT: Are you married?

TRISTAN: I'm a student.

ISEULT: A mature student? Or a student of mature years?

TRISTAN: There're different sorts of maturity.

ISEULT: That certainly applies to me.

(Tristan takes a sip of coffee and returns the mug to Minstrel. He opens the briefcase and takes out a few sheets of paper.)

TRISTAN: These... questions... may... embarrass you.

ISEULT *(moves slightly towards him)*: You may be more embarrassed by the answers you get.

TRISTAN: First question: is boredom a problem in your marriage? You may answer yes or no.

ISEULT: Yes or no, then.

MINSTREL: That means, an occasional problem.

TRISTAN *(scribbling)*: Occasional problem...

ISEULT: I can't help if my husband neglects me, doesn't talk to me, doesn't touch me. Do you think I'm ugly?

MINSTREL: On the contrary.

TRISTAN: On the contrary, Madam, you're very charming and... attractive.

ISEULT: Well, if that's the best you can do...

TRISTAN: Second question: what do you do about the problem of marital boredom?

ISEULT *(looks at him sharply)*: How do I know my husband won't see the answers?

TRISTAN: The survey is confidential.

ISEULT: It wouldn't be good for his health, it might kill him.

TRISTAN: Don't worry. How, then –

ISEULT *(gets up)*: – do I solve the problem of marital boredom? Like most women, I'm afraid. With an occasional – *(She looks at him.)* You really want me to tell you?

TRISTAN *(bitterly)*: You already have. With an occasional indiscretion. *(He begins to write down the answer.)*



THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT: If that's what you want to call an occasional bar of chocolate, fine.

TRISTAN (*greatly relieved*): Is that all?

MINSTREL: I doubt it.

ISEULT: Sometimes even with two bars of chocolate. The big crunchy one with nuts.

TRISTAN: Do you entertain sexual fantasies?

MINSTREL: Frequently.

ISEULT: Always on New Year's Eve.

MINSTREL: And on National Holidays.

ISEULT: And on Memorial Day.

TRISTAN: And what do you... fantasize about? The question's part of the survey.

ISEULT: How do I know you're not some kind of pervert, visiting lonely women and putting intimate questions to them in the hope they'll lead to a different kind of survey?

(Tristan is seized by a sudden attack of coughing. Iseult pummels him on the back.)

ISEULT: Glass of brandy?

(Tristan nods. Iseult quickly goes out. Tristan's cough slowly abates. He stares at Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: Oh my God.

TRISTAN: Oh my God.

(Iseult returns with a bottle of brandy and two glasses. Minstrel takes the bottle and fills Tristan's glass. Tristan downs it.)

ISEULT: My goodness, you are thirsty. One more?

TRISTAN: And you?

(Minstrel fills both glasses. They drink. Minstrel takes a swig from the bottle.)

ISEULT: Actually, I have a glass of brandy every day. My husband would have a stroke if he found out. Wouldn't you, if you discovered your wife was betraying you with something so – so –



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THE NYMPH DIES

MINSTREL: – potent?

TRISTAN: Something's O.K., but I would draw a line at somebody.

ISEULT: That's why brandy is far less dangerous.

MINSTER: And also far less exciting.

(Iseult downs her glass.)

TRISTAN: To return to the survey...

ISEULT: Must we?

TRISTAN: Shall we say your sexual fantasies are limited to an occasional glass of brandy behind your husband's back?

ISEULT: How many sheets of paper have you got?

TRISTAN: Five, six.

ISEULT: Then you'd better rush out and get a few more.

TRISTAN: Let's limit ourselves to your favorite fantasy.

ISEULT: Oh... *(She collapses on the bed.)* Suddenly I feel very...

TRISTAN: Brandy?

ISEULT: I'll be all right, it's just... vertigo. *(Props herself on an elbow and looks at him.)* It isn't really a fantasy, my favorite fantasy. More of a secret longing. May I ask you something?

TRISTAN: By all means.

ISEULT: How long does it take to grow a moustache like that?

(Tristan's hand flies up to make sure that his moustache is still in place; he smiles.)

TRISTAN: Well, I'd say, I'd say...

ISEULT: You see, I'd like my husband to grow a moustache. That's my fantasy. That one day he'll come home from work sporting the most seductive moustache in the world. You won't believe this, but I've never kissed a man with a moustache. Isn't that sad, at my age?

TRISTAN: A kiss... can be... quite... dangerous.

ISEULT *(abruptly rises)*: In theory. But in practice I find that most men have to be given a kiss of life before becoming more dangerous than a poodle.

TRISTAN: To continue –

ISEULT *(falls back on the bed)*: Oh, my head... Would you do me a favor... and... go to the bathroom... and... bring me a wet towel?



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(Minstrel rushes out. Tristan follows him.)

ISEULT *(unable to hide she's playacting)*: Help... I'm dying...

(Minstrel returns with a wet towel. Tristan follows him, snatches the towel and presses it against Iseult's forehead.)

ISEULT: Oh... You're so gentle...

TRISTAN: Actually, I can be quite rough as well.

ISEULT: Oh? What does that look like?

TRISTAN: Madam, we don't know each other, but would you allow me to kiss you?

ISEULT: Part of the survey?

TRISTAN: No, Madam, that would be part of my general education.

ISEULT: Do you realize you're exploiting my one and only moment of weakness?

TRISTAN *(complacently)*: My mother warned me I'd turn into a villain, and a big one at that.

ISEULT: Oh yes? And how big are you?

(Blackout.)

10.

(Lights on Mark and Tristan jogging. Mark has a boomerang in his hand.)

TRISTAN: Why does it have to be the way it is?

MARK: Because you're a fool.

TRISTAN: Why can't it be the way it might have been?

MARK: You're jealous of someone who doesn't exist.

TRISTAN: He existed for her. Anyway, that's not important. What *is* important is that we can't believe any more that our love is unique.

MARK: And Iseult, what does she say?

TRISTAN: She's gentle with me, with the patience of a martyr. She spoils me in a hundred different ways. Just like in the good old days. Obviously because she feels guilty.

MARK: And you?

TRISTAN: I can hardly get through the day. I'm terrified of nights. As for Sundays –



THE NYMPH DIES

MARK: Can't you simply forget them?

TRISTAN: They're our frontline. A symbol of our decay.

MARK: How can I help you?

TRISTAN: You can't.

MARK: Next Sunday I'm going to the country to practise boomerang throwing. I suggest Iseult accompanies me, to get some fresh air. In the meantime you can clean the flat and cook some dinner.

TRISTAN (*looks at him, astonished*): Really?

MARK: I find that a splendid idea.

TRISTAN: Well I don't.

MARK: Do you think it's too radical?

TRISTAN: Surprising, to say the least.

MARK: I want to help you as a friend.

TRISTAN: Out of the question.

MARK: May I tell you something? I speak as your boss. As your friend I wouldn't have the courage to say this.

TRISTAN: Go on, kick me, I'm down.

MARK: I think there's only one thing that can help you.

TRISTAN: What's that?

MARK: You must take a deep breath – like this – (*Takes a deep breath.*)

TRISTAN: Like this – (*Takes a deep breath.*)

MARK: – find a long, thick candle –

TRISTAN: – long, thick candle, yes –

MARK: – light it –

TRISTAN: – light it –

MARK: – and shove it up your ass.

(Mark in Tristan look at each other. Blackout.)

11.

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: "Iseult is again the Queen and again her life's full of joy. But equally it is full of sadness as well. She has her hot, her beautiful secret, and again wants to have Tristan by her side whenever she feels like it, whether it be day or night." The only problem are these boring Sundays.



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(Lights on "room." Iseult is lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling. The phone rings. Reluctantly, she gets up to answer it.)

ISEULT: What now again, Mother?... *(She lifts the receiver.)* Yes, I know you're ill, I know you can't walk... Why didn't you give me money to study medicine?... Mother, I've told you a hundred times that you can't live with us... We haven't got enough room to box each other's ears... Where can you go?... Wouldn't have a clue... Old people's home?

(Slams the receiver down and returns to the bed. Tristan enters and goes to the window.)

ISEULT: Come here.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT: I've invented a strategy for defeating Sundays.

TRISTAN: Really?

ISEULT: We're going to bomb the runway so that Sunday won't be able to take off.

TRISTAN *(turns)*: How?

ISEULT: For strategic reasons we're going to divide the enemy in two. Morning and afternoon. How are we going to put out of action Sunday morning?

TRISTAN: Kamikaze way. When it appears, we open the window and throw ourselves on top of it.

ISEULT: Don't be silly. We're going to dispose of Sunday morning this evening. *(She reaches under the bed and produces a bottle of wine.)* We're going to mount a two-bottle strike against it, taking no prisoners.

TRISTAN: What about afternoon?

ISEULT: When we wake up we'll look so frightening the afternoon will call it a day, and capitulate.

TRISTAN: And if it doesn't?

ISEULT: We'll instantly bomb it with a visit to the Zoo.

TRISTAN: And if it rains?

ISEULT: We have a well-tested defence system called umbrella. *(Tristan looks at her for a while, then quickly goes out.)* Tristan?

(Tristan returns with two wine glasses and grins.)

(Blackout.)



THE NYMPH DIES

12.

(Lights on "office." Mark is practising boomerang throws. Tristan staggers in completely drunk.)

TRISTAN: Excuse me, is this... it isn't... *(Turns to go.)* What am I doing at the railway station?... *(He walks into a closed door. Mark guides him to a chair.)*

MARK: The train to heaven is gone, but the train to hell is waiting on platform one.

TRISTAN: To Ireland. That's where we're going, Iseult and I. Bye bye. Bye bye.

MARK: If you carry on like this you'll certainly go – and I mean it.

TRISTAN: You don't know what's happening – *(Hiccups.)*

MARK: I can smell it.

TRISTAN: Exactly. *(Hiccups.)*

MARK: You need help.

TRISTAN: Mark... no one can help me. *(Produces a handkerchief, starts to cry.)* I don't know how to be Tristan any more. I've created a vampire, a student with a moustache, a devil's disciple who has usurped my place in the natural order of things. I've become a stranger, an intruder in my own life.

MARK: How could a wife not recognize her own husband? Especially with his pants down?

TRISTAN: Then why doesn't she say so?

MARK: Because she thinks the magic will last only as long as you both pretend that she did have a lover.

TRISTAN: Mark! – that's my hope. But I have no proof. And that's my hell.

MARK: Why don't you ask her?

TRISTAN: Because I need a shadow of hope that she did recognize me. And wouldn't deceive me. Uncertainty's hell, but knowing the truth might kill me.

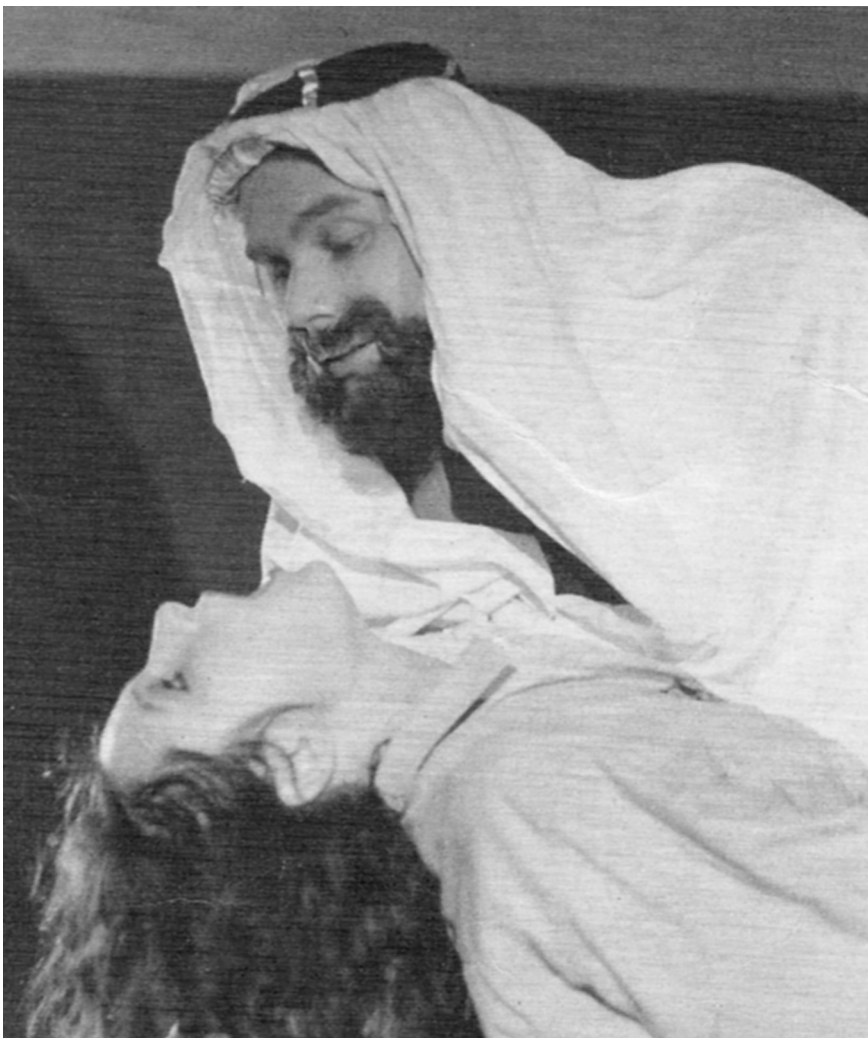
MARK: Go on drinking, then.

TRISTAN: I'm sorry, Mark. I won't any more.

MARK: Do, if it helps.

TRISTAN: Not any more. Again she stays in bed all day long. Again the kitchen is full of dirty dishes, and our flat full of silence.

MARK: Actually... I, too, am in a position that leaves me no choice but to take up drinking.



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THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN: Woman?

MARK: Boomerang.

TRISTAN: That's even worse.

MARK: No throw is like any other. Each one leaves me in doubt. Do you understand?

TRISTAN: Hundred percent.

MARK: The art of throwing is not simply a matter of manual skill, it's got to do with the forces contained in the boomerang –

TRISTAN: Boom! – boom! – boomerang!

MARK: If you want to be sure that the curve which brought the boomerang successfully back to your hand wasn't a fluke, you must repeat the throw with an identical twist of the wrist –

TRISTAN: You must repeat the throw?

MARK: Yes. And hope for the best.

TRISTAN: And hope for the best.

MARK: Normally I hold it like this –

TRISTAN (*rises as if transfixed*): Mark...

MARK: Let me show you...

TRISTAN: Mark, do your best ideas also hit you like boomerangs out of the blue? (*He reaches for the phone and dials a number.*)

(Lights on "room." Iseult, drunk, dishevelled, is lying on the bed, sucking her thumb. For a while she ignores the phone, then gets up and picks up receiver.)

ISEULT: Home for the mentally disabled. Unfortunately we're full at the moment –

TRISTAN: Iseult! – I've managed to get work for you! I've just met the son of a rich Arab sheikh from Abu Dhabi. He's finished writing a doctoral thesis and wants to have it professionally typed. He'll pay double the usual rate.

ISEULT: I don't know.

TRISTAN: He's a real sheikh, he's got money sticking out of his ears, he'll come now.

ISEULT: What's his name?

TRISTAN: What do you mean, name? (*Looks at Mark for help.*) I don't know his personal name, but people call him – (*Urgent gesture at Mark.*)

MARK: Prince Omar.

TRISTAN: – yes, Prince Omar.



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ISEULT: I've never typed for a prince.

TRISTAN: Well, there you are. He's very polite and awfully kind, you'll like him.

ISEULT: I doubt it. But he's got money, as you say, and women are known to have done quite a bit more for money than type someone's doctoral thesis. *(She replaces the receiver and smiles.)*

(Tristan winks at Mark. Lights on "office" out. Lights on "room" remain. Iseult takes a deep breath, reaches for her hand mirror.)

ISEULT: Oh my God.

(Furiously, she starts to comb her hair. There is a knock. Iseult goes to the door. Tristan enters disguised as an Arab sheikh.)

ISEULT: Salem Aleikum.

TRISTAN: I come as of little late. Many excuse. No no, I am come late. Anyway, I'm not early. But am big apology.

ISEULT: As well as a prince.

TRISTAN: Prince Abdul Ibn Saud Omar Fahd Mecca Medina Ben Mubarak Yamani Arafat. *(He bows.)*

ISEULT: And I'm Iseult. Not a princess, but housewife, cleaning lady and typist.

TRISTAN: I be lucky to getting typist who is beautiful like princess. *(Produces some papers.)* Please, I give you dictatorship.

ISEULT *(laughs)*: I hope you mean dictation.

TRISTAN *(slaps his forehead)*: My English is a completely mix-up!

ISEULT: I'm completely mixed up myself. Won't you straighten me out?

TRISTAN: Please? I'm thick-headed and very slow.

ISEULT: Are you really, or are you just boasting?

TRISTAN: Please, I dictator, not you. One, two, three.

ISEULT: Thick-headed, slow, with a sense of rhythm – enough to convince any woman she's in for a treat. Tell me, Mister Prince, is it true what they say about Arab men?

TRISTAN: What say they?

ISEULT: That they're rough with women? Really wild?

TRISTAN *(pulls sharply at her hair)*: Not true.

(Iseult moans. Blackout.)



THE NYMPH DIES

13.

(Lights on "office." Mark with the boomerang, practising. Tristan enters, puts down his briefcase.)

MARK: Well? Won't you tell me?

TRISTAN: Surely not the vulgar details?

MARK: Especially those.

TRISTAN: I can't.

MARK: Come on.

TRISTAN: All right. I slapped her. I pushed her on the floor and kicked her.

MARK: Did you enjoy it?

TRISTAN: Immensely. I realized that – disguised as an Arab – I can do things I wouldn't dare do as Tristan. I can treat her like a –

MARK: – slut?

TRISTAN: I was overcome by a tremendous feeling of –

MARK: – freedom.

TRISTAN: I went to the bathroom to change back into –

MARK: – yourself.

TRISTAN: What I saw in the mirror really –

MARK: – shocked you.

TRISTAN: My left eyebrow had disappeared. The wig had slipped to one side, exposing my hair. As for the beard, it wasn't there any more, it's probably under the bed!

MARK: How could you ever have thought she didn't recognize you?

TRISTAN: She was right. Why shouldn't Desdemona strangle Othello?

MARK *(suddenly serious)*: What about Tristan and Iseult?

TRISTAN: Their roles have been played.

MARK: Like those of Iseult and the student?

TRISTAN: And of Iseult and Prince Omar. All three couples can only repeat their relationships.

MARK: If the game's to continue there must be new players. Right? Just like in my case!

TRISTAN *(surprised)*: In your case?

MARK *(swings the boomerang like a sword)*: Look. I worried, fool that I am, about manual skill. I devoted hours of attention to secret forces within the boomerang. But the most important thing I forgot.

TRISTAN: Really?



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MARK: The thrower. Each throw, good or bad, changes me. In fact I'm only a succession of throwers. You could say that the boomerang creates its thrower.

TRISTAN: You mean like – love?

MARK: Yes. If love is not always the same, how can lovers be? In the end, what's important is to go with the flow, not against it.

TRISTAN: So it's quite normal for the flow to bring a succession of lovers into Iseult's arms!

MARK (*shocked*): Succession?

TRISTAN: At regular intervals. Usually as the magic of the previous encounter begins to wane.

MARK: And how does she like them – all equally?

TRISTAN: No. But each one brings something new into her life.

MARK: A new wig, a new set of eyebrows...

(Tristan produces a pipe and a black eye-patch. In a second, he is transformed.)

MARK: Professor Moriarty?

TRISTAN: Dr. Cyclop, an expert for comforting lonely ladies.

(They laugh. The phone rings, Mark answers.)

MARK: Sorry? I don't understand... Just a moment, here is my colleague.

TRISTAN (*takes the phone*): What flat?... Is your flat for sale, Mark?

MARK: No.

TRISTAN (*into the phone*): I'm sorry, wrong number...

MARK (*suddenly dawns on him*): Wait... (*But Tristan has already replaced the receiver.*)... Tristan... This is an agency. We sell real estate.

(They look at each other. They reach for their briefcases, take out papers, sit down. Lights slowly fade.)

14.

(Lights on "room." Iseult on the bed, attractive, but tired and sad. Tristan enters disguised as a bohemian painter. He is followed by Minstrel, who carries a brush and a box of watercolors.)



THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT: You've come.

TRISTAN: Yes.

ISEULT: I've been waiting for you.

TRISTAN: I know.

ISEULT: What's it like outside?

TRISTAN: Autumn.

ISEULT: I like autumns. Everything's so peaceful. In Ireland, they say,
it's always autumn.

TRISTAN: Really?

ISEULT: Will you ever hang in the National Gallery?

TRISTAN: Of course. If not my paintings, then I, from one of the
chandeliers.

ISEULT (*short laugh*): You take it so seriously.

TRISTAN: It's a profession. Like love.

ISEULT: I'm very shy. Will I have to undress?

TRISTAN: I'll be looking at you with the eyes of an artist.

ISEULT: I don't want to catch pneumonia.

TRISTAN: Are you cold?

ISEULT: Yes. Promise you'll warm me up when I begin to shiver.

TRISTAN: I will.

ISEULT: I like you. You're different from my other...

TRISTAN: Lovers?

ISEULT: Yes.

TRISTAN: Are there many?

MINSTREL: They have accumulated.

TRISTAN: How different?

ISEULT: More... sad. So very sad. Like myself. I can feel it. I see inside you.

TRISTAN: And what do you see there?

ISEULT: Longing. For something lost. Forever green. You remind me of
Tristan.

TRISTAN (*startled*): Really?

ISEULT: In the first year of our marriage. When life was a magic garden
through which we roamed like two kids.

TRISTAN: And now? How do you live now?

ISEULT: Now our life together is merely a springboard for –

MINSTREL: – flights of fantasy.

ISEULT: God wasn't kind to us when he gave us desire.

MINSTREL (*hands Tristan brush and watercolors*): Shall we begin?

TRISTAN: Shall we begin?



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THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT: Paint Ireland for me. Tristan refuses to take me there. Paint it for me.

TRISTAN: Now?

ISEULT (*rises*): Paint me a forest... (*She takes off her gown. But instead of continuing to undress, she begins slowly, ritually to dress, putting on a skirt, then a blouse, then a cardigan.*). . . Then we'll walk hand in hand into the trees. While you'll busy yourself with your easel and brush, I'll be undressing in the quivering net of shadows and sun. I shall lie down on the ground. And there, white and wounded in the dead leaves, you will paint me.

(Finally she puts on her gown as well and curls up in a foetal position on top of the bed.)

TRISTAN: Iseult...?

ISEULT: And when you've painted me you can breathe life into the canvas, so you'll have a new, innocent Iseult. And you can leave my body to rot with the leaves.

TRISTAN: Iseult...?

ISEULT: Why aren't we trees? So we could shed our yellowed lives in the autumn and grow fresh ones again in the spring?

(Tristan gives brush and watercolors back to Minstrel, comes forward and sits on the bed. Iseult begins to shiver.)

ISEULT: Oh God, I'm so cold. So naked, so exposed.

TRISTAN (*gently touches her*): Shall I warm you up?

ISEULT: Hug me. (*She sits up, Tristan embraces her.*) Wrap yourself round me. Hide me.

TRISTAN: Why're you crying?

MINSTREL: Because there is no me.

ISEULT: Because there is no me. Can't you find me either? Tristan, my love...

(Lights slowly fade.)



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15.

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: They became Tristan and Iseult again. Their passion turned into an album of faded holiday snaps, vague memories of times distant and past. Tristan went to work, Iseult typed, washed and cooked. They stared at TV. Sometimes they even talked to each other! What sort of day did you have, this soup is excellent, it's raining again, would you like some more tea. Sometimes they went to the cinema and then to a restaurant, where they sat in the corner and watched other guests having a jolly time. They eavesdropped on their conversations. Silently they finished their meals, silently they drove home, silently went to bed. Time passed, time stood still. Then, one day, it moved again.

(Lights on "room." Iseult at the typewriter, Tristan near the door, briefcase in hand, on his way to work.)

TRISTAN: Sister? I didn't know you had one.

ISEULT: Don't be silly, all people have sisters.

TRISTAN: You never mentioned her.

ISEULT: I never liked her. She ran off to France with some kind of artist, too old even to be her father. My mother still hasn't forgiven her.

TRISTAN: Well, I don't even know her.

ISEULT: That's why it's best if *you* pick her up at the airport.

TRISTAN: And then?

ISEULT: She'll tell you. She may want to spend the first night at a motel.

TRISTAN *(reluctantly)*: Well, all right. *(He goes.)*

(Iseult jumps to her feet and dials a number.)

ISEULT: Hullo?... I need a cab to take me to the airport... Now... *(Still on the phone, she reaches for her handbag.)*

(Blackout.)



THE NYMPH DIES

16.

(Lights on "office." Mark, with the boomerang in his lap, is sitting on one of the two chairs, dejected. Tristan stands, looking at him.)

TRISTAN: I still think you should go. After all that training. It is a world championship.

MARK: I did have some chances of success. But I blew them by becoming too eager. I was like a man running in front of himself to monitor his own progress.

TRISTAN: You're not the only one, Mark.

MARK *(rises)*: Einstein was wrong.

TRISTAN: He must've been, when you think of it.

MARK *(sits)*: He was right to say that space is curved. What he didn't know was that space is curved like a boomerang and that we're all flying through it along the trajectory drawn by the Great Thrower in heaven. *(Rises again.)* Returning to his hand for another throw.

TRISTAN: I'm so tired.

MARK *(sits)*: Only a perfect throw would be worth the effort. And there is no such thing.

TRISTAN: I can't be Tristan any more. I can be Tristan as long as Iseult isn't Iseult –

MARK: As long as she's her sister.

TRISTAN: Or niece. Or cousin. As long as she's Sonia or Mabel or Jeniffer.

MARK: And she?

TRISTAN: Can be Iseult as long as I'm a student, Arab prince, postman, meter reader, painter, burglar... Love has shed us like dead leaves.

MARK: We all have to surrender sooner or later.

TRISTAN *(seizes Mark by the lapels of his jacket)*: Is there no way out?

MARK: There is. We must give up trying to be unique. Who knows, I may be good enough to win that championship. The problem is, I want to be sure that I will.

TRISTAN: Will we ever be Tristan and Iseult again?

MARK *(rises)*: Do you really think I should try?

TRISTAN: Go, Mark, risk it, make me proud of you.

MARK: That means I'll have to step up my training.

TRISTAN: Practise, Mark, practise every day.

MARK: Mornings as well.

TRISTAN: Take the boomerang and go, I'll take care of your surveys and things.



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MARK: You really don't mind?

TRISTAN: No. At least one of us must at least once in his life win at one thing at least. Go.

MARK: You really are a friend. *(He puts a sheet of paper in front of Tristan.)* This lady should be contacted now, she'd like to see the house in Grub Street, will you see to it?

TRISTAN: This very instant.

MARK: Well, then...

TRISTAN *(pushes Mark towards exit)*: Off with you.

(Mark goes. Tristan sits on the chair, consults the sheet he was given, reaches for the phone, pauses, thinks. He replaces the receiver. He gets up and walks nervously up and down. He looks at his watch. Suddenly, his mind made up, he sits down and dials a number.)

TRISTAN: Bleak Travel Agency?... Do you organize trips to Ireland?... Five days would be ideal... I'd like to reserve two tickets... I'll pick them up straightaway... Thank you. *(Replaces the phone, smiles, claps his hands, grabs his briefcase and rushes out.)*

(Blackout.)

("Room" in darkness.)

TRISTAN: Iseult? Why did you lower the blinds? Have you got a migraine?

(Lights on "room." Iseult, hair in disarray, is standing in the middle of the room, trying to straighten her gown.)

ISEULT: Back already?

TRISTAN: I have a surprise for you. *(Triumphantly.)* We're going to Ireland!

(He hands her two tickets. Iseult doesn't quite know what to do with them. She puts them on the typewriter.)

TRISTAN: Aren't you happy?



THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT: Sure.

TRISTAN (*puts down his briefcase and sits on the bed*): While Mark goes to his championship, we'll pop over to Ireland. I'm sure he won't mind, he's all right as a boss, he likes helping.

(He realizes that he is sitting on something hard. He reaches under the blanket and pulls out Mark's boomerang. He realizes that there is something more, and larger, under the blanket. He sweeps the blanket away to reveal Mark, naked to the waist. They stare at each other. Tristan looks at Iseult.)

ISEULT: I've invented a new strategy for fighting Sundays.

(Blackout.)



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THE NYMPH DIES

Act Two

(In the second half of the play only “room” remains. It reflects a degree of material improvement: the typewriter has been replaced by a word processor, the bed by a sumptuous sofa, there is an armchair, mini-bar, two telephones, standard and cordless. Etc.)

(As the audience return to their seats, Tristan and Iseult are already on stage, rearranging furniture, changing, preparing the “room” for what is to follow. As soon as Minstrel appears on the scene, they freeze.)

1.

(Spot on Minstrel.)

MINSTREL: My lords and ladies, if you would hear the continuation of a high tale of love and death, of Tristan and Queen Iseult, here is how – following their hard landing – they succeeded in becoming materially secure, middle-class, stylish, and how the playing fields of their love turned into a bloody battlefield.

(Lights on “room.” Minstrel brushes the strings of his harp. Iseult comes alive and goes out. Tristan sits down in the easy chair and starts to work, using a pocket calculator and taking papers from his briefcase which is lying open on the floor next to the chair. The cordless phone rings. Tristan answers. Minstrel goes out.)

TRISTAN: Hello, Mother... No, your daughter’s in the kitchen... Cooking, I should imagine... Braised nettles, apple steaks, buckwheat



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jelly... She slipped in front of a shop selling health food and came home a freak... I don't complain, I eat out... You know, business lunches... Yes, I'll tell her that you're dying... Have you fixed the date of the funeral?... Hullo...?

(He puts the phone down. It immediately rings again.)

TRISTAN (*answers*): Listen, how many times have I told you that we won't invest as much as a penny in that project... We have to move with the times, serious money is now in shops and offices, housing is for beginners... Bye.

(Puts the phone down. It immediately rings again.)

TRISTAN: Yes?... (*Realizes it's not the cordless phone, but the standard one on the side table; goes and picks up receiver.*) She's busy right now, can I help?... Thirty copies of King Lear, double-spaced, stage directions in italics – (*Makes a note.*) – don't worry, we have a laser printer... Usual fees, invoice by fax... Thank you.

(Replaces receiver. The phone immediately rings again. He reaches for it, but changes his mind, lets it ring, goes to the mini-bar to fix himself a drink. Iseult enters and picks up the phone.)

ISEULT: Mark, how are you... Yes, do come. Yes, he's here... We both are... Bye. (*Puts the phone down.*)

TRISTAN (*glass in hand*): Who was it?

ISEULT: Minstrel. He's coming to help us.

TRISTAN: In the kitchen, with washing up?

ISEULT: No, he is going to open our eyes. So we can face our past.

TRISTAN: Isn't it safer to face the past with eyes closed? Or, safer still, face only the future? And that, too, with eyes closed?

ISEULT: Who has no future must look for it where he lost it – in the past.

TRISTAN: I feel safe only in the present.

ISEULT: Tristan the valiant knight.

TRISTAN: I need space in which I can touch the walls every time I put out my arms.

ISEULT: And this space is the castle in which dwells Queen Iseult. (*There is a knock at the door.*) And at the door of this castle knocks Minstrel.



THE NYMPH DIES

(Door opens, Mark enters. His head is heavily bandaged.)

MARK *(shuffles up to Tristan and hands him business documents):*

Contract for Pig & Whistle. Signed. Witnessed. Deposit received.
Receipt sent by post. Problem with the sale of penthouse in Maddox
Lane. Surveyor found rot. Dry and wet. Big hole in the roof.

TRISTAN: What about the conversion in Lion Street?

MARK: No time to go there... Actually...

TRISTAN: What?

MARK: I forgot.

TRISTAN: Although the offer expired two weeks ago.

MARK: I'm sorry.

TRISTAN: This can't go on.

MARK: I can't handle all these... details. Ever since this happened to
me – *(He touches his bandage.)*

TRISTAN: Write it down, make a list.

MARK: I do. When I remember. But then I forget I have it.

ISEULT: Won't you sit down, Mark?

MARK: Oh yes... Thank you for reminding me. *(He sits in the easy chair.)*

ISEULT: Drink?

MARK: No. Maybe yes. Perhaps. No, better not. On the other hand... do
you think I should?

(Iseult goes to the mini-bar.)

TRISTAN *(looking at Mark):* Has this ever happened to anyone else? Or
are you the only one whose head was struck by a returning boomer-
ang? During a world championship. In front of TV cameras.

MARK: I'm the only one.

TRISTAN: How do you feel as the butt of silly jokes the world over?

MARK *(proudly):* I had an offer for an interview in The New York Times.

TRISTAN: And?

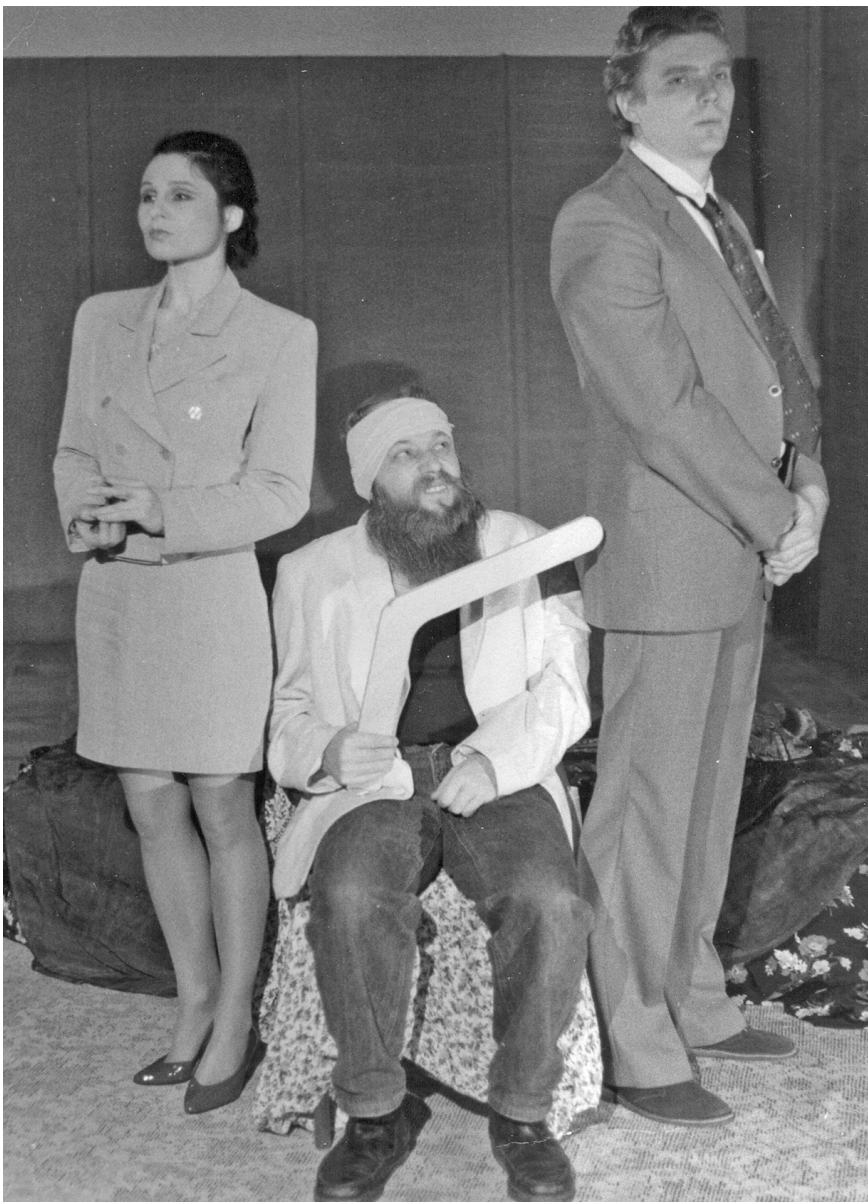
MARK: I turned it down.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT *(brings a tray with three glasses of brandy):* Dignity's more
important than money and fame.

TRISTAN: We've advanced to philosophy.

ISEULT: We've advanced in many ways. We have a new car which I'm
not allowed to drive because I may scratch the paintwork. I have a



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THE NYMPH DIES

brand new word processor, but that doesn't mean I'm now anything more than a typist. You have a new calculator, the best money can buy, yet you still haven't calculated the basic parameters of our future. (*Hands Tristan a glass of brandy.*) You're the boss of the hottest real estate agency in town (*Hands Mark a glass of brandy.*) and we have three times more living space than before, but that simply means three times more emptiness. (*She drinks.*)

TRISTAN: And three times more dust, cobwebs and dirty dishes. What will you do, Mark?

MARK: You mean now?

TRISTAN: About your head.

MARK: Which head?

TRISTAN: Look, you can't say I'm not very patient. But business is business, and if that starts to suffer –

MARK: I don't feel well. I feel that I am –

TRISTAN: What?

ISEULT: – a puddle running dry in its shallows.

MARK: Thank you.

ISEULT: I have run dry already.

MARK: I remember –

ISEULT: – times –

MARK: Yes, times when I was still – when I was still –

ISEULT: – a clear, fast-flowing stream.

MARK: Thank you. And I want to return.

ISEULT: So do I, so do I.

MARK: I miss –

ISEULT: – innocence.

MARK: Movement. I'd like to be – I'd like to be – (*He flails about with his arms.*)

TRISTAN: A bird.

MARK: No. I'd like to be – (*He makes a wavy movement with his hand.*)

TRISTAN: A snake.

MARK: No. (*He repeats the movement.*)

ISEULT: I'd like to be a stream again.

MARK: Thank you. Something must –

ISEULT: – happen.

MARK: Yes. We must –

ISEULT: – provoke a storm.

TRISTAN: The weather forecast again?



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MARK (*ris*es): Something must happen. (*He puts down his glass of brandy, untouched.*)

ISEULT: Stay, Mark. Sit down.

MARK: Thank you for reminding me. (*Sits.*)

ISEULT: Be our child. Tristan doesn't want one because then there'd be three of us.

TRISTAN: No longer company, but a crowd.

ISEULT: Since we know each other we're alone. We. Tristan is convinced that this "we" is called Tristan.

MARK: Ah...

ISEULT: We met in the twelfth century. I was sitting in front of the house, painting sunset. A shadow fell over me. Standing above me was an arrogant little boy who said: "Only girls paint sunsets." I said: "Move away, you're blocking my view." "What view," he said, "there's nothing behind me, I fill the horizon."

TRISTAN: Yes, and you felt such a surge of relief that you threw your arms round my neck. And that's where they still are.

ISEULT: Do you understand now, Mark, why Tristan doesn't want a child?

MARK: No.

ISEULT: A child would unblock my view. I'd see the sun again.

TRISTAN: Of course we agreed about not having children, but Iseult finds it convenient to blame me.

ISEULT: I, too, am scared of having a child. I'd like Tristan to tell me why.

TRISTAN: He can't.

ISEULT: He doesn't want to because he's afraid.

TRISTAN: He doesn't want to because he doesn't give a damn.

ISEULT: Of course, immortal lovers like us can't possibly sink to the level of having children. That would instantly render us trite. We would plummet from heavenly heights into a pile of soiled nappies.

MARK: Actually, I'm on my way to India.

ISEULT (*after a pause*): Actually, I'm on my way to Ireland.

MARK: Kundalini. Mantra. Yantra. There somewhere, I think, lies the answer.

(*The phone rings.*)

TRISTAN (*answering*): Yes?... I know... One of my employees forgot... Sorry... Thank you... (*Puts the phone down.*) India's off.

MARK: Why?



THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN: The conversion in Lion Street. Contract. They want to sign.
In our office. In twenty minutes. (*Consults his watch.*) I wouldn't
waste any time, considering you don't drive.

MARK (*rises*): Ah, yes... Well...

ISEULT: See you, Mark. Don't forget me.

MARK: I think I won't waste any time. Considering I don't drive.

*(He sidles out of the room. Tristan re-occupies the easy chair and
resumes work with calculator.)*

2.

(Iseult goes to the window, looks out.)

ISEULT: Don't you feel that throbbing out there? Storms shatter illu-
sions, wash them away.

TRISTAN: Oh. Really?

ISEULT: Don't you find it unusual that we've never come to a single
decision?

TRISTAN: I have. I decided to grow up.

ISEULT: Oh? And what does that mean?

TRISTAN: I've accepted that life isn't a succession of events each more
wonderful than the preceding one, but a pool with occasional ripples
that spread out and vanish, leaving the surface as it was before.

ISEULT: No. No, no.

(Minstrel enters.)

MINSTREL: No.

ISEULT: Tristan, the more I love you the lonelier I am. The closer I get
to you, less I'm able to feel you.

TRISTAN: What can I say?

ISEULT: We have a choice. We can remain where we are, which is
nowhere, or we can take a step forward.

TRISTAN: Or backward?

ISEULT: A step forward is the choice we mustn't avoid. Otherwise we'll
never experience life-as-it-might've-been.



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TRISTAN: Another illusion, which women in particular seem to be prone to, and which they mistake for imagination – that there's an alternative to life as it is, which hasn't materialized because the magic box has so far failed to disgorge all its attractions –

ISEULT: This life is here, Tristan, in this room, between us, so close I could touch it. (*She reaches out and nearly touches Minstrel.*) You feel it, too, don't deny it.

TRISTAN: All I can feel is bad air.

ISEULT: Can't you see how different our lives would've been if we'd chosen the possibilities we rejected?

TRISTAN (*touching her forehead*): You're ill.

ISEULT: The shadow of life-as-it-might've-been has caught up with us. Certain possibilities of choice are going to be repeated. By not rejecting them this time we can turn life-as-it-might've-been into reality.

TRISTAN: They say that in every marriage there is a phantom marriage, with phantom partners the real ones would like to be married to. The eternal foursome.

ISEULT: Oh Tristan... Help me.

TRISTAN: You're standing before a door which you take for an exit from what you think is your prison. But you've painted that door – on a wall you erected yourself.

ISEULT: Poetry!

TRISTAN: Thank you.

ISEULT: Can you now tell me what I should do?

MINSTREL: Make dinner?

TRISTAN (*looks at his watch*): Make dinner?

(*Blackout.*)

3.

(*Spot on Minstrel.*)

MINSTREL: Iseult remembered everything that she heard, but she concealed her anger and continued serving Tristan and being pleasant with him. But the story of love and suffering had to move on, so one day she decided to give a little spin to the wheel herself.



THE NYMPH DIES

(Lights. Tristan, briefcase in hand, near the door, on his way to work. Iseult in the easy chair, reading a newspaper.)

ISEULT: Did you read about this poor girl? Abducted and raped by three Arab sheikhs?

TRISTAN: In succession, or by all three at once?

ISEULT: What would you do if they did that to me?

TRISTAN: Your beauty's a touch too refined to attract the eye of a motorized Bedouin.

ISEULT: They weren't Bedouins, they worked for an oil company.

TRISTAN: The smell of camels can be quite a turn-on, but the smell of oil... Uggghh.

ISEULT: Well, what would you do?

TRISTAN: Blow up the nearest oil refinery.

ISEULT: Would you still love me? I want to know.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT: In case.

TRISTAN: In case you are raped, or in case I find out that you were?

ISEULT: In case I'm overcome by a desire to get raped.

TRISTAN: You tell me.

ISEULT: You mean, how would I feel if I was raped by three hairy sheikhs? I'd still love you.

TRISTAN: What comfort. *(Turns to go.)*

ISEULT: Do you remember that day ten years ago when you came home and found here –

TRISTAN: – my boss who's now my employee?

ISEULT: – your best friend, whom you respected but now despise? Why did you believe my explanation without a twinge of doubt?

TRISTAN: It seemed plausible.

ISEULT: There was more than one version.

TRISTAN: I believed the first one, before you had time to resort to embroidery.

ISEULT: The first one was Mark's.

TRISTAN: You know I've always trusted you.

ISEULT: That I wanted to learn the art of boomerang throwing?

TRISTAN: A legitimate desire no reasonable husband could object to.

ISEULT: And that Mark offered his services as an instructor?

TRISTAN: Why not? "Those who can't, teach."

ISEULT: And had to remove his trousers and shirt because he had thrown coffee over himself?



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TRISTAN: It does happen.

ISEULT: And hid under the blanket because he was afraid you'd misunderstand the whole thing?

TRISTAN: In the French farces you type this wouldn't be so, but in real life truth *can* be stranger than fiction. And now I must go.

ISEULT: Wouldn't you like to know what really happened?

TRISTAN: Which version will this be? Twelfth?

ISEULT: Thirteenth.

MINSTREL: Final.

ISEULT: Final.

TRISTAN: Okay.

ISEULT: Won't you sit down?

TRISTAN: No.

ISEULT: He came with the boomerang. He placed my hand around it and explained how to hold it and swing it.

TRISTAN: And so you held it.

ISEULT: No. I said it was too long and too curved.

TRISTAN: And he said he had something shorter and less curved, something you could swing together.

ISEULT: No. He recited four beautiful poems in medieval Irish.

TRISTAN: That's how you spent the morning?

ISEULT: Not quite. At eleven, as I got up to go to the kitchen to make coffee, he suddenly reached out and – without waiting for my permission – put his hand up my skirt.

MINSTREL: Why?

TRISTAN (*after a pause*): Why?

ISEULT: I couldn't think of a reason.

TRISTAN: How far up?

ISEULT: Ten inches above the knee.

TRISTAN: But that's very close ...

ISEULT: Very close.

TRISTAN: Did he say anything?

ISEULT: He sighed, "Oh Iseult, oh Iseult, oh Iseult."

TRISTAN: It must've been a very emotional moment for him.

ISEULT: Well, what happened next?

TRISTAN: I assume he inched his way up to a less equivocal grip.

ISEULT: No. He left his hand where it was.

TRISTAN: For how long?

ISEULT: It seemed like eternity.



THE NYMPH DIES

MINSTREL: Yes, time does tend to come to a standstill at moments like that.

TRISTAN: Which leg was it?

ISEULT: The left one. I think.

TRISTAN: And where... was his hand?

ISEULT: On the inside.

TRISTAN: And he just held it there?

ISEULT: Gazing into my eyes.

TRISTAN (*after a pause*): What sort of expression did he have on his face?

ISEULT: As if he wanted to tell me something deep and meaningful but couldn't find the words.

TRISTAN: Did you come to his aid with some gem from your treasury of literary quotations?

ISEULT: Yes. When I collected myself I said, "What are you doing, Minstrel?"

TRISTAN: Minstrel?

ISEULT: He never told you? In one of his previous lives he was a minstrel in Ireland.

(Tristan looks at her. Then he laughs. It's a hollow laughter, lasting some time.)

TRISTAN (*suddenly serious*): And then?

ISEULT: He took his hand away. And I went to the kitchen.

TRISTAN (*turning to go*): And then you drank coffee and talked about his other reincarnations –

MINSTREL: No.

(Tristan turns back.)

ISEULT: I didn't get a chance to make coffee. I tripped and fell.

TRISTAN: On your back?

ISEULT: Front.

TRISTAN: The kitchen floor's very hard.

ISEULT: I instantly rose to my knees.

TRISTAN: And got up?

ISEULT: No. I couldn't straighten up.

TRISTAN: Cramp?

ISEULT: Minstrel. He was behind me. With his hands on my shoulders. He was pressing me down. Can you imagine what a shock that was?



The Nymph Dies (*Tristan and Iseult*), Slovenian Chamber Theater, 1994
Boris Kerc as Tristan, Violeta Tomic as Iseult, Sreco Spik as Mark/Minstrel
Directed by the author and Branka Bezeljak Glazer





THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN (*after a pause*): A big one?

ISEULT: Enormous. I couldn't even scream. All I could do was grab hold of the table leg. I held onto it so hard that – that –

TRISTAN: – the table nearly collapsed?

MINSTREL: That it did collapse.

ISEULT: And all the time I kept thinking of you. In your office. Selling apartments, rooms with a view –

(Tristan clutches at his chest and collapses. He rolls about, moaning, gasping for breath. Iseult stares at him, first in disbelief, then in mounting terror.)

ISEULT: Tristan...

TRISTAN: Ohhhhhrrrr... gggrrrr... hhggggrrrr...

ISEULT: Where does it hurt?

TRISTAN: P... p... ppppp... oison...

ISEULT: What poison?

TRISTAN (*flailing about*): Ohhhhhrrrr... Iseult... Help...

ISEULT: I'll get a doctor.

MINSTREL: There's no need.

TRISTAN: P... p... p...

ISEULT: Tristan, it isn't true, I made it all up, please forgive me. I love you.

(Tristan calms down and lies still for a moment. Then he sits up, takes a deep breath. He gets up.)

ISEULT: What was it?

MINSTREL: Nothing.

TRISTAN: Attack.

ISEULT: What sort of attack?

TRISTAN: Usual.

ISEULT: Tell me.

TRISTAN: Why should I torture you?

ISEULT: Because otherwise I'll torture you, literally.

TRISTAN: All right. After all it was you who said we should face facts. The fact is that I've got poison in my blood which I'll never get rid of, and which is slowly wearing me down and will eventually drive me mad.

ISEULT: And who poisoned you?



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TRISTAN: A witch doctor of the African tribe of Fulani.

ISEULT (*supresses laughter*): Why?

TRISTAN: Because I allowed a female member of the tribe to instruct me in the finer points of the tribal lore.

ISEULT: Where? When?

TRISTAN: While showing a penthouse with a breathtaking view to an interested client.

ISEULT: Who was a member of the tribe of –

TRISTAN: – Fulani.

ISEULT: Black?

TRISTAN: Dark brown.

ISEULT: What was she doing here?

TRISTAN: Studying. Agronomy. Fulani breed cattle.

ISEULT: In other words – a dark-skinned peasant slut.

TRISTAN: She showed me the uses to which the Fulani put their family sticks. She demonstrated wuttudu-wuttudu, telli-telli, turi-turi and jood-joodude.

ISEULT: How exciting!

TRISTAN: Which means sideways, up and down, doggy fashion, and the man sits while the woman sits on his –

ISEULT: Family stick?

TRISTAN: How did you guess?

ISEULT (*after a pause*): Are they good? At this sideways up and down various entries business?

TRISTAN: Blessed with a complete lack of inhibition, aesthetic as well as moral.

ISEULT: Then you must've been well instructed.

TRISTAN: Can't complain.

ISEULT (*barely able to contain herself*): I would've thought that the success of a lesson would be measured by the degree of improvement in the pupil's handling of the instrument in question. Or maybe the teacher was good and it was the pupil who wasn't up to scratch? Or maybe the instruction took place on a lousy instrument?

TRISTAN: Her brother broke my arm and knocked my teeth out for good measure. Then, feeling sorry, he tried to make up for it by buying me a couple of beers. He managed to slip a small amount of poison into one of them. Not enough to kill me, but enough to turn my life into hell.

ISEULT: Poor Tristan. (*She starts to cry.*)



THE NYMPH DIES

MINSTREL: Poor, poor Tristan. *(He goes to the door, pauses.)*

TRISTAN: I'm sorry.

ISEULT: Why do you think I'm crying? Because of the things you're supposed to have done with your family stick? I'm crying because you've done none of them.

TRISTAN: No.

ISEULT: I'm crying because we're such cowards.

TRISTAN: We're safe.

ISEULT: I can't any more. Let me live.

TRISTAN: Are you fettered?

ISEULT: Yes.

TRISTAN: Well, break the bloody chain! Blow up! Grab hold of thin air and climb up it to heaven! Become a lesbian! Become a nun!

ISEULT: Tristan! – help me!

(Tristan looks at her in despair. Abruptly turns and goes out. Iseult throws herself on the sofa and cries even harder.)

(Blackout.)

4.

(The phone rings. Lights on "room." Iseult, neatly dressed, looking sexy, comes rushing in and grabs the receiver.)

ISEULT: Yes?... *(Disappointed.)* Oh, it's you, Mother... Of course I'm happy to hear from you, you phone so rarely these days, only twice a day... Mother, I don't want to hear another word about how Tristan and I got you into an old people's home... You're there because you are old... No, you can't live with us, we have problems... You're sick and lonely, but we're sick, lonely and cursed... Yes, Mother, I *am* doing something about it, I've ordered a take-away knight to rescue me... *(There is a knock.)* That'll be him... *(Puts receiver down and goes to open the door.)*

MARK *(slowly enters, grinning)*: Here I am.

ISEULT: Nice of you to be so obedient.

MARK: You said you wanted to –

ISEULT: – play a game.



The Nymph Dies (*Tristan and Iseult*), Slovenian Chamber Theater, 1994
Violeta Tomic as Iseult, Sreco Spik as Mark/Minstrel
Directed by the author and Branka Bezeljak Glazer





THE NYMPH DIES

MARK: Chess?

ISEULT: Sit down.

MARK: Poker?

ISEULT: I'll be a princess, imprisoned in the enchanted castle. You'll be a prince who will rescue me.

MARK: Fairy tale?

ISEULT: It will be, if the game succeeds. Sit down. (*Mark sits on the sofa. Iseult joins him.*) Tell me – why do I love a man who is my only horizon?

MARK (*shrugs*): Bbbhhh...

ISEULT: A man who is so close that I can't even touch him? A man I can't see because we have one pair of eyes?

MARK (*shrugs*): Bhhhh...

ISEULT: Not long ago I started to feel a desire to... touch another.

MARK (*looks round the room*): Which one?

ISEULT: For one reason alone. To reduce Tristan from the emptiness that surrounds me into a little man beside me. (*She takes his hand.*) Something must... break us apart.

MARK: Oh ...

ISEULT: But he's afraid of the storm. I must provoke it. (*Looks at Mark.*) I need a hero to pull me across the line.

MARK (*looks at the floor*): Which line?

ISEULT: The line I'm afraid to cross. I have a feeling that this hero is somewhere here, very close.

MARK (*looks around the room*): Really?

ISEULT: Do you think he finds me attractive?

MARK (*shrugs*): Bbbbbhhh...

ISEULT: I think I stimulate him in hundreds of ways, from heavenly to vulgar.

MARK (*gets up and moves away*): I'm sure you do.

ISEULT: Why doesn't he show it?

MARK: Bbbhhh ...

ISEULT: He's too careful. So careful that I'd call him a coward! Afraid even to take a paddle.

MARK: Perhaps he can't swim.

ISEULT: I'd teach him.

MARK: Why?

ISEULT (*rises*): You mean, what would I get out of it, beside the satisfaction that I've increased, by an orgasm or two, the margin of happiness in the world? You don't understand.



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MARK: Sorry.

ISEULT: I'm not after pleasure. I just want to break this vicious circle so the game can continue. *(She clutches at his hand.)* Help me.

MARK: It's all a misunderstanding –

ISEULT *(on her knees, embracing Mark's legs)*: Pull me across the line! Be a hero, be a knight!

MARK: That's not me.

ISEULT: Become that!

MARK: Inside me, too, there's a line I can't cross.

ISEULT: Let's save ourselves before it's too late.

MARK: For me it's too early.

ISEULT *(gets to her feet)*: In other words, you've shaken the tree all right, Iseult, but the fruit's not yet ripe.

MARK: I wouldn't say so. I'd say –

(Iseult slaps his face – just as Tristan enters with his briefcase, returning from work. Iseult passes him on her way to the door. She turns, looks at him, retraces her steps, slaps his face as well.)

ISEULT: So you won't feel neglected. *(She goes.)*

5.

(Tristan and Mark nurse their cheeks, eyeing each other.)

TRISTAN: We don't live in an ideal world.

MARK: No.

TRISTAN: If we did, love would be covered by government regulations.

MARK: Yes.

TRISTAN: Then we would know what's the right thing to do.

MARK: Yes.

TRISTAN: And then... we might do something.

MARK: Yes.

TRISTAN *(pours himself a drink)*: Not just stand. And drink. Waiting for it to be done to us.

MARK: I need advice.

TRISTAN: It's all a question of who's stronger, Mark. One isn't stronger by being a step ahead, one is stronger by lagging behind. Do you know what I'm talking about?



THE NYMPH DIES

MARK: Hundred percent.

TRISTAN: I won't be provoked into losing my head. I'll wait, finger on the trigger. But I won't fire. Yet.

MARK: The thing is – I need advice.

TRISTAN: Sorry, Mark, I find other people's problems boring and insignificant.

MARK: I'd like to – live a full life. Something you've already achieved. (*Tristan looks at him sharply.*) You and Iseult. For me you're an ideal couple.

TRISTAN (*touches Mark's forehead*): Are you ill?

MARK: Even your first meeting must've been extraordinary.

TRISTAN: Unique. We collided like two cars on a dark road, and have remained together because no one's been able to saw us apart. A double write-off.

MARK: D'you know what's inside me?

TRISTAN: Wouldn't have a clue.

MARK: One great big disorder. The more I try to clear it up, the worse it gets.

TRISTAN: There's only one thing that can help you.

MARK (*full of expectation*): What's that?

TRISTAN: You must take a deep breath – like this – (*Takes a deep breath.*)

MARK: Like this? (*Takes a deep breath.*)

TRISTAN: – find a long, thick candle –

MARK: – candle, yes –

TRISTAN: – light it –

MARK: – light it, yes –

TRISTAN: – and shove it up your ass.

MARK (*after a pause*): Tristan...

TRISTAN: D'you mind if I sit down? Very tiring, giving advice to people.

MARK: I mean look at me. I've sold hundreds of offices, shops –

TRISTAN: None at all lately, and if this continues you'll have to think of other ways of earning a living.

MARK: – but I haven't done what a normal man does at seventeen!

TRISTAN (*after a pause*): What?!

MARK: Well, there you are.

TRISTAN: You mean, you haven't... You're still...?

MARK: Maybe I have – before I was hit by the boomerang. But if I think about it... I'm sure I haven't. And if I think about it even harder, I feel I should –

TRISTAN: – grab the first opportunity.



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MARK: I need... your help.

TRISTAN: Sorry, Mark, I'm not going to pimp for you. Ask the first one you see, or put an ad in the paper.

MARK: I've had an offer. Only –

TRISTAN: Only what?

MARK: I'm not sure it's right.

TRISTAN: Why, is she a virgin as well?

MARK: No, quite experienced. Only – she's not in love with me. She just wants to use me for –

TRISTAN: – satisfying her nymphomania.

MARK: – solving some of her problems.

TRISTAN: You must help her.

MARK: You really think so?

TRISTAN: Of course. A man must always help a woman in distress.

MARK: Thank you. You really are a friend.

TRISTAN: But don't wait too long. Women can change their minds at a moment's notice.

MARK: Really?

TRISTAN: I wouldn't waste any time if I were you. Considering you've been waiting for this all your life.

MARK (*goes to the door*): I think I won't waste any time. Considering –

TRISTAN: – that you may be too late already.

MARK: I think I won't –

TRISTAN: – waste any time. Good luck. (*Afterthought.*) Mark... (*Mark turns.*) That... slapping of your face earlier... what was that for?

MARK: Oh that? Well, I... asked for it.

TRISTAN: Why?

MARK: Since this happened to me... I keep getting headaches. If I'm slapped... it causes a shake-up... and... my head stops aching.

TRISTAN: Really?

MARK: Yes.

TRISTAN: Why didn't you tell me? (*He slaps his face.*) Still aching?

MARK: No.

TRISTAN: One more, to make sure? (*Slaps him again.*)

MARK: Thank you. I think I'd better not waste any time...

(Mark hastily departs. Tristan laughs. Blackout.)



THE NYMPH DIES

6.

(Lights on "room." Phone rings. Iseult enters and picks up receiver.)

ISEULT: You again, Mother... What have we done?... Used half the money from the sale of your house to buy our new apartment?... Mother, how can you be so rude to your daughter?... Of course I trust Tristan, he'd never do a thing like that... What did the doctor say?... That you won't last much longer... I don't care what the doctor says... Stop torturing me with your silly threats, be normal for once, for God's sake, be normal at least on your death-bed!... *(Slams the phone down, moans, then shrieks. Gets up, takes a deep breath, closes her eyes.)* Tristan, where are you? Help me. *(There is a knock. Iseult goes to the door. Mark enters, grinning.)* Careful with that grin, you might decapitate yourself.

MARK: I've become a hero. A knight.

ISEULT: Really?

MARK *(strides into the room)*: I'm going to pull you.

ISEULT: Oh?

MARK: Across. Pull you across the line.

ISEULT: What happened?

MARK: I've become a hero.

ISEULT: You mean you've taken a careful step away from your caution and begun to entertain the possibility that you may have to get used to the idea that you might have no choice but to accept my offer?

MARK: Precisely.

ISEULT: Such passion.

MARK: I wouldn't waste any time, considering that I've waited all my life for this moment.

ISEULT: First we must agree on the rules.

MARK: What rules?

ISEULT: Think of it as a banned nuclear test.

MARK: Isn't that dangerous?

ISEULT: Very. That's why the blast and the fallout must be strictly controlled. No one must know that the explosion took place. And one more thing. Throughout the test the participants must behave with restraint. Do we understand each other?

MARK *(completely confused)*: Hundred percent.



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

ISEULT: I personally would prefer to be under a general anaesthetic.
Unfortunately that's not very practical.

MARK: No.

ISEULT: So I suggest that we keep the increase in respiratory activity
to a minimum and restrict our expressions of relief to a few sub-
dued grunts at the appropriate moment.

MARK: Okay. I wouldn't waste any time, considering that I may be too
late already.

ISEULT: Well, don't.

MARK (*at a loss*): What am I... supposed to...?

ISEULT: You're a hero. You're a knight.

MARK: Precisely. (*Scratches his head.*)

ISEULT: Do you need visual stimulation?

MARK: Please.

ISEULT: You want me to throw coffee over myself, so I can undress.

MARK: No time for coffee.

ISEULT: Okay, I'll pretend that's already been done. (*Takes off her
cardigan.*)

MARK: More.

ISEULT: Can't you do the rest yourself? I can help you with directions
every step of the way.

MARK (*scratching his head*): Bbbbhbbb...

ISEULT (*puts the cardigan on again*): I'm cold.

MARK: I'm hot. I'll pull you across.

ISEULT: No you won't, Mark. You're not a knight. You're not a hero.

MARK: I am.

ISEULT: Nor am I Iseult the Fair. I'm Iseult of the Earth. I smell of
washing powder and disinfectant. I, too, lack the courage that you
should have. I, too, am only a little everyday thing, incapable of
generosity to my Mother or to myself. I'm sorry, Mark, that I have
to punish *you* for all this.

*(She slaps his face – just as Tristan enters, returning from work.
Iseult passes him on her way to the door. She turns, comes back,
looks at him.)*

TRISTAN: I haven't got a headache.

ISEULT: No? (*She slaps him.*) You'll have one now. (*Exits.*)



THE NYMPH DIES

7.

(Tristan and Mark, trying to avoid each other's eyes.)

TRISTAN *(after a pause)*: Well? How was it?

MARK: Good.

TRISTAN: You grabbed the opportunity with both hands.

MARK: At the crucial moment I suddenly didn't have enough –

TRISTAN: Courage?

MARK: Experience.

TRISTAN: And what will you do now?

MARK: I'm going to stop trying to unravel this –

TRISTAN: – Gordian knot –

MARK: – and I'm going to –

TRISTAN: – cut it, well done. What do you need – scissors, axe, chain saw?

MARK: Tell me – am I ripe for this step?

TRISTAN: Which one?

MARK: For two years now I've been on the point of flying to India. I have an open ticket. The problem is – I can't make up my mind.

TRISTAN *(takes a coin from his pocket and hands it to Mark)*: Heads you go in half an hour, tails you go first thing in the morning.

(Mark examines the coin, weighs it in his hand, then returns it to Tristan.)

MARK: Thank you.

TRISTAN: Come to the window, Mark. *(Puts his arm round Mark's shoulders and guides him to the window.)* What do you see?

MARK: Miles of office space. Housing developments –

TRISTAN: No, Mark. The world. A world of blood, sweat and tears.

MARK: Horrible world.

TRISTAN: No. Wonderful, tragic world. But why's everything just an echo of a distant party to which we haven't been invited?

MARK *(shrugs)*: Bbhhh...

TRISTAN: Isn't that what we really want? To be able to break down the walls of our chrysallis and expose ourselves – naked? Should be the easiest thing in the world. Except for us. For us it's impossible.

MARK: Sad in a way.



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

TRISTAN: We still long for the real world. But it's really the longing now that we're attached to, not breaking out. The longing's become part of the in-house entertainment. That's why you'll never go to India. And I'll never do anything. Do you know what we are, Mark?

MARK: Cowards?

TRISTAN: Perfect men. Our epitaph will read: "Never did anything; well done, chaps."

MARK: Actually, I've been on my way for some time. The only thing that's missing is the first step.

TRISTAN: Shall I tell you about my enlightenment? (*He eases Mark into the chair. Iseult enters, halts in the doorway, listens, unseen.*) Not long ago I met a young woman who – I think she – quite – all right, I'll put it bluntly – I think she liked me.

MARK: Lucky you.

TRISTAN: I got the feeling that she'd go with me anywhere. And suddenly I had this vision of – starting all over again. Falling in love, getting married, going through all the stages that Iseult and I've gone through. A terrible thought struck me – that it would all end up here! With everything exactly as it is... What a waste, I thought! What a waste of energy, and of time, which is much better spent doing nothing. It's no use, Mark. Isn't that comforting?

MARK (*shrugs*): Bbbhhh...

TRISTAN: I have nothing against Iseult. I still – all right, I'll put it bluntly – I still –

MARK: Love her.

TRISTAN: Yes. More and more, in a way.

MARK: Ideal marriage. Great love.

TRISTAN: I just want to... tidy up my living space. I won't allow anyone to demolish the building I've erected to keep out the cold. Do you understand?

MARK: Hundred percent.

TRISTAN: I'm talking about the fine art of striking back at the right time in the right place and hard enough to cause maximum damage. (*Confidentially.*) Mark, I need your help.

MARK (*alarmed*): Mine?

TRISTAN: Remember the lady who – as you said – offered you an opportunity to join the ranks of men?

MARK (*alarmed*): Why?



THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN: You said that you didn't lack courage, only experience.

MARK: Well, maybe courage as well.

TRISTAN: You need a woman who's got both.

MARK: Such a woman does not exist.

TRISTAN: Oh yes, she does. Listen, Mark. I want you to come here tomorrow while I'm at work, sit next to Iseult on the sofa – like this – (*He positions Mark on the sofa and sits next to him.*) – put your hand on her knee – like this – (*Puts his hand on Mark's knee.*) – look deeply into her eyes and say, "Iseult, please help me."

MARK: "Iseult, please help me?"

TRISTAN: "I've never –"

MARK: "I've never –"

TRISTAN: "– and if I don't soon –"

MARK: "– and if I don't soon –"

TRISTAN: "– I'll shrivel and die."

MARK: "– I'll shrivel and die."

TRISTAN: And then you wait.

MARK: For what?

TRISTAN: To see what she'll do.

MARK: And then?

TRISTAN: Come to the office and tell me.

MARK (*deep sigh*): I don't know.

TRISTAN: And then we'll talk about a raise.

MARK (*gets up*): Raise?

TRISTAN: Ten percent.

MARK: And if I don't do it?

TRISTAN: Job center. Do we understand each other?

MARK: I think we do.

(*Iseult withdraws.*)

TRISTAN: Do we *really* understand each other?

MARK: I think we *really* do.

TRISTAN (*slaps Mark on the shoulder*): You're not entirely brainless.

(*Mark goes to the door. He halts, turns, wants to say something. He changes his mind and leaves. Tristan pours himself a drink and laughs. Mark looks in through the door as Minstrel. He brushes the strings of his harp.*)



Evald Flisar: COLLECTED PLAYS, Volume 1

MINSTREL: No, I'm not entirely brainless.

(Minstrel withdraws. Tristan rubs his eyes to make sure he isn't hallucinating. Iseult enters.)

ISEULT: Tell me, did you really spend half the money from the sale of Mother's house to finance the purchase of our apartment?

TRISTAN *(after a pause)*: Well, in business terms one would call that investment –

ISEULT: Cut the crap, did you or didn't you?

TRISTAN *(after a pause)*: Yes.

ISEULT: Good. I've decided to take Mother out of that horrible place and care for her here.

TRISTAN: Actually –

ISEULT: I'm so glad you agree.

(Blackout.)

8.

(Lights on "room," with Iseult nervously pacing up and down. The phone rings. She ignores it, then answers.)

ISEULT: Casualty department of the main hospital. We can't accept any cases, no matter how urgent. We're getting ready for a surgical separation of Siamese twins.

(Replaces receiver. Phone rings again. She picks it up and blows a raspberry down the line. There is a knock. She replaces receiver and faces the door.)

MARK *(cautiously entering)*: Here I am.

ISEULT: I've been waiting.

MARK: Last night I was seized by despair and I started to bang my head against the wall. Something moved inside it. Suddenly I know what I want.

ISEULT: Tell me.

MARK: Sit down. Here, on the sofa.



THE NYMPH DIES

(Iseult sits on the sofa, Mark sits next to her.)

MARK: Iseult, help me.

ISEULT: Like this? *(She places Mark's hand on her knee.)*

MARK: Never before have I –

ISEULT: Never before have you –

MARK: And if I don't soon –

ISEULT: And if you don't soon –

MARK: Never before have I longed for India as much as I do now. And if I don't depart very soon –

ISEULT: – you'll shrivel and die.

MARK: How d'you know?

ISEULT *(lifts Mark's hand off her knee and puts it into his lap)*: Female intuition.

MARK: Iseult, help me. *(Takes a sealed envelope from his pocket and hands it to her.)* For Tristan. My boss. Ex-boss.

ISEULT: Has he sacked you?

MARK *(rises)*: No. I'm off. Allahabad. Ahmedabad. Aurangabad. Bangalore. Indore. Mysore.

ISEULT: Can I go with you?

MARK *(astonished)*: Would you?

ISEULT: No. Ireland's my country. That's where I'll go if I ever make a move.

MARK: It's cold in Ireland, windy.

ISEULT: Cold is my destiny.

MARK: But India's hot.

ISEULT: Cold is my life.

MARK: This letter explains why I'm leaving. But don't give it to him before tomorrow evening, when I'm already in Bombay.

ISEULT: Why not?

MARK: He might try to persuade me to stay. I can't risk that. He can be very –

ISEULT: Violent.

MARK: – insistent.

ISEULT: Take care of yourself.

MARK: I won't. I'll throw myself into empty space like a boomerang. And when I return... I'll be different. And then – you never know. History can repeat itself.

ISEULT: First as a farce and then as a bigger farce.



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MARK: Don't forget the letter.

ISEULT: I won't. (*She pushes the letter under the cushion.*)

MARK: India is pure magic. It works already, although I'm not even there yet. I want a new personality. Someone who hates dithering.

ISEULT: And it works already.

MARK: Look. Instead of long-winded good-byes, shaking of hands, empty phrases – pure action. (*He turns and marches to the door. Iseult laughs. Mark looks at her.*) Sure you don't want to go with me?

ISEULT: You'll stay, Mark. You'll stay here as Minstrel.

MARK: Minstrel isn't going to India?

ISEULT: He doesn't belong there. He must bring our story to a conclusion.

MARK: A happy one, please, if possible. (*He goes.*)

9.

(*Iseult picks up a chair, puts it in front of the sofa, sits, waits. Tristan enters and approaches.*)

TRISTAN: Are we trees?

ISEULT: No, Tristan.

(*He begins to circle around her.*)

TRISTAN: We're not. Our life's our only season.

ISEULT: Yes, Tristan.

TRISTAN: Can we accept that?

ISEULT: No, Tristan.

TRISTAN: We can't. So we construct an illusion that we can renew ourselves. We long for a violent storm that would strip us of the shrivelled leaves of our past mistakes and leave us for a brief terrifying moment completely bare, a leafless trunk, out of which, we hope, will grow a new life, fresh and firm, springlike.

ISEULT: We wait.

TRISTAN: We refuse to admit that in late summer, with autumn not far away, it's useless to wait for the spring.

ISEULT: It won't come again?

TRISTAN: It won't come again. Why do we have metaphors?

ISEULT: So we can crawl inside them when we're cold.



THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN: So we can hang on to our most precious illusion.

ISEULT: The story of our life?

TRISTAN: As long as life is a story we can imagine that the most interesting chapter is still to come. We can rewrite the story endlessly to make it exciting, more palatable –

ISEULT: We can play at life instead of living it.

TRISTAN: Isn't it time we called it a day?

ISEULT: But I haven't started yet.

TRISTAN: I've finished.

ISEULT: Is it my turn now?

TRISTAN: Go ahead.

ISEULT: You won't be upset if I say what I think?

TRISTAN: Don't you always?

ISEULT: This time it'll really hurt.

TRISTAN: How can I bleed – it's only a game.

ISEULT (*rises*): Not any more, Tristan dear. (*Minstrel enters and stands behind her.*) I've changed the rules.

TRISTAN: Really?

ISEULT: What did you expect? That I'd fret a little and then gratefully crawl back inside your metaphor? Poor Tristan.

TRISTAN, MINSTREL (*jointly*): Poor Tristan! Don't you see how clever women are? They want us to be the stage on which to perform the grand ballet of their sex, called "Look how marvellously I can pirouette in the center of my life." One would've thought that once they secured this stage they'd be happy, even grateful. On the contrary. This center of male strength reveals the illusory nature of their independence. They want us to be strong, but then they resent us for it. The myth of the mysterious nature of women is really nothing more than the simple paradox that women want one thing while at the same time wanting it's very opposite!

ISEULT: Poor Tristan.

TRISTAN: Truce, Iseult. Please.

ISEULT: War's over. We're free. We can start living life-as-it-might've-been.

TRISTAN: I'm tired. (*He lies down on the sofa.*)

ISEULT: You'll understand when I return. (*Goes out.*)



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10.

MINSTREL: Tristan dreamt he went dancing. Iseult was there, too. She came to ask him for a dance. She was wearing a long white dress. She was so beautiful! So beautiful! His breath was taken away. She said: come, Tristan, let's find the rhythm we lost. He tried to get up to follow her. But he couldn't. His feet had turned to ice. He cried out at the top of his voice. He was angry with her. It was her fault he couldn't dance with her. She was too beautiful.

(Iseult returns wearing a white wedding dress.)

ISEULT: Will you marry me?

TRISTAN *(buries his face in his hands)*: Stop it, stop it, stop it!

ISEULT: Poor Tristan. You think you've changed things, moved the game along.

TRISTAN: Haven't I?

ISEULT: No. I have. Why d'you think Mark hasn't been to the office for over a week?

TRISTAN: He's ill.

ISEULT: He's flown to India. Thanks to me.

TRISTAN: Really? Being practical as well as determined, you probably booked his flight and even arranged for his cholera jabs.

ISEULT: How right you are, and how metaphorical yet again. I never thought an injection could be so... heavenly. *(She looks at Tristan defiantly.)* He's not in India. He took off his clothes, although this time he hadn't thrown coffee over himself, and... well, need I say more? And again. And again. Twice a day. And now he's too scared to face you.

TRISTAN *(after a long pause)*: And where did it take place – this journey into exotic parts?

ISEULT: In our bed. The only thing that interfered with our pleasure was the noise of the bedsprings. They really do creak too much. Will you have them repaired, or shall I?

(Tristan takes a deep breath and again buries his face in his hands. It isn't clear what he's trying to hold back – laughter or tears.)



THE NYMPH DIES

ISEULT: You're the one I've always loved. But I wanted to love you by choice. I don't have to live with you any more. That's why for the first time in my life I can really say that I want to.

(Tristan laughs.)

TRISTAN: Remember the circus that came to town two years ago? The main attraction were two clowns, Bongo and Pongo. Their act consisted in trying to stab each other with daggers. But they used daggers with collapsible blades. And under their shirts, cellotaped to the skin, they had bags of chicken blood. Isn't it time we washed our hands of it?

ISEULT: It's too late.

TRISTAN: Why?

ISEULT: Because Bongo, the cleverer of the two, knew all along that in the end they'd have to spill real blood. During one of their ritual stabbings he replaced the collapsible blade with a real one. *(Tristan stares at her.)* How's the poison? Aren't you going to have a fit?

(Tristan turns and hits her in the face. She falls on the sofa. He hits her again, very hard. She starts to bleed from the nose. Tristan steps back, horrified. Iseult tries to stop the bleeding with her wedding dress.)

ISEULT: How does it feel, to be able at last to hit what you've loved?

TRISTAN: So it's true.

MINSTREL: Yes.

ISEULT: Will you marry me now?

TRISTAN: Behind my back!

ISEULT: I begged you to help me.

TRISTAN: Penis? That's the axis around which the world revolves? No!... No!...

ISEULT: We love each other, that's our tragedy. That's the fact we've refused to face. *(Tristan shakes her violently. He wants to hit her again, but restrains himself.)* Isn't this a wonderful day? This celebration of – what did you call it? – our life of bliss? *(Tristan hits her.)* High poetry of an estate agent. What happened to it? Was it so high that it vanished into thin air? *(Tristan hits her.)* Or was it flushed away in the toilet of one of the apartments you sold?



The Nymph Dies (*Tristan and Iseult*), Slovenian Chamber Theater, 1994
Violeta Tomic as Iseult and Boris Kerc as Tristan
Directed by the author and Branka Bezeljak Glazer





THE NYMPH DIES

TRISTAN (*pushing her away*): What about you?

ISEULT: Yes, what about me. A typist all my life. A recorder of words not my own.

TRISTAN: And whose fault is that?

ISEULT: But the words that were mine, deeply buried inside me for years, I had no time to put down. What a success! Queen Iseult of the Quick Hands! Bravo, bravo! (*She claps.*)

TRISTAN: It's my fault. I didn't know how –

ISEULT: You didn't know how –

TRISTAN: – to become what you wanted.

ISEULT: Perhaps I didn't know what I wanted. What did you want?

TRISTAN: That it wouldn't end like this.

ISEULT: Is it ending?

TRISTAN: But you, too...

ISEULT: I, too, Tristan. I, too.

TRISTAN: And yet, how simple everything seems, there being only one question –

ISEULT: Put by a Danish prince.

TRISTAN: If you'd never typed playscripts –

ISEULT: – our drama might've been different? Are you sure?

TRISTAN: Shall we... once more... like we used to...?

ISEULT: Let's, Tristan.

TRISTAN: Will you begin?

ISEULT: I had begun, Tristan. You finish.

(Tristan looks at her. He rises and slowly goes out.)

ISEULT (*quietly singing*):

And will he not come again?

And will he not come again?

No, no, he's dead;

Go to thy death-bed,

He never will come again.

(The phone rings. Iseult answers.)

ISEULT: Yes?... Yes, I am her daughter... When did she die?... Two hours ago... Thank you for letting me know... (*Puts the phone down.*)



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(Tristan returns with two glasses of red wine. Keeps one, hands the other to Iseult.)

TRISTAN: Long life.

ISEULT: "There's rosemary, that's for remembrance; pray, love, remember." *(She drinks.)*

TRISTAN: "This nothing's more than matter."

ISEULT: *(sings)*

They bore him barefac'd on the bier;
Hey non nonny, nonny, hey nonny;
And in his grave rain'd many a tear.

TRISTAN: "O rose of May! dear maid!"

ISEULT: "There's a daisy; I would give you some violets but they withered all." *(She drinks.)*

TRISTAN: "I must common with your grief, or you deny me right."

ISEULT: "Let this be so: the means of death, the obscure burial; no trophy, sword nor hatchment o'er my bones, no noble rite nor formal ostentation."

TRISTAN: "So you shall; and where the offence is, let the great axe fall."

ISEULT: "And where the offence is..." *(Places both hands on her head.)*
O Tristan...

TRISTAN: What?

ISEULT: I feel so strange. What's this...? This...

TRISTAN: Axe?

ISEULT: O Tristan.... What's this?

TRISTAN: Rescue potion.

ISEULT *(looks in the glass, horrified)*: Oh no... No! No! Tristan, no!!!

TRISTAN: Yes.

ISEULT: "God bless you, sir."

TRISTAN: "Let him bless thee too."

(Iseult gathers her strength, reaches out and pulls Mark's letter from under the cushion.)

ISEULT: There's a letter for you, sir; it comes from the hero that was bound for India; if your name be Tristan, as I am let to know it is.



THE NYMPH DIES

(Tristan opens the letter and reads it. He buries his face in his hands. Minstrel pulls the letter from his hand.)

MINSTREL *(reads)*: “Dear Tristan, I’m sorry to have to leave without saying good-bye – as friend to friend. I’m sorry, also, for not having done what you asked me to – that would not have been me. I finally got my courage together, I threw myself and swished off. When I come flying back I’ll probably collide with myself once more, and that, too, will be the only case of its kind in the world. I’m going in order to find out if it’s possible to come back not the same. I know you won’t cease poking fun at me, but I hope that I’ll learn to play the game of life with less panic. And – like you and Iseult – with more subtlety. Please remain happy, witty and loyal to each other, as you have been since your birth in the twelfth century. Yours, Mark.”

TRISTAN: Iseult, no... No!... No!

ISEULT: Yes. *(Begins to shiver.)*

TRISTAN: So it wasn’t true!

MINSTREL: No.

TRISTAN *(slowly turns and looks at her)*: “How now, sweet queen?”

MINSTREL *(prompting)*: “There with fantastic garlands –”

ISEULT: “There with fantastic garlands did she come, of crow-flowers, nettles, daisies; there, on the pendent boughs her coronet weeds clambering to hang, an envious sliver broke, when down her weedy trophies and herself fell in the weeping brook.”

TRISTAN: “Alas! then, she is drown’d!”

ISEULT: “Drown’d.”

TRISTAN *(shakes her violently)*: Why, why? Why this lie?... Why these games?

ISEULT: End of games. Peace now. “Drown’d.”

(Tristan picks up his glass, rushes out, returns with glass refilled and a handful of pills. He swallows the pills and washes them down with wine.)

TRISTAN: Let’s go then. Like a pair of idiots.

ISEULT: No, Tristan. Like all heroes we, too, are dying on the battle-field. Give me your hand. *(Tristan sits next to her on the floor, leaning against the sofa. She holds his hand.)* Isn’t it Sunday today?



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TRISTAN: A devil's day, an open door to hell.

ISEULT: But at last we managed to defeat Sundays once and for all.

Isn't that wonderful? We've won, Tristan. And now we're on a ship, sailing to Ireland.

TRISTAN: "And the sail, what is the manner of the sail?"

ISEULT: "Why, for its color, it is black." (*Tristan buries his face in his hands.*) "O friend, fold your arms round me and strain me so that our hearts may break. Take me to that happy place whence none return, but where great singers sing their songs forever."

TRISTAN: "The time is near. When it is finished, if I call you, will you come, my friend?"

ISEULT: "Call me, dear."

TRISTAN (*embraces her*): "Iseult, my love. Iseult, my love. Iseult, my love."

(They tighten their embrace and grow still. Minstrel lights a candle and puts it next to their heads.)

MINSTREL: "My lords and ladies, traveling singers intended this tale for all those who love, and not for anyone else. I'm here to pass on their greetings – to those who're thoughtful, and those who're happy, to all who're sad and to all who're glad, and to all who suffer, who're in love. In this tale, let them find comfort for inconstancy, for injustice, for aches of the heart."

(Lights slowly fade.)