

ROSALIND (*bitterly*). Like a star . . .

They exit, turning out the lights.

Late-night wireless. Light comes up.

FLORA *in a nighty brings on a tray of bread and jam.*

GERTRUDE *comes in.*

GERTRUDE. Ich bin so müde, ich muss mich irgendwo hinlegen, wo ich nicht gestört werde . . . [I am so tired, I must lie down where I won't be disturbed . . .]

She exits into the school. FLORA returns and turns off the wireless. She kneels down and says a short prayer. HETTY comes in wearing one of the beige dresses and a balaclava.

HETTY. Where on earth is everyone?

FLORA. They must have gone for a walk . . . My, doesn't beige look fetching on you? . . . How is everything? What did the vet say?

HETTY *looks away and takes the dog-lead out of her pocket.*

Oh Lor', Hetty, you didn't . . . was it . . . oh Hetty, I'm sorry . . . 'there's a great spirit gone' . . .

HETTY. No, please don't be nice to me or I'll break down . . .

GERTRUDE *starts to play in the distance. FLORA pours some tea.*

FLORA. Would you like something to eat? Don't worry, that's not being nice . . . Ivy was on cooking duty . . . Is that Gertrude?

HETTY. She's in one of her grievings . . . It'll be Beethoven, I imagine . . .

HETTY *picks up the list of dead and wounded and reads it in silence.*

So much death . . . Someone . . . I can't remember who . . . said that we should say to each child, 'You are a marvel. What a wonder you are – your eyes, your cunning fingers, the way you move. You might become a Beethoven, a

Michelangelo, a Shakespeare. You have the capacity for anything . . . And so, when you grow up, can you then harm another who is, like you, a marvel?' Oh God, Flora, sometimes I'm frightened it's just not worth it . . . dragging you all about in appalling conditions . . . working ludicrous hours . . .

FLORA. Nonsense . . . why even today I was reading a letter from a dear little marvel who thought we were worth much more than fivepence . . . she thought we were worth at least sixpence . . .

They both laugh.

You're allowed not to be strong all the time, you know, Hetty . . . let me take care of you for five minutes . . .

HETTY (*putting away the lead*). Sometimes you wish you'd never allowed yourself to feel so much . . .

HETTY *falls silent. GERTRUDE plays Brahms in the distance. FLORA lights a cigarette and hands it to HETTY.*

FLORA. The terrible thing about pets is that the ones you absolutely loathe seem to live forever . . .

HETTY *pulls back the blackout on the window. The light of the full moon comes through.*

HETTY. What a strange day . . . twilight and darkening . . . and then luminous . . . Why is it women who are made mad by the moon?

FLORA. Women, Irish wolves and apparently penguins . . .

HETTY. That's right . . . You've always had a problem with full moons and I've never been very sympathetic . . . I'm sorry, is it one of your silly superstitions?

FLORA. No . . . no . . . although it is possibly rather silly . . . It has a story . . . I don't know why I've never told you before . . .

FLORA *gets some bread and the jam and makes sandwiches as she talks.*

You see, when my mother died, we went to live with my grandmother on a house by a lake . . . And for my little

brother Toby and I, it was . . . well, it was a Wonderland because, you see, my father was almost never there . . . and he wasn't a very nice man . . . he wasn't kind to Toby . . . and Toby was such a gentle soul, he couldn't . . . you don't really want to hear all this . . .

HETTY. Yes I do . . . just a scrape of margarine . . .

FLORA. Well, we used to play make-believe in the woods . . . we'd pretend to be Babushka and Marushka, the Elfin king and queen, having banquets and things . . . And sometimes we'd lie back in the grass and Toby would say, 'Listen Marushka – I can hear the flowers growing' . . . He loved flowers . . . he was always picking them for everyone . . . you'd wake up and there was a little bunch of primroses on the pillow . . . and he was always asking me impossible questions . . . 'What's sky?' And I'd say, 'It's where heaven is . . .' and he'd say, 'What's it like to die?' . . . and it was awkward, you know, I mean I didn't have the answers – and I'd say, 'It's like going home – to our real home where Mumma is . . . and God' . . . And he'd say, 'Will God like me as I am?' And I said, 'Yes Toby, he'll like you very much.' Honestly, Hetty, I'll tell you another time . . .

HETTY. Please, I want you to go on . . . just one round . . . thanks.

FLORA. Well, years went by and Toby was sent to a boarding school because my father said he needed toughening up and he hated it . . . and my father would thrash him because his report would say he was a coward on the rugby field, and still a mother's boy . . . and so on . . . and he'd come into my bed – you see, he was terrified of the dark – and he'd cry into my hair and he'd say, 'Oh Flora, something's not right with me . . . Why am I wrong?'

And then when he was fourteen . . . It was one winter evening, my father had gone out and we had the wonderful sense of being able to breathe again that we always had . . . and Toby said he had a surprise for me and I was to come when he called . . . he was in our mother's old room which we were forbidden from ever entering and so I knew it was something special . . . when I opened the door, the curtains

were shut and there was no one there . . . just lots of candles placed about the room . . . and the gramophone was on . . . playing the silliest song that our mother simply loved about a little speckly hen . . . and then . . . the curtains opened and he stepped forward and . . . and he had reddened his lips and his cheeks . . . and he looked so beautiful . . . so like our mother . . . and he was wearing her ivory-lace dressing gown and when he looked in the mirror, he laughed . . . you know, that wonderful infectious laugh people have when they are really happy . . . and we danced round and round the room and we were . . . shimmering . . .

And then suddenly the door opened and my father was standing there . . . and I've never seen anyone so angry . . . And he grabbed Toby and he said, 'How dare you – how dare you bring shame on the memory of your mother – don't you ever – don't you ever – no son of mine will be a . . .' And he used terrible words . . . I don't have to tell you. And I was begging him, saying, 'Daddy, stop it . . . stop it, Daddy' – and finally he said he was sending him to an army school and if that didn't make a man of him . . .

And Toby didn't say anything . . . he just stared at him . . . And all the time this silly song was still playing about a speckly hen . . . but it had slowed right down . . . which should have been so funny . . .

That night I said my prayers . . . and I begged God to smite down my father and to take him out of our lives . . . and then I thought I heard a noise outside and so I went to the window . . . it was a beautiful ice-cold night with a full moon . . . and still . . . so still . . . as if the world was holding its breath . . . Toby was standing on the frozen lake in the moonlight . . . he was completely naked . . . and I called to him . . . I begged him to come in and I told him how much I loved him and how I would hug away his loneliness . . . And he just looked at me so calmly and he said, 'Marushka . . . Marushka . . . I'm going home' . . . And there was a sound . . . you know, the sound the ice makes when it cracks . . . only it wasn't the ice . . . he'd taken my father's army gun and he'd shot himself . . .

I never wanted children after that . . . And I know it's silly but I always felt that if only there hadn't been that full moon he wouldn't have done it . . . because it would have been dark . . . and he was always so frightened of the dark . . .

HETTY. Well thank you, Flora, that's really cheered me up . . .

FLORA. Oh dear – no, all I mean is that *in spite of* everything, I do believe in God and I think the fact that we have loved, well, that somehow testifies to . . . Sorry, I've been a bit waffly . . . persiflage . . .

HETTY. Bless you, Flora . . . You're a very dear friend . . . But who knows? Perhaps God didn't create us . . . perhaps *because of* everything, we created God . . . as the most necessary make-believe of all . . .

FLORA. Do you remember that moment at the very end of *Pilgrim's Progress* as he steps into the river? 'And all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.'

FLORA *breaks down*.

Big-band sound. High-energy dancing. All the girls are dancing and are extremely drunk. BERT appears at the microphone.

BERT. The Blackout Stroll. You ladies called 'wallflowers' – fated to sit out all the dances because perhaps your face isn't your future or your figure isn't the cuddly kind – here's your chance to dance the latest step. And your godsend . . . when the lights go out, you change partners in the dark . . .

BERT *sings*. HELEN *joins him and drunkenly sings along*.

Lights go out. HELEN and BERT kissing drunkenly, watched in disgust by ROSALIND.

More song. Lights go out. JOSEPH and IVY slow-dance.

JOSEPH.

When I have you dance, I would wish you a wave of the sea
That you might ever do nothing but that
Move still, still so,
And own no other function.

They continue to turn slowly and kiss tenderly as the light fades . . .

ROSALIND and CHARLIE *are stumbling back into the peg room*.

CHARLIE. What was that word for when doves coo?

ROSALIND. 'Roucouler' . . . roo-coo roo-coo . . . onomatopoeia.

CHARLIE. Mmm . . .

They kiss on the lips very tenderly.

(Whispering.) Thy lips are warm . . .

ROSALIND. We mustn't . . . It's . . .

CHARLIE *magically extracts a bunch of paper flowers from behind ROSALIND's ear*.

CHARLIE. Why? How can it be alright to kiss as characters in front of lots of strangers but not in private . . .

ROSALIND. I don't know . . . it's not natural . . .

CHARLIE. Why not? Who made that decision? Why should we feel ashamed for loving each other? It seems natural to me . . . it seems lovely and gentle and . . . I'm not going to be ashamed . . .

ROSALIND. When the war's over, things won't be so bonkers . . .

CHARLIE. How can we possibly change back? The war's been the best thing that ever happened to us . . . Don't change . . . please don't change . . . *(They kiss.)*

They pull apart as they hear the others arriving. There is a crash from beyond the cloakroom.

IVY *(offstage)*. Ooops . . . Sorroy!

They are whispering drunkenly, lots of shushing, as they enter.

I hope Joe and Mister Pelmet were allowed back in the guesthouse . . . they was ever so . . . merry . . . ooh I'm so weary, I've come over all unnecessary . . .