

SMOKE

a play by Juan Carlos Rubio

translated from the original Spanish by Roger Pettitt
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General Society of Spanish Authors Prize 2005

Characters

(in order of appearance)

Jack

Michael

Yolma

Susan

FIRST THERAPY

Scene One

THE THEATRE

We are in a theatre where our story begins.

VOICE OFF: Ladies and gentlemen, may we remind you that the recording of this event by the use of cameras or any other audiovisual equipment is prohibited by law. Please disconnect your mobile phones and watch alarms. We bring you Mr Jack Rolling.

(NB: In all this scene, in which the therapy takes place, a lot of audiovisuals are displayed to reinforce the message of Mr Jack Rolling.)

We hear bursts of music which keep repeating from time to time, as a kind of theme of the therapy. Jack Rolling comes on stage. He is wearing a very elegant suit. He is a born salesman; one who is very sure of the quality of what he is selling. He reminds us at times, in his speech, of a politician in the final rally of his campaign. Or of a television preacher.

JACK: Good evening ... My name, as you all know, is Jack Rolling ... And you also know the reason for my visit to this beautiful city of London ... I'm not here to entertain you ... This is not a play ... This is a therapy ... You have come to explore the grubbiest corners of your soul ... Are you likely to be sick? Think about it, there's still time ... If any of you here don't feel prepared for this experience, you may leave ... (to a member of the audience) Don't laugh madam ... I'm serious ... Are you really likely to be sick and tell the truth? (pause) Well, we have a brave audience ... The main thing is this: to call things by their proper name ... That's the best way of confronting a problem ... You are all drug addicts ... You are hooked on a terrible vice ... We aren't talking of an occasional interest, no ... We're talking about a genuinely harmful dependency ... Well, let's carry on, let's face it ... I want to hear it ...What do we call that terrible monster that torments your lives? (pause) Please, don't behave like blushing virgins ... What do we call that monster that torments your lives?

Only one woman, sitting in one of the rows, dares to raise her hand and answer.

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: Tobacco ...

JACK: Sorry, I couldn't hear you ... Can you repeat it?

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE: It's tobacco!

JACK: Exactly: Tobacco. Thank you, thank you very much ... Tobacco. That's our private monster ... And I'll say it again: "Hello, my name is Jack Rolling and I'm an ex smoker"...

A series of figures, graphics and photographs start to be projected ... Each time a little faster as Jack's speech develops.

JACK: Sixty cigarettes a day... I smoked sixty cigarettes a day ...I started when I was sixteen and smoked for the next thirty four years ... If we add that up we get the revealing figure of six hundred and forty four thousand, six hundred cigarettes... Without counting leap years... Seven hundred and forty four thousand and six hundred cigarettes! If we start with the fact that a cigarette measures a little over three inches, we would get a single cigarette of two million, three hundred and forty five thousand, one hundred and ninety six... More than thirty six miles long! You all know Big Ben. Well that's six hundred times higher than Big Ben. Can you imagine that? And how much time was spent in smoking those? With an average of five minutes per cigarette we get ... Three million, seventy two thousand, three hundred minutes ... Or, the same thing ... Sixty two thousand, five hundred hours ... That is two thousand, five hundred and eighty five days ... Seven years, ladies and gentlemen ... I spent seven years non-stop smoking a cigarette thirty six miles long ... There are industries that have contributed less than me to the greenhouse effect ...

From a corner of the theatre a camera flash goes off.

JACK: No, no photos, please ... It's totally forbidden ... There's enough material in the foyer ... Would you please hand your camera to an attendant? ... Thank you.

Someone from the theatre makes the person who took the photo go out into the foyer (a young man of twenty plus with a black bag over his shoulder)

JACK: Where were we? The numbers, yes! The facts and figures speak for themselves ...

The projections begin again.

JACK: The twenty first of July, nineteen ninety six ... The day I put out my last cigarette ... It was hot, very hot, some big black clouds covered the sky with a worrying, threatening look, like one of those typical autumn days in Manchester ... There we were ... I should explain that I use the

plural because my wife was with me, because in those days I was a married man, now no ... But, well, if you like that's a story I'll tell you some other time – in another therapy!... We were, to repeat, my wife and I, in a car on the way to a friend's house where we were going to dine, when I suddenly stopped on the side of the road and I said to my ex wife: “Susan, take a good look at this cigarette ... look at it hard because it has been the last.” Susan began to laugh, tilting her head back a little, in a gesture a mixture of flirtation and a little malice, and asked me if I could keep driving. “We're going to be late, Jack ... And those clouds look pretty bad ... I don't want you driving in the rain.” I insisted: “That was the last cigarette of my life ... I'm never going to smoke again!” And I threw the thing decisively through the window. She, needless to say, didn't believe a single word. How many times had I said that before? Orson Welles used to say: “Giving up smoking is easy. I've done it hundreds of times.” In that way, Orson and I were very similar ... But not that time ... That time I knew it was definitive ... What was so special about that steamy hot evening in July nineteen ninety six? (pause) Do you want to know? Do you want to know?

We hear again bursts of music, a little bit exaggerated.

JACK: ... At eight fifteen in the evening of that twenty first of July of nineteen ninety six, after having smoked seven hundred and forty four thousand cigarettes and having taken up seven years of my life doing so, I realised that there was no reason to continue smoking, that the only thing that tied me to tobacco was my own fear of being free ...

The word 'Freedom' is projected on the screen. And behind it the Union Jack flag. Then we see a series of images connected with tobacco and its seductive powers.

JACK: Freedom ... An interesting concept ... “The quality, especially of the will of the individual, of not being totally constrained, able to choose between alternative actions in identical circumstances”. As a lawyer, my profession for twenty years, I managed to prove the innocence of many men, I managed to win the battle against the lie and get the truth to shine out with all its power ... But, until that day, I hadn't realised that I was doing a poor job defending my own life ... Was I free? Yes, but I didn't recognise it. Until that moment! There it was. It's finished ... Finally I could see clearly the commercial manipulation, the false hopes that entering the smokers club your life reached a new level, a new status ... Right in front of my eyes! (pause) Anton Chekov, the noted Russian playwright , wrote at the end of the nineteenth century, a monologue entitled "On the harmful effects of tobacco" ... In it, a man named Niujin was forced to give a lecture to satisfy the social anxieties of his wife ... In

spite of his love of smoking, he felt obliged to convince the audience of the disadvantages of the addiction ...Although, deep down, what he wanted to tell the whole world was how unhappy he was in his marriage ...I am also here in front of you, like that poor man ... But with a big difference ... Firstly I am not here because I've been pushed by someone ... And secondly, I don't want to convince anyone of anything ... It's you who have to convince me of another question: "On the beneficial effects of tobacco" ... And since we cannot rely on the talent that Chekov had, I shall need a member of the audience.

The headline: ON THE BENEFICIAL EFFECTS OF TOBACCO appears on the screen in large illuminated letters. Jack goes towards the little steps leading down into the auditorium.

JACK: Come on now, I'm not going to eat anyone ... For now ... (indicating someone) The lady who kindly helped me before with an answer ... Would you be willing to come on stage? I would be very glad of your help.

The lady, after hesitating a little, gets up.

JACK: Thank you. A round of applause for this beautiful woman!

The woman goes up on to the stage. Jack helps her. A stage hand brings on a chair.

JACK: What's your name?

WOMAN: Yolma.

JACK: Yolma, welcome ... Have a seat please.

Yolma sits down.

JACK: Yolma ... Are you from London?

YOLMA: No, I'm from Poland.

JACK: Then you are from here ... Well, Yolma, do you smoke?

YOLMA: Yes. I've already smoked Big Ben several times over.

JACK: And I imagine you've come to my therapy to give it up.

YOLMA: I've tried more than once and ...

JACK: Yes, yes, like Orson, like me, I know the rest ... Well, Yolma, go ahead, smoke.

YOLMA: Smoke? How do you mean, smoke?

JACK: Yes. If you want, just open your bag, take out your cigarettes and smoke one. Go ahead.

Yolma opens her bag tentatively and takes out a packet of cigarettes.

JACK: (to the public) If you'd all realised that this was the reason I needed a volunteer, I'm sure I would have had more candidates.

Jack takes a lighter from his pocket and gives Yolma a light.

JACK: I always carry a lighter in my pocket in case a beautiful woman needs a light ... Ex smoker yes, stupid no.

YOLMA: Thank you.

JACK: And now, while you smoke that cigarette ... Tell me, Yolma ... Could you tell me the beneficial effects of smoking? I can tell you the harmful effects: cancer, arterial problems, cholesterol, bad breath, horrible smell, negative social acceptance, money wasted, etcetera ... But I can't find a single benefit of being a smoker ... I'm sure you can help me.

YOLMA: I smoke because ... Because I like it.

JACK: In spite of how much it cost to start, the feeling of disgust that each drag of those first cigarettes smoked in secret, the wretching, the coughs, the foul smell, you managed to overcome it, you felt accepted by the club of adults and now ... Now you like it ... But you want to give up.

YOLMA: Yes.

JACK: Why do you want to give up something that you like?

YOLMA: You've said it. It's not good for your health.

JACK: So the equation would be: "I like doing something that is not good for my health" ... Have you any children?

YOLMA: One. Marek.

JACK: Marek smokes?

YOLMA: No,no. He's six ...He wants to be a pilot.

JACK: Would you like it if Marek smoked in the future?

YOLMA: No ... Please God no.

JACK: So, you like to do something that you would not want your son to do for anything in the world, something that is bad for your health and you're willing to take away from you life, but ... You don't feel able ... Instead, Do you feel able to continue smoking?

YOLMA: Yes. It's easier to continue.

JACK: Why is it easier to continue than to not continue?

YOLMA: Well ... it's the nicotine dependency.

JACK: False! It's been proved that nicotine dependency is minimal. A few days and it's gone. So, what we are talking about is psychological dependency.

YOLMA: Yes, it could be ... I ... I don't have the strength of will.

Jack approaches Yolma. He begins to wrap her in a spiral of energy and persuasion. Finally the great salesman that he has inside him comes out.

JACK: Of course you have it! If you don't, how do you explain that you carry on smoking in spite of all the inconveniences you see, of destroying your health and giving a bad example to your son? You have to be strong willed NOT to stop smoking! Stopping is easy ... Who wouldn't want to give up something so harmful, disagreeable and unnatural? Anyone can do it! But to carry on? Carrying on is complicated! Don't you realise? The world wants to convince you that you won't be able to ... But in reality it's so simple to give a last drag on that cigarette you're smoking and never light another one ever ... You choose. And if you choose to be brave you will be free ... Free in the way you were before you smoked the first cigarette in your life ... Don't you remember, Yolma? Let's make history... Let's return to that moment, to that first drag you took ... Were you with friends?

YOLMA: They all smoked...

JACK: And you wanted to be accepted by them.

YOLMA: I didn't want them to make fun of me.

JACK: You thought that smoking would make you accepted.

YOLMA: Smoking made me feel accepted ... it made me feel grown up.

JACK: And now? What is the excuse for carrying on depending on a drug that makes you feel unhappy when you are not taking it and is killing you slowly when you are taking it? If you were that young girl again, but with the knowledge that you have now... If you had a second chance ... Would you make the same mistake again? Close your eyes Yolma!

Yolma closes her eyes, a little scared by Jack's vehemence.

JACK: And listen to the voice inside you ... Now you have that second chance ... Is that your last cigarette? Are you going to say goodbye forever to that monster that you have created yourself? Are you ready to open your eyes? Are you ready to live?

Sudden darkness. We hear the background music.

VOICE OFF: In the Foyer you will find books, DVDs and videos of “The hardest thing is to keep on smoking”. Thank you for coming. We wish you a happy life without tobacco.

Scene Two

The Dressing Room

Jack seems tired, with an attitude and gestures much less calculated, more real. He has left the salesman behind. He speaks on his cell phone.

JACK: ... Yes, I'm OK ... Tired, as you know, so many towns in such a short time that ... (...) In London ... I arrived this morning ... (...) Yes, she lives here ... Has done for two years ... (...) No, I have no idea ... See each other? Don't talk rubbish, Paul! No, we haven't spoken since the divorce (...) No, it doesn't make me angry. You know I love getting into the drama, that's all ... (...) Oh, that would be good ... We'll speak then as soon as I get back from the European tour ... That's a growing market, those damned Europeans smoke amazingly.

YOLMA: (off stage) Mr Rolling?

JACK: Just a moment please! (to the mobile phone) Don't forget to say hello to Sarah and the children ... Bye Paul. See you in New York.

Jack hangs up.

JACK: Who is it?

YOLMA: (still off stage) Yolma ... Remember? Earlier, on the stage ... The one who just gave up smoking forever a moment ago.

JACK: Oh yes, yes, of course ... One second.

Jack puts on his jacket and his character of the Jack Rolling that we saw on stage, with more energy. Yolma comes in. She seems nervous of being alone with him. She treats him with total adoration.

JACK: Come in.

YOLMA: Mr Rolling, I'm sorry to bother you ...

JACK: It's no bother, Yolma please. How can I help you?

YOLMA: I ...I want to thank you for what you've done for me.

JACK: There's nothing to thank me for ... And, in any case, it's you who's done something for yourself, not me.

YOLMA: Don't be modest! Your book is marvellous, I've read it so many times.

JACK: So many times?

YOLMA: No, don't misunderstand me. Your book is perfect. Any normal person would stop smoking right away after just reading it once ... But in my case it was different ... I desperately didn't want to give it up ... I'm separated. And with a son ...

JACK: Ah ...little Marek. A future pilot.

YOLMA: Yes, Marek ...

Yolma takes out a photo from her bag and shows it to him.

JACK: Very handsome. He's got your eyes.

YOLMA: No. Actually he's the spitting image of his father.

JACK: (*pointing to the photo*) The man with no head?

YOLMA: Yes, the man with no head ... He was a real bastard! Oh, I'm sorry, I'm sorry ... What will you think of me?

JACK: Don't worry. I'm divorced too. And amongst us divorced people we know that a photo without a head is an essential step towards sanity.

Jack returns the photo. There is an uncomfortable pause.

JACK: Would you like to sit down?

YOLMA: No, no, I'm going now ... I just wanted to tell you that ... That today you've made me see it so clearly, so naturally ... When you asked me during the show ...

JACK: (*correcting her*) Therapy.

YOLMA: I mean during the therapy ... When you asked me if that was my last cigarette, I ... I saw your eyes looking at me with such power that I felt as if I could fly ... Up there, like a bird ... A beautiful white bird ... Free ... Remembering so many things from when I was a child and ... (*getting emotional*) I'm not going to cry, no ... Although, if I do, it will be because I'm so happy ... Never again, you know? I'm never going to smoke again ...

JACK: You don't know how happy it makes me to hear you say a last goodbye to smoking.

YOLMA: I won't keep you any longer. Thank you, from the bottom of my heart. Thank you for showing me the truth. You're an example for me, for my son ... You're an example for all mankind!

Yolma goes. Jack remains still and silent for a moment, thinking. Then he goes to the dressing room door.

JACK: Please! I don't want to see anybody until after the next show! Actually, I don't want to see anyone, not even after the next show... Anyone means anyone, OK?

Jack goes to the table where he has his black briefcase.

JACK: "You're an example Mister Rolling ... For me, for my son, for all mankind..."

He opens the briefcase and takes out a cigarette case and a cigarette from inside it. He looks at it in silence for a moment. Then he lights it, inhaling the smoke with a deep, intense pleasure.

JACK: *(looking up to heaven)* Don't look at me like that, Orson . Please. Not you, not you...

Darkness.

SECOND THERAPY

The editorial office

We are in the office of a small local magazine. Susan, a fifty something woman, attractive and with some character, is speaking on her cell phone.

SUSAN: ... No, I'm not going to go ... No ... A livestock market in Kent, no ... Send Jennifer, she loves rural stories, but me ... (...) I am listening to you, of course I'm listening to you! That's why I'm telling you that ... (...) I don't care if you are my boss, Alan, please, I never ask you for anything ... (...) Well, yes, yes I did, but that was ages ago ... and I returned it, didn't I? What I'm trying to say is that ... (...) Damn it! Not a livestock fair! I'm too old to go stepping through sheep shit ... Actually I'm too old to go stepping through sheep shit or any other animals shit ... (...) No, no ... If I was the best reporter on this magazine I would be at home now, stretched out on my sofa and not working overtime like an intern in this deserted office .. (...) No ... (...) No ... (...) What part of the word 'No' don't you understand?

The young man who was thrown out of the theatre during the Rolling Therapy for taking a photo enters with his bag on his shoulder.

MICHAEL: I've got his photo! I've got it!

SUSAN: (*still talking on her phone*) Two days off?

MICHAEL: They threw me out of the theatre and forced me to erase the photos of the camera (*shows his camera*), but ...

SUSAN: ... I know you're kidding me, Alan, I know...

MICHAEL: ... but I am a resourceful man (*shows a small camera*)

SUSAN: ... You always use that preacher voice when you're lying ...

MICHAEL: ... So, Bingo!

SUSAN: But it's OK, it's OK, you win ... Not because you've convinced me but because you exhaust me ... I'll step through all the sheep shit I have to ... Satisfied?

Michael has sat in front of his laptop and is downloading the photo from his small camera. Meanwhile, Susan makes a note in her diary.

SUSAN: Stand number seven at the fair ... When should I be there? (...) Oh, my god ... Even the poor animals won't be awake at that time ... Don't you have any respect for their rest? (...) OK, OK ... And about those days

off ... (...) Alan? Alan, don't start that old excuse about the lack of reception ... Alan! (She hangs up) (*To Michael:*) Can you remind me why I work as a journalist?

MICHAEL: So that some day they might give you the Pulitzer?

SUSAN: Oh, that's true, thank you ... What were you saying about a photo?

MICHAEL: What do you think?

Michael shows the computer screen. We see a photo of Jack Rolling.

SUSAN: Ah ... Well.

MICHAEL: 'Well'? Only 'Well'? It's Jack Rolling!

SUSAN: Yes, OK, I see. Now I see ... Mr Jack Rolling ... The Marlboro cowboy's worst nightmare.

Susan returns to her table with complete indifference. She looks for something in her handbag.

SUSAN: ... So he's come here to lead those who've been led astray to that wonderful land without tar or nicotine.

Susan takes out a packet of cigarettes. Meanwhile Michael waits for the printer to produce a copy of the photo of Jack.

MICHAEL: Taking photos is forbidden ... Can you believe it?

SUSAN: Because of his hair.

MICHAEL: His hair?

SUSAN: Yes. His hair. He doesn't want us to see certain areas, shall we say less well covered parts ... that's why he chooses his own photos ...

Michael picks up the photo that has come out of the printer.

MICHAEL: OK, that's true! He's going bald! But how do you know? ... About his hair I mean ... Do you know him?

SUSAN: Yes, but we haven't seen each other for a long time ...

MICHAEL: I didn't know you were a friend of Jack Rolling.

SUSAN: I've never been a friend of Jack Rolling. I only said I know him ... Can we change the subject?

Susan finally lights her cigarette.

MICHAEL: Obviously his therapy wasn't very successful with you ...

SUSAN: Michael ...Stop.

MICHAEL: OK, OK ...Let's drop it. Mysterious woman ... Nobody knows anything about you, where you come from, where you're going.

SUSAN: That's because I don't come or go ... I float.

MICHAEL: Well, stop floating and come and have dinner with me to celebrate my exclusive ...

Susan tilts her head back a little, in a gesture a mixture of flirtation and a little malice.

SUSAN: I'd love to, but ...

MICHAEL: Why don't you leave out the 'buts' from your vocabulary?

SUSAN: I'd love to, "but" I've got to compile a lot of information. I'll finish late ...

MICHAEL: That's OK ... We'll eat here. I'll treat you. And I'll help you with the paperwork ... 'Two for the price of one'. It's a special offer.

SUSAN: Michael, please don't pressure me.

MICHAEL: Why don't you want to be with me? Give me a good reason.

SUSAN: How about because I could be your mother?

MICHAEL: Don't go on about that ... It doesn't bother me.

SUSAN: But it does me ... and it certainly would your mother too.

MICHAEL: You aren't my mother! If you knew her you would notice the huge difference.

SUSAN: If you saw me first thing in the morning I'm sure that difference would not be so huge.

MICHAEL: First thing in the morning?

Michael embraces her affectionately, trying not to bother her.

MICHAEL: What side of the bed do you sleep on?

SUSAN: Michael, I don't want to be accused of being a paedophile ... (*because of her cigarette*) I'm going to set you on fire if I'm not careful ...

MICHAEL: I'd prefer it if you did it on purpose.

SUSAN: Let me go!

Susan lifts her arms up to try to get loose. Michael finally lets her go.

MICHAEL: Put that cigarette down or we'll have a problem with the smoke alarm.

SUSAN: I love the sound of that alarm ... Can you keep a secret? The last time it went off it wasn't accidental ...

MICHAEL: What?

SUSAN: I wasn't having a good day ... I was here on my own ... And then I remembered that sound, so ... So real, able to blot out any strange thoughts you might have in your head ... It's like an anaesthetic ... (*Pause*) I shouldn't have said anything, you're going to think I'm mad.

MICHAEL: I love crazy things ... Come eat with me, please.

SUSAN: As friends?

MICHAEL: As friends ... Listen ... Have you never had sex with a friend? Ok, I swear, we'll dine together as friends ... in the traditional sense.

SUSAN: Well, all right ... Is it too much to ask for no hamburgers nor anything that sounds Chinese?

MICHAEL: Any suggestion?

SUSAN: A pasta dish would be good ...

MICHAEL: Perfect ... The best Italian in town is just round the corner.

Michael picks up his jacket.

MICHAEL: And... by the way... red or white wine?

SUSAN: No wine.

MICHAEL: I'll bring a bottle in case I manage to convince you that you're not at all like my mother...

SUSAN: Switch that light off ...

Michael switches off the office light.

MICHAEL: I'll be back in five minutes ...

SUSAN: Don't worry, I'll count sheep while I'm waiting ... I hope I won't fall sleep.

Michael exits. Susan remains, in thought. After a moment she goes to the photo of Jack Rolling. She looks at it for a moment, perhaps for too long a moment ... And she puts it back on the table. Then she goes to a radio and switches it on. She scans the wavelengths and finally stops on something that interests her. She turns it up. We hear the voice of the reporter.

RADIO: Jack Rolling has demonstrated once again his tremendous communications skills, thrilling a devoted audience with his therapy. "The hardest thing is to keep smoking" ... This evening, in two sessions, he has managed to get hundreds of people to give up once and for all that dangerous habit that ...

Susan takes another cigarette. She lights it as if to contradict what she is hearing.

RADIO: ... so bothers so many of us. But let's leave it to that very person to tell us how he has been received by our city ... Good evening Mr Rolling.

JACK: (*from the radio*) Good evening. Actually London is my second home ...

SUSAN: For God sake...

JACK: (*from the radio*) And I'm happy to return here once again to ...

Susan says in unison what Jack is saying from the radio.

SUSAN and JACK (*from the radio*) : ... to enjoy the friendship and sympathy of the good people who completely open up their hearts ...

At that moment Jack enters. As Susan has her back to him she does not see him.

SUSAN and JACK (*from the radio*): ... If I had to look for a new home there's no doubt: I'd come to live ...

JACK (*from the radio*) and **JACK** (*in person*): ... in this beautiful city

Susan turns round. She is speechless on seeing her ex.

JACK: Go ahead. Carry on ... after all it was you who wrote all that.

SUSAN: But, what the hell ...?

Susan turns off the radio.

JACK: Is that a “Hello, how are you, Jack”?

SUSAN: No. It's a “May I know what you're here for?”

JACK: To say hello to you.

SUSAN: To say hello to me? We haven't seen each other for four years and now you turn up here, without warning, to “say hello to me”?

JACK: Yes, I'm here, without warning, wanting to say: 'Hello' ... Obviously it would be wonderful to receive a reply ... Come on, it's not so difficult, I'm sure you can manage it ... A journalist can always find the appropriate word ... although it may not be the true word.

SUSAN: “Hello Jack” ...

JACK: Another little push and ...

SUSAN: (*theatrical*) “Delighted to see you ... How are you?”

JACK: This is more than I deserve ... Well, thank you ... And you?

SUSAN: I'm sorry, I ran out of my lines.

JACK: May I come in?

Susan switches on the light.

SUSAN: You're already in.

JACK: (*Looking round*) Hey, very nice place you've got.

SUSAN: Editorial office ... You should give it the right name when you've just broken in to it

Jack walks round the office. He picks up a copy of the publication.

JACK: So ... 'London Weekly' ... Impressive.

SUSAN: Who gave you my address?

JACK: What does it matter? I got it.

SUSAN: Sorry, sorry, I was forgetting that I was in front of the powerful Mister Rolling.

JACK: Jack to my friends, just Jack ... Are you still Susan or has the gentle climate of this part of the world blessed you with another name?

SUSAN: I'm still Susan. Recovering my maiden name was sufficient blessing, thank you.

JACK: Mahoney ... Miss Susan Mahoney ... Is that how you sign your articles?

SUSAN: No, actually I sign them as Dorothy Parker.

JACK: The good thing about being in London is that almost no-one would realise that was a pen name.

SUSAN: Considering you swear that you love this city, you don't show much regard for the cultural level of its citizens.

Jack keeps walking round.

JACK: I do, of course I do ... I love every one of the cities where I do my therapy ... Especially when they're successful.

SUSAN: Do you want to stop pacing round like a second rate private eye?

Jack stops.

SUSAN: Well ... What have you come for?

JACK: It's a long ...

SUSAN: Well, make it short ... I suggest like a headline, considering where we are.

JACK: You see, today, after the therapy, I sat for a while on my own in the dressing room. I get pretty exhausted, you know? I prefer not to see anyone. I prefer to think ... And I realised how distant we are, you and I.

SUSAN: We're not distant. We're divorced ...

JACK: But does that mean we can't speak to each other? It's absurd, we're adults, we share a son ... That fair haired boy with curly hair ... Er ... Steven, isn't he called?

SUSAN: It's not my fault that your son doesn't communicate with you. If you've come to get me to intercede on your behalf ...

JACK: I'm not here for you to intercede in anything. Steven and I have a close and wonderful father and son relationship ... I send him a generous cheque every month and he cashes it ... Full stop, end of story ... But we were talking about my visit ... I wanted to greet you ... "Hello."

SUSAN: How many more times are you going to say "Hello"?

JACK: Until you ask me to sit down.

SUSAN: In that case I'm afraid you're going to end up with an entry in the Guinness Book of Records.

Susan approaches her desk and looks for some papers, or at least, she makes as if she is looking for some.

JACK: Come on ... don't be so rude.

SUSAN: You're right. If I was really rude I wouldn't have let you come in.

JACK: Why don't we argue about all this over dinner?

SUSAN: (*ironically*) Oh, yes, of course, wait while I reserve a table at The Ledbury ...

JACK: I'd prefer the Savoy Grill ...

SUSAN: Jack, look, I don't know why you've come, but I don't care ... Just go ...It's not a good idea you being here.

Jack notices the photo of him on the desk.

JACK: But, what the hell is this?

SUSAN: It looks quite like you ... Yes, yes, it is you ...

JACK: Who took this photo?

SUSAN: Leave it where it was.

Susan tries to take the photo from him, but Jack stops her.

JACK: This is a crime, punishable by law.

SUSAN: Don't get into drama ... Michael took this photo without any evil intent.

JACK: Michael? Who is Michael?

SUSAN: A trainee on the magazine.

JACK: And you were thinking of allowing it to be published. Look at my hair!

SUSAN: (*trying not to laugh*) What is happening to your hair?

JACK: This isn't the time for sarcasm.

SUSAN: I have nothing to do with ... I didn't order this. I'm only an assistant reporter ... a junior reporter.

Jack folds up the photo, puts it in his jacket pocket and picks up the telephone.

JACK: Very well,let's call the police. Let them decide whose fault it is ... Give me his full name. Michael, what else ...?

SUSAN: I know you're not going to create a stink about this little affair ...

Jack dials a number.

JACK: Police? Good evening ... I'm Jack Ro ...

Susan interrupts the call.

JACK: Susan, this is very serious. Either you give me the name of this photographer... (*smiling*) or you'll promise to have dinner with me and we'll forget this annoying affair.

SUSAN: Are you blackmailing me?

JACK: That's an ugly word ... 'Blackmail' ... Call it 'barter' ... 'Today for you, tomorrow for me'...

SUSAN: I prefer to call things by their proper name ...

JACK: In that case, yes; it is blackmail ... do you promise?

SUSAN: You're just the same as usual, Jack. The same.

JACK: And you too, Susan, the same ... the same ... Promise?

SUSAN: Yes ...

JACK: Where would you like me to take you to dinner?

SUSAN: I've got work to do, Jack, seriously ...

Susan returns to her desk and sits down.

JACK: That's fine, we'll call somewhere and they can bring us something to go.

Michael enters, carrying two bags. He is humming a popular Italian song. He approaches Susan.

MICHAEL: Italian food for the signorina!

JACK: The famous Michael?

Michael sees Jack and stops in his tracks.

SUSAN: Michael, Jack ... Jack, Michael ...

Jack takes the photo out of his jacket pocket and shows it to Michael.

JACK: Shall I sign it for you?

Michael takes it.

JACK: “Affectionately yours, Jack” will be OK?

MICHAEL: Ah... well... you see... the thing is ...

JACK: I'm listening son, I'm listening.

MICHAEL: I ... Well... that photo isn't ... No ... I ... (*he shuts up*)

JACK: I hope that your photographic skills are greater than your speaking skills.

SUSAN: Jack is willing to forget this whole affair if you destroy the photograph.

MICHAEL: Right away.

Michael tears the photo into little pieces.

MICHAEL: It's finished ...

JACK: (*by the computer*) Are you sure?

Michael wipes the photo from the memory of his camera.

MICHAEL: And wiped from the camera's memory ... gone ... OK?

SUSAN: (*to Jack*) OK?

JACK: OK, but that doesn't wipe out your promise.

SUSAN: I've already told you I can't go out.

JACK: And I said that we can phone for a take - away ...

Jack inspects the bags of food that Michael has brought in.

JACK: Of course I never thought that they were so quick in London ... (*to Michael*) We can manage, thank you Michael.

Jack takes out the wine and inspects it.

JACK: It's not bad, son. Not bad. A good year. For a trainee you've really gone to town ... How much did you pay?

Jack takes out some glasses from the bag.

JACK: And proper wine glasses ... What kind of dinner were you going to celebrate here?

MICHAEL: Do you want to stop poking around in my things?

Michael stops Jack. The two confront each other.

JACK: Do you want me to poke around somewhere more intimate? How about in your nostrils?

SUSAN: Jack, would you excuse us for a moment?

JACK: Why not ... where could I excuse you most conveniently?

SUSAN: There, in my boss' office.

Jack goes towards the exit.

JACK: Goodbye Michael ... A pleasure meeting you ... And if some time you'd like a photo ... Ask me. I'd be delighted to pose for you ... including in the nude.

Jack exits into one of the offices. Michael approaches Susan.

MICHAEL: What's that guy doing here?! Did he come for the photo?

SUSAN: He found the photo on top of the desk when he arrived ... He came to see me ... (*on seeing the strange expression on Michael's face*) I told you I kind of knew him ... He's ... (pause) my ex-husband.

MICHAEL: Jack Rolling is your ex-husband?!

SUSAN: Please don't shout.

MICHAEL: He's your ex-husband?

SUSAN: Yes, he's my ex-husband. We were married for a while.

MICHAEL: A while?

SUSAN: Twenty years.

MICHAEL: Twenty years?!

SUSAN: Will you stop repeating everything I say?

MICHAEL: And why has he come here tonight?

SUSAN: I don't know ... Something must have happened to him ... But Jack isn't straightforward. It's impossible to guess what he's up to ... He always wriggles about like a python before he swallows his victim whole.

MICHAEL: Tell him to go.

SUSAN: Too late. He's not going to go until he gets what he wants.

MICHAEL: And are you going to give it him?

SUSAN: Oh, take it easy, boy!

Susan goes back to the desk.

MICHAEL: I'm sorry. I know it's not my business, but ... I don't like him for you.

SUSAN: I don't like him for myself either ... But I've given him my word that I'll have dinner with him ... (*looking at the bags of food*) Do you mind if ... ?

MICHAEL: Do I mind?

Michael disconnects the digital camera from the computer.

MICHAEL: No, that's great! I can't think of a better way of spending this evening ... lose a good photo and lose ... It's fine.

SUSAN: We'll have dinner together at the weekend. My treat.

MICHAEL: Don't feel obliged, "mother" ...

SUSAN: I don't feel obliged ... (*referring to the bags of food*) How much was all this?

MICHAEL: Hey, Susan please ... It's the least I can do, you've freed me from prison ... Oh ... And from Mr Python.

Michael heads for the door. Susan picks up a cigarette pack ready to smoke one.

MICHAEL: I'm not surprised you're still smoking ...

Susan puts the packet down. She takes out a rose from one of the food bags.

SUSAN: Thank you.

MICHAEL: They gave it me when I bought the wine.

SUSAN: Thank you anyway.

MICHAEL: Are you sure you'll be OK?

SUSAN: I'm sure.

Susan kisses him on the lips (more than anything to annoy her ex. She is sure he is spying on them) Michael exits. Susan looks at the rose. Jack enters)

JACK: When did you start being a cradle snatcher? OK, I'll shut up.

Jack takes the wine bottle, intending to open it.

JACK: He must be more or less the same age as our son, don't you think?

SUSAN: No, he's younger than Steven actually ... But an animal in bed. Do you want more details?

JACK: It's too intense a subject, let's leave it for the dessert ... Let's talk about the weather first. That always helps one to relax ...

SUSAN: The temperature in London is frankly horrendous. Only a calm sunny day manages to get me out of my house. Mostly it's the problem of having my hair loose.

JACK: It suits you better tied back ... And how's it going? You've been here

SUSAN: Two years. It's going well, very well. At least until a few minutes ago.

JACK: Susan, please, cut out sarcasm for a while. We're alone you and I ... Relax. The python snake is not going to eat you.

SUSAN: Oh, well, I'm pleased the python snake doesn't eat fifty year olds ... Although I see that it still maintains the wonderful custom of spying from behind doors.

JACK: In the jungle it's better to be informed ... And, speaking of information ... What's your magazine 'London Weekly' all about?

SUSAN: Social activities ... from the Kent livestock fair to the therapy of Mr Rolling, all has its place in our pages. Well, the “Rolling Therapy” as such, we don't touch on in this edition ...

Susan picks up the broken pieces of the photo of Jack.

SUSAN: We're short of graphic material, a pity ...

Susan throws the pieces into the waste bin.

JACK: Who knows, even tonight I may give you an exclusive ... Hmm ... Do you have something I can open this bottle with? A knife? A screwdriver?

SUSAN: How about a corkscrew?

Susan takes a corkscrew out of a drawer.

JACK: I see this isn't the first party to be celebrated here, Miss Mahoney.

SUSAN: Of course not, Mr Rolling.

Susan indicates the table on which Jack has gone to put plates.

SUSAN: Michael and I usually do it on this table ... But you're right, we'll wait for the dessert for the sweeter details.

JACK: I'm glad you've recovered your sense of humour.

SUSAN: Yes, it's one of the senses I've recovered in these last four years.

JACK: Give me a break ...

SUSAN: OK.

Susan, tired of watching Jack unable to open the bottle, takes it off him and opens it.

SUSAN: Lets return to the safety of political correctness ... How are you? How are your businesses doing?

JACK: I can't complain... "The hardest thing is to keep smoking" is still in the top ten of the book best sellers after seven years... Only that blessed Harry Potter has been up there with it... Of course with the help of a magic wand anyone can win the battle ... Do you know how much money just this operation brings in? Without counting the talks, videos, and so on ...

SUSAN: No, I don't know and I don't want to know ... I was never any good with numbers.

JACK: You should show more interest. Half of it is yours.

SUSAN: No, it's not mine ... Would you mind pouring me a glass of wine?

Susan leaves the bottle on the desk.

SUSAN: I need a glass to be able to keep myself together.

Jack pours the wine into two glasses.

JACK: Why do you persist in not wanting what belongs to you? Without your help I wouldn't have been able to do it.

SUSAN: You must be the only divorcee in the world determined that your ex-wife should see you broke. And, being a lawyer, that's doubly strange, don't you think?

JACK: I can assure you it would be very difficult to leave me broke.

SUSAN: I don't want anything from you. I didn't then and I don't now ... The settlement was clear. Mutual agreement, renouncing pension and inheritance.

JACK: Has your lawyer recovered from his heart attack?

SUSAN: Can we change the subject?

Jack starts laughing.

SUSAN: What's so funny?

JACK: You and me here ... together. Who would have thought this even a few hours ago?

SUSAN: Don't start fantasising ... This is nothing more than the result of a dirty blackmail.

Jack raises his glass.

JACK: Let's toast blackmail ... Love is nothing more than that, a blackmail.

Susan, a little bothered, puts her glass down, ready to eat.

JACK: That was just a brilliant phrase.

SUSAN: Can we eat for god's sake?

Jack searches in the bag which Michael brought and takes out the food.

JACK: Let's see what's on the menu ... Caprese salad ... And pasta with ... (*he smells*) something indefinable ... I see that little Michael knows your passion for Italian food.

While Susan gets out the cutlery and napkins, Jack goes to the light switch and turns the light off, leaving a more intimate atmosphere.

SUSAN: Could you tell me just what you're doing?

JACK: You weren't intending to eat under the light of the 'London Weekly'?

SUSAN: Well, this is the office of the 'London Weekly' ...

JACK: Look ... not now.

Jack switches on the radio, which is playing romantic music.

SUSAN: Jack, please ...

Susan switches it off. Jack switches it on again with a gesture of ' I beg you'. She ignores him.

JACK: Do you remember that restaurant in the Piazza Novana?

SUSAN: No ...

JACK: Oh, come on. You do remember ... Our first trip to Italy. '89.

SUSAN: No, I don't remember ... So what!

JACK: I just wanted to know if you remembered things from when we were happy.

SUSAN: We were happy? Why do you use the plural in such a casual way?

JACK: So you weren't happy then?

Susan does not reply.

JACK: Aren't you going to answer?

SUSAN: No, I'm not going to answer. I'm going to have dinner with you, as you managed to make me promise. But I didn't say anything about opening the memory chest ...

JACK: That restaurant was called "Angelo Rosso" ... I even know what you ate: Spaghetti alla Puttanesca".

SUSAN: Carbonara.

Jack smiles victoriously. Susan looks at him, a little angry.

SUSAN: Where is this leading us?

JACK: For dessert you had walnut ice cream.

SUSAN: Sorry. I'm not going to play your game.

JACK: It doesn't matter. You know it was Stracciatella...

SUSAN: But ... how can you remember?

JACK: I haven't got your good memory, but I keep all the bills, as you know ... There are some people who carry a diary. I carry my accounts.

SUSAN: How romantic ... They give me the creeps ... (*she drinks the whole glass in one go*) Could you give me some more wine?

Jack pours her more wine.

JACK: After dinner we walked for hours.

SUSAN: That was also included in the restaurant bill?

JACK: No. In the chemist bill where we had to stop to buy plasters for my feet.

SUSAN: Here's to you. You win.

They toast each other.

JACK: Salute.

SUSAN: Salute.

JACK: When we arrived at the Trevi fountain, we saw an American tourist, completely drunk, trying to imitate that Italian actress who got into the fountain in a film by Visconti ...

SUSAN: I suppose you mean that Swedish actress who got into the fountain in a film by Fellini... I notice you didn't ask for a bill for the show.

JACK: Thank goodness I have you to correct certain details ... You've always had a better memory than me.

SUSAN: Unfortunately ... But, tell me ... Where are all these bills the summer of '89 leading us?

JACK: To the point where you were laughing like a fool, throwing your head back, with your shoulders a little forward, while some carabinieri tried to get that woman out of the water ... And, yes, I'm sorry to contradict you ... You seemed happy. You were happy.

SUSAN: (*after a short pause*) I was happy ... Satisfied? One of those strange moments in which one thinks: "I am happy ..." But as soon as you think that it vanishes into thin air ...It's almost frightening how short a time it lasts ...

JACK: What happened Susan?

SUSAN: Please ... don't spoil this beautiful dinner.

JACK: Seriously, what happened?

SUSAN: You should know.

JACK: I only know that one morning you got up and said "Goodbye".

SUSAN: Well, ask yourself what happened between the Trevi fountain and the day when I said goodbye. Check your bills. You'll surely find some clues ...

Susan switches off the radio, gets up, puts the office light on, putting an end to the romantic atmosphere, and lights a cigarette.

SUSAN: I'm not going to eat any more ... I've still got a lot of work to do ... (*referring to the cigarette*) I hope a little smoke won't bother you.

JACK: I adore smoke ...

SUSAN: Careful, Mr Rolling. If someone were listening, your book would fall from the best seller lists, making bloody Harry Potter happy.

JACK: Do you think I'm concerned?

SUSAN: "Hello, it's me ... Remember?" I was there ... Your career has always been important to you. Too important.

JACK: Not now ... I stopped being a lawyer to do talks. I could also stop doing this. So what? Nothing is that important.

SUSAN: Are you in crisis? Come on, you are ... A little crack in that solid monolith ... Hallelujah! A shame that you've had this revelation so late, but ... No, seriously, I'm pleased for you ... Your expression looks almost human.

Susan has gone to Jack's side. He keeps sitting and she squeezes in alongside him.

JACK: Are you really pleased?

Jack strokes her hand.

SUSAN: Yes, I am pleased ...

Susan takes her hand away.

SUSAN: But not that much ...

Susan gets up and moves away from him.

SUSAN: And now I'm going to smoke this cigarette in five minutes ... That's the time you say it takes in your therapy sessions isn't it? And then you will go, Jack.

JACK: Five minutes? It's enough.

SUSAN: Enough for what?

JACK: To ask you for something.

SUSAN: Aha! At last we get to the nub of the matter ... You've come for a specific reason, of course. A mere "Hello" wasn't enough.

JACK: No. I want something else ...

SUSAN: Speak. I have a thousand sheep waiting to be interviewed.

JACK: I want us to do a therapy.

SUSAN: Excuse me?

JACK: Every year I go on stage dozens of times to do a therapy in front of people I don't know. I've realised that I need to do it with you.

SUSAN: Therapy? You made a mistake when you took the taxi, Jack. This is a magazine office, not a psychiatrists consulting room ...

JACK: Won't you help me?

SUSAN: Help you do what, for God's sake?

JACK: To close once and for all the door you left open when you left.

SUSAN: I did not leave any door open. If I remember correctly, and you know my memory is always right, I shut the door with a good bang.

JACK: Without giving me any explanation ... I didn't understand at all!

SUSAN: Correct answer. A prize for the gentleman ... That's why I went. You never understood anything.

JACK: At least I needed a full stop. You didn't give it me.

SUSAN: Now you're doing the victim bit? What's the matter with you? I don't recognise you, you're not yourself ... You look like you, but ... Stop fooling around!

JACK: I'm not fooling around ... It's very important for me.

SUSAN: Time's up, Jack. Off you go.

JACK: You haven't finished the cigarette ...

Susan goes to the ashtray and puts out the cigarette.

SUSAN: Yes, I have. Look, you're finally persuading me to give up smoking ...

JACK: Susan, please. I'm not asking so much ... It's an obsession that's burning inside me ... I want to forgive you. I want to forgive myself. And I need you for that.

Susan stops for a moment to think, touched by what she has heard.

SUSAN: OK ... I don't think this will kill me ... Come on, insult me, shout, stamp ... and then go away ... Go ahead. Do your therapy.

JACK: I have nothing to say. You haven't understood anything. It's you who has to do the therapy.

SUSAN: Me?

JACK: Yes. You. You owe me all those words you didn't say when you slammed that door ... I want the truth.

SUSAN: The truth? What the hell is the truth?! God! Can you send me a sign?!

At that moment a mobile phone rings.

JACK: Answer it ... Maybe they have your number in heaven.

SUSAN: Yes? (...) Oh, Hi Michael ... Fine, I'm fine ... (...) Yes, I'm still here ... (...) No you don't need to, thank you anyway ... (*looking at Jack and seeming to be deciding something*) Although ...

Susan picks up the rose that Michael gave her. Jack doesn't like this gesture.

SUSAN: On second thoughts it would be nice to have a drink ... Can we meet in ten minutes at the George? (...) No, don't come up ... Better meet there. Order me a mojito. See you. (*Hangs up. To Jack:*) Come on, let's do that therapy.

JACK: You like that boy?

SUSAN: Is this part of the therapy?

JACK: No, simple curiosity.

SUSAN: I'm sorry, I don't reply to any questions that have anything to do with the present ... Only archaeology is allowed ... Can we begin?

JACK: Leave it ... Perhaps it's not a good idea. You're in a hurry.

SUSAN: You're deceiving me, Jack ... you can manage to get a smoker whose been addicted for years to say goodbye to their addiction in ten minutes ... Isn't that enough to clear up a couple of doubts of your ex-wife?

JACK: No, it's not enough ... My patients pay to work with me ... They trust me ... You, on the other hand ... It's been a mistake. Goodbye, Susan. Thank Michael for the dinner.

Jack goes towards the door, but Susan stands in his way. She pushes him.

SUSAN: Do you think you can come here in the middle of the night, blackmail me, pressure me, make fun of me and now, just simply walk away? No, Mr Rolling, I'm not having that. I want to do that therapy!

JACK: OK. We'll do it ... But with one condition.

SUSAN: Oh, that's charming, with conditions ...

JACK: When we finish you accept something I'm going to give you ... No, it's not money, nor an object nor a property ... It's information ... You're a journalist aren't you?

SUSAN: Do what you like ... Well ... Let's go back to the day when I walked out of the house, let's go back to that moment since it seems so important to you ... It was January thirteenth, a Tuesday ... In some countries Tuesday the thirteenth is unlucky, strange isn't it? I felt glad to be English, so that date didn't mean anything to me... I got up very early, it wasn't quite dawn ... I was so scared... "You must do it, Susan, you must do it" ... From the kitchen window I could see snow falling on the roof tops ... On the radio the speaker was talking about the harshness of that winter and the death of several beggars in Regent's Park. I thought: "The real world waiting ..." I took a sip of coffee ... I looked out of the window again ... And if I was making a mistake? And if this move ...? "Don't think twice ..." An assertive woman's voice spoke to me: "Don't think ... Go out. It's your only chance ... Are you going to miss out on it?" But, what was it? ... The last day of Harrods sale. The radio, it was the radio... I smiled... With bitterness, mixing the taste of coffee and my fears ... I put my suitcase on the table ... Almost nothing, the bare essentials... What is essential when you leave behind half of your life? Five minutes after seven

... Too early ... Too early for what? You had arrived the night before from a round of meetings on the west coast. On Monday you were starting the recording of a new DVD with your therapy ... “The weekend is going to be for us”, You had promised me mechanically, while we were coming home from the airport ... I had agreed mechanically ... Mechanically had been the key word for a long time ... We made love mechanically when it was necessary ... We had dinner with friends mechanically ... We spoke mechanically about our son, about our dog, about the newly decorated lounge ... I had begun to assume that that was my life ... The strange thing about anything mechanic is that it doesn't depend on you, it simply happens... But what were you complaining about Mrs Rolling? Your husband is earning more money than you ever dreamed possible ... Your son doesn't need you any more ... “Bye Steven, take care of yourself, you know that there's a turkey waiting for you on Thanksgiving Day ...” And me? Where was I? Susan Mahoney ... What was left of that student of journalism who had dreamed of making an impression on the world, of loving a man until the day he died. Passion? Nothing ... There was nothing left on that cold Tuesday morning ... It was all a lie! A lie that could have lasted as long as it needed to ... I had tried, Jack, I had tried more than once. To get out of that deception, of that mortal routine, but ... was it worth it? I thought about leaving a note ... I thought about calling you later, from my sister's house ... I thought so much that I didn't realise that there you were, completely dishevelled, in the kitchen door, yawning loudly, calling out random sentences ... You went to the fridge, you took out a bottle of milk, you took a swig of it, you scratched your groin with that casualness that only men are capable of and you disappeared down the hall ... And I stood there frozen to the spot as if a blast of that polar air that lashed the city had managed to come through the window and attack my insides ... When I saw you appear, I thought for a moment that you would convince me that it was a madness, that I wasn't going to find anything better, that my place was there, next to you, that you were going to change, that our lie was a lie that all couples, all lovers endured ... I don't know... But no, instead you hadn't even noticed that I was dressed, with my suitcase on the kitchen table and my eyes red from crying ... You didn't realise, Jack ... Once again you didn't notice anything ... So I left my cup of coffee in the kitchen sink, picked up my suitcase and, before going out, I said one simple “Goodbye”. What else was there to say? Was anyone listening?

Jack, who has been listening, all emotional, recovered a cold and ironic expression. He applauds rhythmically.

JACK: Fantastic, seriously, fantastic ... Have you practised a lot or was it spontaneous?

SUSAN: What are you talking about?

JACK: About your adorable and moving monologue ... It's a long time since I enjoyed anything so much in the theatre ...

SUSAN: Oh, God. Have you been pulling my leg?

JACK: Let's put it like this, I went full speed ahead with regards to the feeling so that I could get to where I wanted.

SUSAN: How could you be so ...? You really are a bastard!

JACK: A bastard who wanted to hear you come out with all those lies ... You weren't waiting for me to say anything ... You were like a rat deserting a sinking ship ... Save yourself if you can!

SUSAN: You can't say that! I tried up until the last moment for us to ...

JACK: (*interrupting*) In Dan's arms?

Susan is quiet. She was not expecting that comment.

JACK: In Dan's arms, Susan?

Susan, nervous, takes a cigarette and lights it.

JACK: Another five minute interval ... Thank you. Your generosity moves me.

SUSAN: Dan has nothing to do with it ... I'd decided to leave you a long time before... Who the hell told you that?!

JACK: Have a seat, darling, have a seat and you enjoy the show that you're going to love ... Who told me? You won't believe it ... The very same Dan! ... Some weeks ago he bumped into me in the gents at a restaurant ... "Hello, Dan ... How's life treating you?". And he burst into tears, the great idiot started crying while he was drying his hands in one of those high pressure dryers ... And he told me everything ... The rise and fall of your secret romance ... It took a while, Susan, because Dan is one of those extraordinary men who dries his hands so thoroughly after washing them ... None of that waving them about on the way to the door or rubbing the discreetly on his trousers like anyone normal would... No... Dan dries his hands completely before returning to his table ... Meticulously, as if his life depended on it ... And, of course, while that hot air was ridding him of the last drop of water I was listening to a sporadic succession of regrets,

excuses and justifications ...He was feeling so guilty ... To start with I didn't understand him very well, believe me ... between the noise of the dryer and the amount of drink we had had, both Dan and I, my hearing skills weren't at their best, but, little by little my mind was clearing with the hot air and the flow of words ... And, finally, the truth about my wife running off: She was having an affair with Dan, the dentist, the wonderful man who dries his hands one hundred per cent every time he goes to the gents ... Wasn't there anyone more normal in the world, for the love of God, Susan? Wasn't there anyone more normal and that I didn't know?!

SUSAN: Jack, the truth is ...

JACK: “Jack, the truth is”?! Five days after solemnly banging the front door of our house you went with him to Brighton ... An international conference on caries ... Isn't that romantic?

SUSAN: He could see that I was sad and he wanted to ...

JACK: Cheer you up? If he's as meticulous in everything he does as he is at drying his hands, I guess he would have managed it.

SUSAN: Have you come here four years after all that to throw it in my face ...? What right have you got?

JACK: You cheated on me ... Miss Transparent ended up being a Russian doll who kept in her bosom more than one surprise, more than one lie ... One, two, three ... How many, Susan. How many?

SUSAN: Lots ...Do you want to know about them?

JACK: That would be wonderful.

SUSAN: All of them?

JACK: All ... I'm sure you will remember them amazingly. Your memory has always been exemplary ... Without the need for bills.

SUSAN: Well, let's begin with something basic, a bit topical, perhaps, but, what do you want? I'm human ... Sex ... You're not so good, Jack, you're not ... On more than one occasion I had to, you know, give a little push to your virility, a little lie to raise the level.

JACK: Ah, you have the advantage of me ... Men can't cheat in that way

SUSAN: Luckily ...It's so exhausting to pretend you've arrived at the finishing post when you've hardly heard the starting pistol ...

JACK: Poor thing, so much effort, such generosity!

SUSAN: Now you know ... you have to be so careful being sincere with your marital partner when the topic of debate is something below the waist.

JACK: You're not wearing a wedding ring now, Susan. Don't reproach yourself, I beg you.

SUSAN: In that case I'm happy to tell you that I didn't know what a real orgasm was until I was unfaithful for the first time.

JACK: The first time? Apart from Dan ...? Who else?

SUSAN: Uff ... I don't know, immediately ... What about Philip?

JACK: Philip ... What Philip?

SUSAN: "That" Philip, the one you're thinking it is ...

JACK: Were you capable of going to bed with my assistant?

SUSAN: To bed? Let me think ... Yes we did do it in a bed too.

JACK: When I see that bastard!

SUSAN: Give him a kiss from me. The truth is that with him I didn't have to pretend much ... he was a professional ... But that's enough talking about me, please! In spite of being a journalist I don't want to monopolise the headlines. It's your turn ... Aren't you going to delight me with a list of your lovers?

Jack turns his back on her and moves away without saying anything.

SUSAN: Oh, you don't remember? How strange, look at your bills ... You have them, don't you? In fact I've seen them ... Dinners for two in romantic restaurants, luxury suites for two in paradise hotels, telephone calls to numbers that always belonged to women ... I know. I always knew. That's a lie that us women soon get used to ... Let's say when you reach forty and you need to relieve your crisis in the arms of any young girl with firm breasts and empty brain ...

JACK: I agree! I had an adventure ... (*on seeing the sceptical look on her face*) I had many adventures, and? I never considered any of them more than a mere pastime, one way of feeling a passion which, very clearly, you never had.

SUSAN: Yes I did have it ... But not with you.

JACK: Well, clarified this issue... May we go on to the next one?

SUSAN: Of course: Charlie

JACK: Another lover?

SUSAN: No, please ... I mean "Charlie". Have you forgotten your adorable bulldog?

JACK: What?

SUSAN: It's not forgotten, Jack. No ... We went on a journey together from which he didn't return ...

JACK: Are you telling me that ...?

SUSAN: No, I didn't kill it, I'm not a dog murderer ... I could never bear it's dribbling, it's smell, it's disgusting hair all over the house ... You wanted a dog! What an ideal ... "Hello Charlie, give me your paw! Good boy ..." But then who was in charge of it day after day, feeding it, taking it to the vet, picking up it's poos on the street? Me ... Until I saw the light ... "Get in the car, Charlie, we're going to tell Daddy a little lie" ... He should still be living happily on that farm.

JACK: That's disgusting, Susan, it really is.

SUSAN: More or less than what you did with my mother?

JACK: Your mother?

SUSAN: Yes, my mother. I could throw a dog out of the house, but you threw her out ... With all her illness... She needed us so much ...

JACK: Your mother had the best doctors looking after her ...

SUSAN: That could be bought, yes? And what couldn't be bought? Can affection and tenderness be bought?

JACK: We couldn't live with a woman who couldn't remember what she had said five minutes before!

SUSAN: Well at last you've admitted it! "No, Susan, I can't put up with this". But no, instead of that you threw me that whole string of lies, of excuses: "It's better for her, she'll be better looked after in that Home ...". Who was the rat fleeing the sinking ship on that occasion? Who?!

JACK: You could have refused!

SUSAN: You're right ... We were together on that one ... It seemed better to me to climb onto the bandwagon of the farce and let her die alone. That's it, very well looked after.

JACK: Have you anything else to add?

SUSAN: Yes, I have, don't rush me ... Don't you want to do the therapy? Don't you want the truth? That boy with curly blond hair. Steven is he called?

JACK: I know that my son and I have never got on very well ...

SUSAN: Got on well? But, what planet are you living on? Have you ever thought about why he went to live in Sidney?

JACK: He wanted a change of environment.

SUSAN: In Australia? But who the devil goes to Australia for a change of environment?!

JACK: Oh, come on ... Now it's my fault he went to the arsehole of the world.

SUSAN: Yes, it was your fault, Jack ... Because your son never felt loved by you, because you've never known how to give him space, because you've only been capable of showing your affection with your cheque book ... Because he hates you, Jack, he hates you and you don't know how much he does!

Jack seems tired, sunk. He goes to a chair and sits down. Susan does the same.

SUSAN: You look tired, Jack ... I am too ... Yes ... Enough ... I don't want any more of this ... Life is a lie ... Perhaps that's what makes it bearable ... We all have secrets.

JACK: That's why I'm here ... I wanted to know yours ... And to offer you mine ... That's the advantage of not being married ... Finally, the cards on the table.

SUSAN: You can keep them ... there's nothing left to play now.

JACK: Perhaps there is. The moment has arrived for you to know something. Something that will make you happy.

SUSAN: Believe me, nothing you could say would make me happy.

JACK: I'm not going to say anything ... A gesture will be enough.

Jack grabs the packet of cigarettes of Susan, takes one out and lights it. He breathes the smoke with pleasure.

JACK: Here it is ... a fabulous exclusive for you ... the champion of the fight against smoking is no more than a charlatan, precious wrapping paper that wraps absolutely nothing ... (*he smokes*) Come on, go down to that young stud of a trainee ... He can take a photo of me ... one that costs money ... one that's worth taking, not the one of my bald head while I was deceiving another devoted audience ... That is the good thing ... In the end, what you can do in a space in a real magazine and not in a third rate gossip column ... I owe it to you, Miss Susan Mahoney ... Here's another chance to be that journalist who can make an impression of the world... Here's the headline... (*smokes again*) "The naked truth ... Jack Rolling has started smoking again ..."

SUSAN: No, Jack, no ... You're lying again.

JACK: No, I'm not lying.

SUSAN: Yes, you are ... It's not that Jack Rolling has started smoking again ... It's that Jack Rolling never stopped smoking... Do you really believe you conned me? Please, Jack, please ... I always knew ... But nobody wanted to put the cards on the table. What for? We were all happy as we were, in a cloud the colour of money ... No ... You never stopped. That's why you never started again. You simply never stopped ...

JACK: I never stopped loving you either.

SUSAN: Can I applaud now? That sentence sounded very good ... Too much emphasis on the word "never" perhaps ...

JACK: Can you not for once believe something I say, something I do?

SUSAN: Can you believe in me after what I've told you?

Jack says nothing.

SUSAN: That was the right answer ... No ... Faith can't be made. It exists or it doesn't exist. I have no faith in you. Nor in me ... Nor in anything.

JACK: We still could ... Yes, we still could.

SUSAN: What? Lie to each other a bit longer? Is it worth it? No, too late. Too late.

Susan takes the cigarette off Jack. She smokes it.

SUSAN: Love is like smoke, you know? It's there ... It's not there ... You think you can catch it, but ... it's gone.

JACK: When there's smoke it's because something is burning.

SUSAN: No, not now ... Don't kid yourself ... Not now ... Go, please.

JACK: Susan ...

SUSAN: Go, damn you!

Jack goes. Susan appears to fall apart ... In a daze she looks at her cigarette. She slowly lifts her hand so that the smoke is higher. The smoke alarm sounds and slowly increases in volume. The water from the sprinklers on the ceiling soaks Susan.

THIRD THERAPY

Scene One

THE THEATRE

We find ourselves in a theatre. In the darkness we hear:

VOICE OFF: Ladies and gentlemen, may we remind you that the recording of this event by the use of cameras or any other audiovisual equipment is strictly prohibited. Please disconnect your mobile phones and watch alarms. We bring you Mr Jack Rolling.

Jack Rolling enters. He is in an impeccable suit again, as in his first therapy. In fact everything happens the same, a surprising repeat. The presentation begins on another day ...

JACK: Good evening ... My name, as you all know, is Jack Rolling ... And you also know the reason for my visit to this beautiful city of London ... I'm not here to entertain you ... This is not a play ... This is a therapy ... You have come to explore the grubbiest corners of your soul ... Are you likely to be sick? Think about it, there's still time ... If any of you here don't feel prepared for this experience, you may leave ... (to a member of the audience) Don't laugh madam ... I'm serious ... Are you really likely to be sick and tell the truth? (pause) Well, we have a brave audience ... The main thing is this: to call things by their proper name ... That's the best way of confronting a problem ... You are all drug addicts ... You are hooked on a terrible vice ... We aren't talking of an occasional interest, no ... We're talking about a genuinely harmful dependency ... Well, let's carry on, let's face it ... I want to hear it ... What do we call that terrible monster that torments your lives? (pause) Please, don't behave like blushing virgins ... What do we call that monster that torments your lives?

Susan appears in the stalls.

SUSAN: The lie.

Jack is speechless. Susan approaches the stage and goes onto it.

SUSAN: That's the monster that torments our lives ... You know it, I know it ... These people know it ... That's why they're here, that's why they've come to this theatre today ... They want a genuine therapy ... A Rolling therapy, pure and simple ... Are you likely to feel sick and say the truth? Do you want to? My name is Susan Mahoney ... At least that was

my maiden name ... I was married for twenty years to this man ... Let's say I know him "reasonably well" ... Or perhaps not?

The projections begin.

SUSAN: If we take into account the average time an adult sleeps, not a too lazy one, it's seven hours and we multiply it by the twenty years I was married, we get the result of fifty one thousand one hundred hours ... or two thousand one hundred and twenty nine days ... five years and eight months, ladies and gentlemen ... That is the time my head was hardly eight inches away from the head of this man, lying on the same pillow, sharing dreams ... and some nightmare ... But let's carry on with the figures ... If we take as an average that a marriage, leaving aside work and other social events, we have each day some four hours of time together, in a more intimate way, we would get an extra amount of twenty nine thousand, two hundred hours, one thousand, two hundred and sixteen six days, three years and three months ... "Hours of sleeping" plus "Shared time" that gives us a total of eight years and eleven months ... Eight years and eleven months! That was the amount of time I spent privately with my husband during the two decades we were married ... It's not exactly what you'd call a quickie ... And now comes the key question ... "Do you believe that was enough time to get to really know him?" I'm not referring to his mania for getting out of bed on the same foot, leaving a bit of food on his plate, not closing the toothpaste tube ... No, I am referring to something more intimate ... More deep ... His true self ... The answer is NO ... I don't know who this man is ... I didn't know then and I don't know now ... Of those eight years and eleven months we lived together, what was true and what was a lie?

Susan projects a photo of Orson Welles.

SUSAN: Orson Welles used to say: "Everything they say about me is true, lies included ..." In that way Orson and I don't seem the same ... I hope.

The face of Orson changes into the face of Susan.

SUSAN: Is that really so? Can a lie be converted into truth if it's repeated enough? Is that good for us? Anton Chekov, the illustrious Russian writer, wrote a short monologue at the end of the nineteenth century called "On the harmful effects of tobacco" ... In it, a poor man called Niujin, was forced to give a lecture to satisfy the social anxieties of his wife... And, in spite of the fact that he liked smoking so much, he felt obliged to convince the audience of the disadvantages of that addiction ... He had to lie ... But, why did he do it? Why didn't he refuse? Because of the pressure from his

wife or for his own needs? Was the lie an addiction which he could not live without?

The headline: ON THE BENEFICAL EFFECTS OF LYING appears on the screen in large illuminated letters.

SUSAN: And since we can't count on Chekov's great talent to prepare this lecture, I'll need the help of someone here ... Any volunteers? (to Jack) How about you? Come on, I'm not going to eat anyone... For now. I'd appreciate your help ...

Jack approaches Susan.

SUSAN: Thank you ... A round of applause for this mature gentleman ...

A stage hand brings a chair on to the stage. Jack sits on it in the end, as if assuming his new role: now he is the patient.

SUSAN: What's your name?

JACK: Jack Rolling.

SUSAN: Welcome, Jack ... Are you from here, from London?

JACK: No, I'm from Bristol.

SUSAN: Lucky man. "If I can make it there...". Well, Jack, do you tell lies?

JACK: Yes.

SUSAN: And I imagine you've come to this therapy so that you can stop doing so ...

JACK: I've tried to hundreds of times and ...

SUSAN: Yes, yes, I know the rest ... Jack, go ahead, lie.

JACK: What lie? How do you mean, lie?

SUSAN: Yes ... If you like, open your mouth and let a lie escape ... One that you think you should share with us tonight.

Jack does not say anything.

SUSAN: Go ahead, lie! *(to the audience, jokingly)* If you all realised that this was the reason I needed a volunteer, I'm sure I would have had more candidates ...

Jack still does not open his mouth.

SUSAN: Nothing occurs to you, Jack? Don't worry, I'll help you ... I always carry a lie in my pocket in case a handsome man needs it ... ex-liar yes, stupid no.

Susan takes a packet of cigarettes out of her pocket and hands one to Jack.

SUSAN: Don't be shy.

Jack takes the cigarette. Susan gives him a light. But Jack is unable to smoke and lets the cigarette fall to the floor.)

SUSAN: The time has come, Jack. You can do it, you are doing it ...

JACK: I can't give up lying ... I can't.

SUSAN: You don't feel able to ... Instead, do you feel able to continue lying?

JACK: Yes. It's easier to continue.

SUSAN: Why is it easier to continue than not to continue?

JACK: Well ... it's the lie dependency. I ... I don't have the strength of will.

SUSAN: Of course you have it! If you don't, How do you explain that you carry on lying in spite of all the inconveniences you see? You have to be strong willed not to stop lying Oh, yes! Stopping is easy ... But, to carry on? Carrying on is complicated! Don't you realise? Nobody can make you carry on! Nobody is going to put a pistol to your head and force you! ... You choose! And if you choose to be brave, you'll be free ... Believe me! Free in the way you were before you came out with the first lie of your life ... Don't you remember? Let's make history... Let's return to that moment, to that first lie you told.

JACK: They all lied in my family.

SUSAN: And you wanted to be accepted by them.

JACK: I didn't want to let them down, I didn't want them to make fun of me ...

SUSAN: You thought that to lie would make you accepted.

JACK: Lying made me feel accepted ... it made me grown up.

SUSAN: And now? Now what's the excuse for carrying on depending on lies that make you feel unhappy when you're not telling one and is killing you slowly when you are telling one? If you were that child, but with the knowledge that you have now... If you had a second chance ... Would you make the same mistake again? Close your eyes, Jack! And listen to the voice inside you ... Is this going to be your last lie? Are you going to say goodbye for ever to that monster that you have created yourself? Are you ready to open your eyes? Are you ready to live in the truth?

JACK: My name is Jack Rolling and I am a liar... I have been selling a false therapy all over the world for many years, a collection of lies that I didn't believe ... I thought that telling the truth would put an end to all I had created ... I did a lot of damage, I know ... I shattered the dreams and beliefs of lots of people ... And now ... (*he can hardly speak*) I'm sorry ... I'm sorry. I'm never going to lie again, never.

We hear a burst of music. Jack changes his attitude and addresses the audience.

JACK: This is my story ... You already know about it, but we wanted to come back and recreate once more, to share with you our therapy ... I feel that I owe you an explanation, I have cheated you ... I have been smoking, yes, secretly ... I never stopped ... I came on stage to convince you of something I didn't believe in ... "The hardest thing is to keep on smoking" ... I ask your forgiveness ... You bought my books, filled theatres to hear me ... And I failed you ... So, because of that, I felt I ought to write a new book... Because of that I started giving talks, doing therapies, travelling the world ... For you, to compensate you in some way for all the harm I have done you ... But none of this would have been possible without her ... without Susan Mahonegy ...

Jack offers his hand to Susan who comes to him.

JACK: Good, Mrs Rolling again ... We've got married again, as you know ... The truth brought us together again here, in this beautiful city of London, two years ago ... I went to see her in the office of the magazine she was involved with ... I wanted ... I don't know ... To attack her, to recover her ... Deep down I needed her help ... And she offered me her hand.

SUSAN: Truth is the only way to face up to love ... To face up to life ... He was able to take that step, to share his secret with me. And, afterwards, to share it with you.

JACK: Take it from me ... Be honest ... Whatever the cost ... It's painful, yes, it is, but it's worth it ... For me it's made me able to reunite with my true self.

Jack embraces Susan. They are the living embodiment of happiness.

JACK: And reunite with her ... Thank you Susan.

SUSAN: Thank you, Jack.

JACK: (*to the audience*) God bless you.

Darkness.

VOICE OFF: In the foyer you will find books, DVDs and videos of “The hardest thing is to keep on lying”. Thank you very much for coming. We wish you a happy life without lies ...

Scene Two

The dressing room

Susan is in the dressing room. She is changing her clothes. She seems tired, not the same woman full of energy that we just saw in action.

SUSAN: (*talking on her mobile*) Yes, in London ... (...) No, in the dressing room, the therapy just finished a moment ago ... (...) Well, very well, a success everywhere we go ... It seems that lying is fashionable ... Or perhaps it's traditional, I don't know ... (...) And I love you too ... And I miss you ... Lots ... Bye, son, bye ... And be careful of the kangaroos.

Susan hangs up. Jack enters.

JACK: May I?

SUSAN: You're already in ... Anyway, I would appreciate it if you called first. It's more polite.

JACK: Such formality between a husband and wife.

SUSAN: Only on stage, Mr Rolling. Only on the stage ...

JACK: By the way, you were very good today.

SUSAN: Should I take that as a compliment?

JACK: I try to be friendly.

SUSAN: Forget it. You don't need to. It's nothing more than a business.

JACK: Are you going to see someone?

SUSAN: That's none of your business.

JACK: Oh, come on ... Simple curiosity. Miami was your home. At least for a while.

SUSAN: OK then. I'm going to see Michael. Remember?

JACK: How could I forget? Your young stud trainee. He must have been devastated by the news of our reconciliation and subsequent wedding.

SUSAN: Today is a good occasion to compensate him, don't you think?

JACK: Without doubt ...

SUSAN: I'm going to spend some days here with him ... I fancy that ... We'll see each other in Birmingham next week, won't we?

JACK: Yes ... And then Europe ...those damned Europeans lie amazingly.

Susan finishes picking up her things. She goes towards the door.

SUSAN: Goodbye, Jack.

JACK: Wait.

SUSAN: *(after a pause, noticing that he doesn't say anything)* What?

JACK: No, nothing .

SUSAN: What?

JACK: All this ... Doesn't it affect you? Doesn't part of you feel ...

SUSAN: No ... I don't feel anything. Why should I? We tried it again, we tried to play husbands and wives. We forced ourselves, but ... *(theatrically)* "Love is like a reed that finds it's own direction". There's no solution ... You and I, we both know it.

JACK: And those poor people who look at us every night from their seats and really believe that we've won the battle against lying, that we are happy when we hardly look each other in the eye? Don't you feel anything for them?

WOMAN'S VOICE: *(off stage)* Mr and Mrs Rolling?

JACK: Yes?

WOMAN'S VOICE: *(off stage)* Can you spare a minute? I've just seen your therapy and I wanted to greet you ...

Jack looks at Susan. She gestures agreement and puts down her bag.

SUSAN: Business is business.

They both now display that attitude of energy and sincerity that they show on stage. Yolma enters, the woman Jack dealt with two years ago, in that half-forgotten therapy of stopping smoking.

YOLMA: Sorry, I don't want to bother you.

JACK: It's no trouble, please ... My wife and I are delighted to meet you.

SUSAN: Of course.

YOLMA: (*to Jack*) Actually, you and I have already met.

JACK: Oh, yes?

SUSAN: Should I cover my ears?

YOLMA: No, no ... It was two years ago in this same theatre ... Back then you came with your therapy: "The hardest thing is to keep on smoking".

JACK: Yes, I remember now ... You were ...

YOLMA: Yolma.

JACK: That's it, Yolma.

SUSAN: Jack hasn't got a good memory for names. He remembers numbers ... Right Jack?

JACK: Right.

YOLMA: Do you know, I stopped smoking forever? Thanks to you ... I stopped ... Never again ... So, when I read in the papers the news that you ... Well, that you had lied. I felt a bit confused ... And I have to confess I was on the point of going to buy a packet of cigarettes and ... But then I thought ... I remembered all you had said to me that day. And how I felt ... And how happy I'd been since you freed me from that monster, that addiction ... A while later I read some more news about you, about your

courage, about your bravery when you started writing again, pouring out your experiences in a new book: “The hardest thing is to keep on lying”.

Yolma takes a book from her bag.

YOLMA: I bought it, of course ... I read it dozens of times ...

Jack smiles with a certain melancholy.

YOLMA: Yes, yes, I know once is enough, but ... I didn't want to stop lying. I was really fixed on lying ... Your book was such a revelation ... Open your heart in this way, shared your lies with all of us ... Present us with your truth ... When I knew you were visiting London I didn't hesitate for a moment, I wanted to be here ... And ... It's been incredible ... Your example is an example to us all.

SUSAN: Our mission is to share our experience, Yolma.

YOLMA: Perhaps I'm mad but ... I'm thinking of calling my ex-husband again. Remember? The man with no head .

JACK: Yes, I remember.

YOLMA: Perhaps we can also have a second chance, like you ... Perhaps we can manage to forgive so much lying and be happy again ... Perhaps ...
(*after a pause*)

That's all ... I don't want to keep you ... You have a lot to do, have dinner and ... I'm sure you'll have a good time ... There's a lot going on in this city...Thank for everything. Thank you.

Yolma goes to leave.

SUSAN: Yolma ... Wait.

Yolma turns round. Jack looks at Susan, as if he fears (or perhaps hopes) that she is going to confess the truth to this woman.

SUSAN: (*with a charming smile*) Would you like us to sign your book?

YOLMA: Oh, yes! It would be an honour.

Yolma offers the book to Susan. She takes it and signs the first page. She then passes it to Jack, who does not take it.

SUSAN: Jack?

Susan and Jack exchange looks, as if challenging each other. Jack finally takes the book.

JACK: Yes, of course, let's sign the book ...

Jack puts his signature on the book and then returns it to Yolma.

YOLMA: Thank you ... This is more than I ... Thank you. Thank you.

Yolma exits.

SUSAN: There you have your answer ... There you have your poor people ... What does it matter what you feel? What does it matter your truth or your lies? Be realistic ... It doesn't depend on you or me, Jack ... Is it important if the Pope really believes in God? No ... The important thing is that Catholics believe in the Pope.

JACK: Do you know? I envy you ... And I admire you. You're practical. You have a sixth sense for life ...

SUSAN: Yes ... It's called common sense. And I usually use it. Especially before taking certain decisions ... But you, Jack ... You come ... You go ... Why, Jack? Why?

JACK: That Tuesday, March 13th, when I went into the kitchen and went to the fridge to take a swig of milk, I saw perfectly well that you were dressed, I saw your suitcase on the table and I saw your eyes, red from crying ... Of course I saw it ... How could I not have seen it, Susan! But I didn't know what to do, I didn't know what to say ... The only thing that occurred to me was to turn round and go back to bed, to convince myself that it had been a bad dream ... I wish all my acts had a sense... I wish everything had a reason... I would have made you much happier.

SUSAN: (*after a pause*) I'll see you in Paris.

JACK: Are you seriously going with that trainee?

SUSAN: Yes ... (*smiling with amusement*) No ...

JACK: Are you telling me the truth?

SUSAN: Listen, are you calling me a liar?

Jack smiles. Susan raises her hand as if swearing on the Bible.

SUSAN: I swear by the Rolling therapy ... I'm going to spend my loneliness in Blackpool.

JACK: Have a drink with me? As work colleagues ... (*raising his hand as swearing*) I swear by the Rolling therapy.

Susan looks at him. She approaches him. She looks tired.

SUSAN: Does it make sense that we try again?

JACK: No. Not at all.

SUSAN: (*smiling*) Correct answer ... I'm going to look for a taxi, I'll wait for you outside, Mr Rolling.

Susan exits. Jack picks up his things in silence, also planning to exit. He lights a cigarette. He puts out the lights. He goes to exit, but stops and looks up as if he is speaking to someone.

JACK: (*shaking his head*) What does it matter ... faith ... That's the word ... Isn't it, Orson? Faith .

Jack takes a drag on his cigarette, put out the last light that was left on and exits.