

A
DIFFERENT
PLACE

by

Robin Graham

© August 2005

A DIFFERENT PLACE

CHARACTER:

ABEL: Foreign man. Probably mid 20s.

(The story is based on an Indian man in South East Asia, but with minor changes he could be from another country/area).

Also referred to:

JANIE: His present "special friend" (in England)

MARY: His previous "special friend" (in England)

TANYA: His wife in his home country

LOCATIONS:

Various locations are suggested in England and in his own country. But the action takes place in the present, in Manchester.

SCENERY AND PROPS:

The performance space is probably bare at the start. And during the play, there is likely to be only:

a suitcase (containing stage make-up, clown costume, mirror and banner)

two long sticks or poles

TIME:

Set in the present (1999), action moves backwards and forwards through Abel's more recent life.

Note: stage directions are suggested in order to help the reading of the script.

SO1: Preset Manchester Music & LX1: Preset

Audience enter

House Lights Out

SO2: Fade out music.

LX1: After 2 seconds; up in 4.

THE PRESENT. ENGLAND.

ABEL enters carrying two poles and a suitcase. He puts down the suitcase. He puts the two poles on the floor, together and next to each other, forming a barrier between the front and the back of the playing area.

ABEL stands to the side of the poles. He opens the suitcase. He checks to see what he has. He takes out some stage make-up. ABEL has never applied make-up before and is not sure what he is doing. He tries to remember the instructions he was given. He starts to put it on. By page 20 he will have applied the face of a clown. He takes out a mirror and looks at himself.

He notices the people in the audience and temporarily stops applying make-up to address his thoughts to them. The audience represent the people he wishes to be like - with stability, families around them, freedoms. The words he speaks aloud are the thoughts he might silently address to them as he passes them in the street.

Throughout, ABEL may smile, but doesn't ever laugh.

As ABEL talks, he points to the areas in front of and behind the poles: behind (upstage) he refers to as "Your Country", in front (downstage) he

refers to as "My Country". Currently he is to the side of the poles but will step over the poles, forwards or backwards, as indicated.

ABEL: Your country. (Pause) My country. (Pause) Your country. (Pause) My country. (Pause) Poles apart.

LX3(3 secs)(and turn off tape)

He pauses, puts down the make-up, steps into the area behind the poles, and picks up one of the poles.

Your country:

He uses the stick as a pole in a punt.

Punting! (Pause) Janie, my special friend, took me down to Cambridge. Explained to me and showed me how to punt, and I insist on trying. Five strokes out, in the middle of the river, just as I have said to her "this is too easy", I forget to pull the pole out of the water, and I follow it in. I can also see the funny side, but I'm not laughing. I'm swallowing water. Janie tried to suppress her giggles. "Can you swim?" she kept saying. "Can you swim?" Because she couldn't. And no, nor could I. I'd never learnt. I'd been brought up in the city. So one of the college boys had to rescue me. It's silly. Janie paid him to punt us up and down for a while. I let my clothes dry off, and we eat our picnic. Janie had made cucumber sandwiches. Cut off the crusts. Cut the sandwiches into triangles. Wrapped them in aluminium foil to keep them fresh. And made them on white bread. She never eats white bread. But that is the proper way for cucumber sandwiches. Your country! And she said "Let's take the crusts with to feed to the ducks". Which we did. She is such a nice lady. Janie.

He applies a little more make-up. Then uses the stick as a support rail in the underground, holding on with one hand, and bouncing slightly at the knees.

Janie took me to London for two days. To show me all her favourite places. I want to see them, but we spend most of the time like this. In the Underground. Or this:

He then stands rigidly, occupying as little space as possible.

Rush hour! Like the buses at home. Because no sooner have we arrived at a place that it was time for her to show me somewhere else.

He holds the stick to represent a tall palm tree.

First, the Palm house. Kew Gardens. She thought I'd like to see some tall palm trees again. She took my hand, and as we walk around, I recall happy memories of a happy childhood back home.

"I was a good boy. Janie, I was! At least most of the time. And always looking forward to a better future. I can see myself now in our garden, a little garden with orchids that my mother looked after. Studying hard. Or maybe... listening to the radio with my friends.."

Janie smiled. And led us over to see the double coconut - two coconuts that grow together joined as one. It looks like someone's arse. Janie laughed, "Ha-ha-ha-ha," as we compare arses. And after, we visit the greenhouse with insect-eating pitcher plants, with their cups of sweet poison to draw in the insect, and the lids that close, so the insect can't get out.

He holds the stick like a pike.

Then the Tower of London. Beefeater with pike. We see Traitor's Gate. And the executioner's block, where heads would roll...

He lets the pole drop forward on to the floor (with a bang), like the axe falling. Then lets it lay there as "The Greenwich meridian".

Next, the Greenwich Meridian. Painted onto the path by the Royal Greenwich Observatory. It's even painted crossing the roadway. Janie played at jumping between Eastern and Western hemispheres. While I stand still in both at the same time. And eleven different sets of people from different parts of the world asked me to move so that they could have their picture taken. And would I mind taking it for them? Of course I don't mind.

LX4(5 secs)

Mostly I'd been seeing Janie for a day at a time. She's very busy. She works very hard. I telephone her on other days. Sometimes at three o'clock in the morning. She said it was alright to call her when I couldn't sleep. And I still suffer from nightmares. So I called. Often. She usually worked half way through the night. And if she was at her desk, she would answer: "Oh, it's you!", she'd say. And laugh. "Ha-ha-ha-ha". And we'd talk. About nothing most of the time. Those important nothings.

"How are you, Abel?"

"Fine. How are you, Janie?"

"Fine. Are you eating enough fruit, Abel? And what about the stain in your interview shirt? Has it come out using my favourite washing powder?"

She used to be married. And leave notes for her husband when she wasn't there in person. If she was working away. Or going to conferences. And he left notes for her. Except he called his "memos". "Memo to Janie. Reference: Infidelity. Subject: my secret affair". She says that he taught her a lot. She says that "relationships have a shelf-life". But I tell you, she is well rid of him now. Even though I think marriage is forever. I would never write notes to my wife. Nor her to me. We would speak to each other whenever we could. Always we were promising each other that next year we'd go and see the giant turtles on the beach. Always next year. We never meant to lose each other.

Pause while he applies make-up.

Let me tell you how I met Janie. I was a student on a course she was teaching. And since then she has continued to be my teacher. Teaching me how to live in this country. How to find a doctor. How to know which bus to catch. How to find the reduced for quick sale items in supermarkets. How to relax just a little. The course she was teaching was how to meditate. Not that I want to meditate. But there was a free lunch provided and afternoon refreshments. To my surprise, every word, every smile, every laugh, every exercise she took me through draws me further in. To Janie. She is like my wife. They'd both always be laughing. Janie would be halfway through a sentence and there would be a "ha-ha-ha-ha". When the meditation course finished, I got to know her. I would be waiting for the laugh to come. It could be at the delicatessens in Sainsbury's: some stuffed olives, hummus, guacamole and a giggle; or watching the election results on the television; or on the telephone at three in the morning, when her mum's fine, and her washing machine has been fixed, and she's telling me:

"the cat's fine, except he presented me with a dead sparrow, and no doubt I was meant to be grateful to him, and he waited and expected me to eat it. But how do you tell a cat you're vegetarian?"

So she pretended to eat it, with a giggle, and when the cat went away, she wrapped the sparrow in a J-cloth, and placed it in the dustbin".

He continues putting on the make-up.

Sometimes I try to make Janie laugh. But I can only make her smile.

LX5 (5 secs)

Pause. Then ABEL holds a pole upright on the floor and sways from one side to the other, and looks at the audience.

A boat trip on Lake Windermere. On a windy day. Twenty-eight meditators, Janie and me. And this?

He holds the upright pole still, and watches imaginary cars pass.

Vroooooom. (Pause) Vroooooom. (Pause) Vroom click flash! Speed camera! Janie swore! I tell her about Tanya, my wife back home, "Tanya would never break the speed limit. Never. She was the most careful driver in the whole wide world". Not like Janie. And Janie swore again, said she'd never break the speed limit ever again. I say "Janie, it's a warning from God, to slow down and be more careful. And anyway you're far too old to be speeding!" That was the wrong thing to say. I wished I hadn't said a thing. I know how easy it is to make enemies. Janie was so proud that she looked so young. "How old am I then?", she asked. Not that it matters to me. "How old am I, Abel?". "Are you fifty-three?". It was much older than she looked. She told me she was actually forty-four, that it was better that I knew, and that she wasn't old enough to be my grand-mother. For a while she was silent. But then she giggled. So I took her shopping to buy her a present to make up for my mistake.

LX6 (4 secs)

Standing sideways on, he drops one end of the pole on the floor, and looks out sideways.

Escalator at the Trafford Centre. Such a place! I can't believe my eyes. Makes me think about the shopping malls back home. We do have shopping malls back home. And a theme park! And polluted beaches, because of the new imperialists - the modern tourist. We have some of the best beaches in the world. And shopping centres. What a use of money they are. With security guards at the entrance checking that undesirables don't come in. And outside people begging for a crust, on the pavements, maybe sitting on a table that at night time is their home. What riches there are. What a shopping choice. But I'm in your country

now at the Trafford Centre. "Have you seen the imitation oriental quarter?" It made Janie laugh. Tanya would have laughed too.

We take a look at the wedding list in Selfridges. Not that we're getting married. Not that her friends could afford her to use such a wedding list. I mean of course we're not getting married. I know that she fancies me, but she says it's not right. She says we'll both know if the time is right. And I ask if it will ever be. Maybe if I can settle down and establish myself here with a good job and have some security, it will be time. If and when they grant me asylum. But I will only marry her if she loves me. I couldn't marry her just to stay in this country. Even if I have to go home. I will only marry her if she loves me. I bought her a necklace. From a crafts shop. Very simple. Made from different shapes of wooden beads. It is a "fair trade" shop.

LX7 (5 secs)

He returns to his make-up. He checks his watch.

I have friends. I have friends in the hostel where I live. We share a fridge. Have an appliance in common. But special friends, that's different. I haven't been in England for that much time. But there has been one special friend here before Janie. Her name was Mary. She said her parents called her that because she was born at Christmas, and Christmas they said is "the season to be Mary". I asked her what she meant. She had to explain a couple of times. And tried to explain to me about the English sense of humour. Mary asked me about life in my country, but I don't like to talk about it. I don't often talk about it. But Janie says that is where my heart is. In my country. With my wife. With Tanya. And Janie is right. She's always right. Really. She is. It's for her I'm doing this. All this make-up. It's alright. It's not women's make-up. I made a promise to Janie. I must keep my word.

He looks in the mirror. Pauses. Looks again at himself. He doesn't like what he sees and is despondent.

(Maybe to himself:) So what do you think? How am I doing?

LX8 (5 secs)

He continues with the make-up, and checks in the mirror. Then he picks up a pole, stands it vertically on the ground, and puts an arm round it (at shoulder height).

Me and Janie under the cherry blossom tree. One month ago. In Janie's garden. You see! It's in full blossom. Pink against the blue of the sky. And beneath it is a carpet of pink petals, and green where the grass and weeds point through. And the dandelions and the daisies. Janie is next to me. Isn't she slim! (Pointing to the pole:) One inch waist! There's a cool breeze. Birds that have been waking me up far too early every morning have flown over to Janie's house and are still chattering away, and Janie's cat is no-where to be seen to shut them up. It's the most beautiful day. I feel happy. Until Janie is telling me that she is going away. Her teacher has asked her to go away. To teach people how to meditate. She has to go. Her teacher said. Her spiritual teacher. He says in life we must do service to others. This is her service. And she wants to go. Far away. She is taking extended leave from work. She can let me stay in her house while she's gone. But I don't want to. And I won't. She'll telephone when she can, but it's very expensive. And she'll be back before I know it. She says. And she says I'll probably get up to all sorts of things when she's not around. She says she thinks I'm a very special person, and she'll think of me every day. I ask her: "Do you love me?" Of course she does. She says. She loves everybody. But she tells me I have to have a life of my own. And so does she.

Beat then LX9 (3 secs)

He holds the pole horizontally, waist height.

A week ago. Barrier at the airport. She shows her British passport. Janie can travel to any country in the world. And she's off far away. To a land of...

(Maybe he uses the pole to illustrate...)

...Giraffes ...Elephants ... Parasols in the sun... With a suitcase, half filled with sun tan cream factor 25, which she bought last year when Boots the chemist had a special offer, and she thought it would last her 25 years she bought so much because the offer was so good and its new, water resistant, easier to rub in, fragrance free, in the green plastic bottle with a flip open cap and I know as she walked away that she didn't love me in the way I need her to. She said "Jai Guru Dev". She always says Jai Guru Dev. She looked into my eyes, and kissed my forehead. Showed her passport. And disappeared off to the duty free shops before they disappear too. "Peace be with you, Janie. Look after yourself". She turned, waved at me, laughed. "Ha-ha-ha-ha". Disappeared round the corner. Then popped her head back round. Waved at me. Laughed. And disappeared. Three minutes later. I'm still at the barrier. She popped her head round the corner again. She sees I'm still there. She calls out: "I'm going now. Take good care of yourself. Jai Guru Dev"...

He stands staring as he imagines her walking away. Maybe he closes his eyes when imagining.

Why? When I'm only just getting to know you. I am so helpless. I want to push that barrier down. I can only watch, and smile, and show I am happy for you. And know that every night, and every day, I shall be dreaming of you. In my mind, as it's always been. I shall survey your face, touch your forehead, stroke my fingers in your greying hair. Look so deeply into your green speckled eyes that I shall see into your soul and right round the back of it. I shall see so clearly every crack in your make-up where the wrinkles are when you've smiled and giggled. I shall feel your breath, your kalamata olive and garlic breath. And hear your hiccups after you've eaten too quickly because you have work to do. I love you, Janie, until it hurts in my chest. And now you can just walk away. You have to love me. You have to love me how I want you to love me. Tell me what I can do. Because I am at the airport saying goodbye. The barrier stands between us. With security men checking documentation. Security men who keep me in my place. Yes. I have been here before. Seen real barriers that stop real people from living. Real torture, persecution, prejudice. Barriers that separate families and friends. Control the so called undesirable. I have been here before...

LX10 (2 secs)

He steps forward over the pole on the floor into the front that represents his country. He is still pushing at the barrier rail. All the time that he is in his country, he never looks at or talks to the audience. This is his own very private world.

(Shouting:) Freedom? What freedom? (Shouting:) Down with the Government! Fairness and justice for all! Down with the Government! Face up to the oppressors! Fight for what we believe in! Down with the oppressors! (Talking:) No. (Pause) A peaceful demonstration. In the palm tree lined avenue. It is a peaceful demonstration. Outside the Local Government Building. It is six o'clock. We're starting demonstrating. I'm with my friend. It is a peaceful demonstration. Because our local leader, our Opposition party leader is being detained. Without a police warrant. Being held indefinitely. We want people to know. We have our placards. We want everyone to know. The press aren't here yet. From six o'clock we said to them, we are having our demonstration. Now it is 7.30. Two truck loads of Police and Special Reserve Units arrive. They arrive with guns. With batons. Shields. We have our demonstration. In our shirt sleeves. We have nothing. We stand our ground. They sit. They wait. They sit near the entrance of the Government offices. They sit thinking, stupid thoughts, thinking that we might storm the building. One of the big Government ministers is due here. We are going to deliver a letter of protest. We, 250 people. It is now half past nine. The Minister is arriving. The crowd push forward. I am pushed against the barrier. I have been chosen, with my friend, to deliver the letter. We jump over the barrier. We walk over to the entrance of the Government building. We are about to go in. We are surrounded...

LXII (30 secs)

We are beaten. With batons. We are dragged by our collars. We see and hear the Special Reserve Units attack the demonstration. We are dragged to a blue police van. They arrest thirty people. We are taken to the police station. We pass over our money. Our valuables. Everything in our pockets. One by one we are asked why didn't we get a police permit for our demonstration. And we say we are a peaceful demonstration: we don't need a police permit. We did nothing wrong. We are taken into a big room, and told one by one to take off all our clothes. And we are given rag clothing in return, that has been used and used, and hasn't been washed, and we are taken to another room where we are fingerprinted, our pictures taken, we are given numbers. And then we are taken, each of us to a different location. I know nothing more about my colleagues.

I am hungry. None of us have eaten. We came straight from our work or our studies. "Can I have some food?" "I'm hungry. I want some food". They are moving me to another room. They Push me to the floor. It is cold. They tell me to sit up. There are four of them. There is only a dim light. There is a fan spinning above my head. They start slapping me, hitting me, asking me questions, why was I so brave to fight against the Government. And I say I speak in the name of truth. And they accuse me of being a public enemy. But I love my country. They say I am not fit to live in my country, that I am a dog begging for pity. They strip me. Tie my hands and legs. Piss on the rags they gave me as clothes. Then swat me with them. Beat me. Swat me. Beat me. Kick me in my ankles. Until I am so drained. And I pass out.

I wake early in the morning. I see the sun come down through a small window. I see the sun. I feel so cold. The fan is still running. "I want some food". "I am so cold". (Shouting:) "I want some food". No one comes. I pass out.

In the afternoon they come. They wear black masks. They interrogate. They accuse. I deny. They want a confession. They want a statement that I will not do it again. Do what? I am weak and hungry. I am not coherent. I tell them to go to hell. One of them says I am so brave. And he takes out his pistol. Points it at my head. Asks for my confession. I say no. I am so fearful. He fires. And again. He asks. I say no. He fires. And again. And again. No bullets. They laugh at me. They laugh and laugh. Laugh as they strip my nerve. Laugh and strip me of my dignity. For two days they keep coming, waking me, laughing at me. Every few hours waking me. The third day comes, I sign their statement. Saying if I ever go to a political demonstration again, I will face longer periods of detention. They give me my front door key and my valuables. They keep my money. They give me some food.

LX12 (4 secs – cue on “more”)

He stops. Pauses. Composes himself. Then slowly crosses back into the "England" side of the pole and continues with his make-up for a while in silence, getting more and more agitated, until he can't hold in his irritation any more. While talking, he picks up a pole, and starts to hold it aggressively...

In my country, I don't know about your country, but in my country, our Prime Minister has gone far too far. Yes? What tourists see is only the outside of it. What they don't see is the inside where people are struggling. I know of organisations where leaders, my friends, have been detained for years without trial. In accordance with the needs of National Security. And in detention, they have been put into a special type of program, run by people with special skills. Skills in destroying memories and hearts and souls. And when eventually they let out these people, they don't know their families any more. They don't know their families. They don't know their friends. Sometimes I wake up at night in a cold sweat. Sometimes I dream of things that happened to me like they happened to me yesterday.

There was a time when I did support the Government. I did become a member of the party. Once. When I was barely a man. And because of my enthusiasm, so did my friends. So did Tanya. I joined because I love serving our people. Speaking the heart of the people. Some play politics as a dirty game. That will never be true for me. In politics you can be honest with people. In my district, I became Youth leader for the party. In my district, I organised membership, I involved people. But I found barriers. Corruption. So much corruption. Money everywhere buying corruption. As a child, I watched my parents and cousins, struggling, working all the hours that God gave them, then putting their money and trust into our Country. And when I became involved in politics, I see how they have been betrayed. I saw the party just promoting Government propaganda. Engaging in back stabbing. My party played me for a fool. So I turned my back on the party. And the party said I was a traitor to my people. A traitor to everybody who had built me up. That I could have been a political leader. But not now. Not any more.

Tanya came with me. She left the party. She became my wife. One night coming home, she was assaulted in our village. By a gang of men in a car that had government number plates. And let me tell you, if someone in your village is beaten up by outsiders, who come then go in a car registered to the government, that someone very quickly becomes an outcast.

He pauses.

My first special friend in this country was Mary. I told you about Mary. We both used to go to Central library every day to read the newspapers. In the circular reading room with the embarrassing echo. She checked the lottery numbers, looked at the pictures of Manchester United footballers, checked the horoscopes: hers and Wayne Rooney's. She noticed me first on a day I had wind. Which suddenly came on from no-where, because I still hadn't found an appropriate diet. And because of the echo, my wind reverberates through the travel section and back. Although no-one could tell where it came from, and everyone kept their heads down after the first few rounds, I can't cope with people looking at me. I am afraid that if I try to leave, I'll make an exhibition of myself, and never be able to face Central Library again. Mary was sitting opposite me, and she knew it was me. She'd been watching me. And I haven't noticed her until now. She'd been having fits of silent giggles. And just as I can't take any more of her, she left and winked at me, and smiled at me kindly.

The next time she was in the library, she came over to talk to me. She was doing a project at school. In her sixth form. She wanted to know all about me and where I am from. I tell her very little. Until I get to know her better. Which I do. And even then I tell her very little. She invited me to her house. I meet her parents. We all get on very well. They had bought in special biscuits. And they showed me plans for the extension they were building. I tell her mother that I am falling in love with Mary. And the mother just smiled. But Mary stopped coming to the library. Some evenings, I wait outside her house in case she'd come by. And one day I knock, and Mary's father told me that Mary didn't want to see me any more. But I don't believe him. So I keep waiting for her. I occasionally catch a glimpse of her but she never saw me. One summer's evening, when the sun had been shining all day, and I have walked miles and miles, watching the courting couples in Castlefield and by the canal and in St Anne's Square walking hand in hand, and I just want to say hello to a friendly face, I go down to Mary's house, and the police come along and arrest me.

I am taken to an antiseptic police station, to a windowless, sound proofed and cramped little interview room, with two policemen with crisp white shirts and trimmed moustaches, and a solicitor who couldn't understand what I am saying. I am left for the night in a stuffy, stifling, sanitised cell, with clinical tiles, and a little metal button on the wall that I keep on pressing until the officers tired of me and warned me to stop, and a skylight of opaque glass that had trapped in all the day's heat. I go to sleep dripping of sweat, stripped to my underpants, lying on

the plastic blue mat on a wooden bench, staring up at the grey ceiling and misty darkness beyond the skylight, so lonely. And scared how this will affect my application for asylum. Only to be told the next morning that they weren't pressing charges. As long as I understand that if I ever go and wait near Mary's house again, I will face longer periods of detention. They gave me back my front door key and my valuables. And my money. And some food. And my case worker came to the police station to collect me.

I have never seen Mary again. But what I do see in Central Library are leaflets advertising a free course on meditation. With a free lunch and afternoon refreshments. So I go along. And soon after comes punting in Cambridge, the Palm House at Kew, the boat trip on Windermere.

Janie always showed me such compassion and warmth as she teased out of me tales of my experiences. I say "I'm eighty per cent better now. Maybe the last twenty per cent will always be with me". And she'd say "It doesn't have to be. If you could forgive them". She wanted to help me to forgive them. Those who had done me wrong. In the prison. In the detention centre. In the government. So that I could move on. To a better place. She'd always bring up the same thing time and time again. But I can't forgive them. And what about those people I have wronged? Who I can't see, who I can't ask to their face for them to forgive me. My mother and father and brother and sister back home, whose lives I have put in danger. And my dear Tanya. "Don't give up", Janie said as she told me again to forgive those who have hurt me. And what if I have to go back home again? If I've got no choice. And end up having to face them again. And I have to go through it all again. No, Janie, I haven't given up. Still I am determined to change the world. If I'd given up I would have been dead a long time ago. Janie doesn't understand. Janie never understands. She thinks everything will be better for me if I join the Liberal Democrats. How can I forgive? She says I must learn to laugh again. How can I laugh? After letting people down so badly, how can I laugh? After knowing what they did to my wife, how can I let anyone see me laugh. And when we argue, this is what we argue about. People don't know what a hard life is. Not people like her. They seek to avoid suffering, and they seek out their pleasures. In my country. In this country. People don't know what it is to be free. Really free. Nothing in this world comes easily. We can make things happen, whether they are good or bad. We can make things happen. At least there she agrees with me.

The day before she leaves is a really nice day. The sun shone for us. And we have another picnic. In Castleton in Derbyshire. Sitting on the wall of the castle on the hill that overlooks the village. She made apple sandwiches with sugar in them. And sandwiches with peanut butter and strawberry jam arranged side by side in stripes. All on Hovis. With crusts on. She made rice krispy cakes covered in orange flavoured chocolate. And we drank Tizer and munched on ready salted crisps. All the things that reminded her of being a child, that she wanted to be reminded of before going away. Then she practised her Tai Chi on the grass in the castle, putting on a show for a group of giggling school children out on a day trip. She was so elegant and graceful and flowing and loving and gentle. She took me for a cream tea at a prim and proper cream tea shop. Where they looked at us strangely. And Janie looked back at them strangely. And then she dashed to the toilet because everything had gone straight through her. All the sugar and the fat and the bubbles she wasn't used to. And she came back and laughed. She said it was funny. But she knows I can't laugh.

Janie never gives up. She thought for a while, all the time looking at me quizzically, trying to catch my eye. Then suddenly she became very serious and exclaimed: "It's just come to me! Dress up as a clown", she said. "No one will know it is you. And stand on a street corner a week from today. And every week until I come back. And laugh. And lots of people will laugh with you. And you will see their humanity. And they will see yours. It will help you forgive, and be forgiven. I promise," she said. But I told her I can't laugh. I've forgotten how to laugh. "When I was a girl", she said, "I used to have two budgerigars. And one day it suddenly seemed wrong to keep them in a cage. So I opened the cage door, and waited. And waited. I tried shooing them out. But they had forgotten how to fly. So I took them to my friend who lived in a tower block, and threw them off the fourteenth floor. And after a little while, they flew back up, onto the balcony." She paused, and looked me in the eye. "They hadn't forgotten. They were just pretending". "And did they fly back into the cage?" I ask. Her face became serious. I have never seen her so serious. She said, "Look at the time. You see what time it is? Every week from today, at exactly this time, I will stand on a street corner wherever I am, and laugh. I give you my word. And if you choose to, you can laugh with me. We can cross this world with laughter. We can change this world with laughter. I give you my word".

LX13 (5 secs)

Pause.

The day she went away, I meet her at her house. Before we leave for the airport, she gave me this suitcase, and this leaflet from her teacher called 'Laughing on street corners'. It says to laugh you don't need a reason. It says if you can't laugh genuinely, fake it. It says take a deep breath, stretch your arms out wide, make a big smile, lean back, and laugh as you breathe out. It says start with the sounds hah-hah-hah-hah. And hee-hee-hee-hee. And hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. It says it's easy to do standing up, and in the open air. Go to all the villages and towns in your area, taking banners, and start laughing at bus stops, in train stations, on street corners. For ten minutes at a time.

He finishes his make-up as much as he feels he needs to. From the suitcase he takes out a wig and a nose. He puts them on, looks at his image in the mirror and looks away quickly.

What does she know?

Mini beat then LX14 (5 secs)

He paces around. Then he kicks the pole divide between the two countries to the back of the playing area (leaving the stage as 'his country'). He becomes immersed in his own world, again not looking at the audience. After a while, he sinks down and sits on the floor.

You want my shoes? Takes my shoes.

He removes his shoes, hands them up to an imaginary guard, and lets them drop on the floor...

How long this time? I have endured so much, I can easily endure this time. Stand up to the people who have the power. They can take my flesh, they can take my body, they will never take my name. Hours. Days. Where the rooms

stink, without fresh air. Every two or three days maybe given some food. Some porridge. Porridge. What sort of porridge? A little porridge, a lot of water. And sometimes in the porridge a cockroach. They make me eat it. I have to eat it. Even if I don't want to eat. I am forced to eat. Cockroaches. Spiders. Lizards. They put them in the porridge just to make you think "give up, give up". I never give up in life. One thing my family taught me. My father never gave up. Not on his family, not on his career. He never gave up so he could give me an education. He is my inspiration now. Father, where did I go wrong? What did I do wrong? How much more will I have to endure. What will happen to my friends and family. When will they caution my father again? For doing nothing wrong. Fining him his hard earned money? And intimidating my mother again in the road by our house? When will they promote my sister only to demote her the next day or the next day?

My shirt? Take my shirt.

He removes his shirt. Throws it aside.

Two weeks. Scars on my body where they cut me with razor blades. And in the hand. Burnt with a hot iron rod. I've got a gash in my face. I have lost a few of my teeth. Remain level headed. Reason with the authorities. Tell the guards torture doesn't work. It doesn't work. Tell them violence begets violence.

They force me to drink water until my stomach is bloated. Then hit me until I bring all the water out again. They give me something to drink and it makes me so weak, I am unable to control my body. They hang me up side down from the ceiling for a day. They make me shit on the floor and pick the excrement up with my hands.

I hear the screams of women who are arrested and tortured. I dread that one day I shall hear Tanya screaming. Because they put the hot iron rod inside a woman's vagina and burn her womb.

My trousers? Have my trousers. Here!

He removes his trousers, and throws them down.

Two months. I've got a line on my leg. Here, a line on my leg. They drop a gas cylinder, they just simply drop a gas cylinder on my leg. And tell me not to scream. To keep my mouth shut. And the tears run down from my eyes.

I am made to sit on ice for hours. My groin and my buttocks are numb. I am passing out all the time. I urinate all over the place because I can't control it. I can't control my shit. They rub my face in it and make me eat it. And then I am unable to eat anything for days. They make me crawl on the floor. With somebody sitting on my back. And whip me. They call me names. Black dog, pariah, son of a bitch, bastard; they insult my parents.

Remain level headed. Reason with the authorities. Tell the guards that violence begets violence. They tell me to lick the floor clean.

LX15 (5 secs)

They make me lick the floor clean.

He licks the floor. He bundles himself into a small ball.

How long? Watch the door! From the corner. Don't move. Watch the door! No! Mind wanders. Narrow cell. Cold floor. Paint peeling. No! Mind wanders. Noises. Banging. Breath heavy. Head aching. No! Breath slowed right down. No! Rage. Bastards. Can't cry out. Want to cry out. Can't cry out. For fear. Fear what they'll do. To me. They're probably watching. No! Feel my skin. Pinch my skin. Legs gone numb. Don't move. Body stiffening up. Want to curl up and die. No! Mustn't say that. No! Curl up and sleep. Sleep. Not die. Not die. Not die. Sleep. Not die. No! Neck hurts. Don't move. Heavy eyes. Must keep going. Leaning back. Against the wall. They're watching. Sinking lower. On to the floor. Can't resist. Whatever. They're going to do it whatever. Noise. Someone coming. Clenched teeth. Hug my body. Stroke my

body. "Who is there?" No. Mistake. No-one. Silence. No. Keys. Hear keys outside. Someone coming. Footsteps. Down the stairs. Why is it quiet? Why? Wait. Wait. Listen. Coming nearer. Or going away? No! Guard comes in. What does he want? Makes me stand up. Pushes me against the wall. Lights a cigarette. Remain level headed. Reason with them. Violence begets violence.

ABEL doubles over in pain as he is repeatedly hit. And sinks to the floor.

Lie still. Don't tell. Don't tell them. They will never take my name. No, nothing. Nothing. Cold. Damp. Clammy. Cold. Sweaty. Feel my body. Close my eyes. He'll go. Away. Food? Yes, I want food. Yes. When? Something to tell. What? My wife? What? My wife what? Don't believe them. Going to release me? Don't believe them. International pressure. What? Don't believe. Car crash victim? My wife? No! My wife? Dead? Car crash? Dead in a car crash?

He is motionless for a while. When he moves he is in the present again.

Tanya!

LX16 (4 secs)

Remember the good times. The times we went to rallies together and tried to change the world. The times we took a pedal boat on the lake, and sat and watched the flocks of birds fly over. The days we flew our kite high into the sky. The day we bought you a wooden necklace. The times we laughed and laughed and laughed. The times we talked important nothings. The day we were married. The times we made love. I love you so much. I always loved you. I never stopped loving you. And I will always strive to change the world for you. For us. You should have left me, you should have gone away. Forgive me, Tanya. Forgive me please! I never saw you to ask you to forgive me.

If he is going to put on a clown's costume he does so now.

*He takes out and unfurls the banner from the suitcase. It reads: "For Tanya".
He attaches the banner to the poles. He tries to step forward to the "street
corner" (possibly in the audience), but stops. And is surprised to find that he
can't proceed...*

(To himself:) I can't. This isn't a face I can hide behind. It's not like the faces I have worn in the past. If I start, I can't turn back. I'm not ready. I can't show the world that part of me I've hidden since childhood. I am afraid. Of letting go? Of being alone? Of losing Tanya forever? I have survived so much, and this is what I am afraid of. That if I am a man without a cause to fight, you will judge me, hate me, because I am nothing. A stranger, who is daring to show his face.

*ABEL withdraws into himself. He sits on the floor. He is still and silent.
Maybe a clock strikes.*

The time?

ABEL is thrown into confusion, panics, then gets up.

I've always been fighting for someone else. This is fighting for myself. I must. Yes? Tanya forgive me. Forgive me please. And let me start to say goodbye.

ABEL prepares to step out again.

I love you. I love you, Tanya. And I don't know how to reach you. I don't know how to. How to ask you to forgive me. So I have to try this. To reach out across the world. To change this world with laughter.

He walks out to a "street corner", probably in the middle or back of the audience. He stands, holding the poles one in each hand, he stretches his arms out to his sides, takes a deep breath, leans back... and fakes the laugh repeatedly:

LX17 (up over 25, down over 15 secs)

Hah-hah-hah-hah, hee-hee-hee-hee, hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. Hah-hah-hah-hah, hee-hee-hee-hee, hoo-hoo-hoo-hoo. (Repeatedly as necessary)

SQ3 (Laughter from Janie at start of 3rd set)

The sound of Janie doing the same - faking laughter - is heard. She fakes it until she starts laughing uncontrollably.

LX18 (at about end of 6th set; fade to black over 12 secs)

SO4 (Fade Up Smiths)

SO5 (Fade down Laughter from Janie)

LX19 (Curtain call)

EITHER: ABEL cannot laugh. His faking turns to tears. He sobs his heart out. Every time he tries to laugh, it turns to tears. Until he gives up trying to laugh and just cries.

OR: ABEL is able to laugh, and laughs along with Janie.

END