

Serge Lamothe

The Prince of Miguasha
A Play in One Act

Translated from French by Paloma Vita

The Prince of Miguasha

Arising from the existential exploration of an improbable *end of the world*, of which we will never truly know whether it comes to pass or whether it is simply foreboded by the protagonists, and centred around the emblematic Prince of Miguasha (a prehistoric fish whose fossilized specimens were found in Quebec), this dramatic text gives a voice to this most exotic and fabled creature: the improbable two-headed beast that is *the couple*. One could say that the entire spatial element and stagecraft of the presentation are summed up in the opening stage direction: *A man and a woman are sitting in semidarkness*. As if the Universe itself had been drained of its substance. And even if at first it is their own feeling of helplessness toward the brevity of human life that is explored, it is the ever-accelerating disappearance of all the elements that constitute their life that is here brought into focus; along with their inability to react to the situation.

In 2003, Serge Lamothe was awarded the Bourse Yves-Thériault for this radio fiction. *The Prince of Miguasha* was broadcast by Radio Canada in its original French version.

The Prince of Miguasha

A man and a woman are sitting in semidarkness.

HER: Oh! Shut up! Shut up! Shut the hell up!

HIM: I won't say another word.

HER: I told you to shut up.

HIM: But... you're the one who...

HER: Shut up, will you!

Time passes. Some dogs howl.

What the hell's wrong with them?

HIM: They're coming.

HER: The dogs?

HIM: No, not the dogs. (...) They said they would come.

HER: They said they would try to come! That's not the same thing.

HIM: You never believe anything. When they said they were going to build a shopping mall by the highway, you didn't believe them. Then, when they said they were going to tear it down, you didn't believe them either.

He laughs.

HIM: When I think about all the trouble they went through to tear it down! Bunch of morons! All they

had to do is wait! I've always said it: time works its magic, death builds its nest.

HER: Oh no! You're not gonna go on about that again!

HIM: It's nothing. (...) Just a slightly blurred image that won't come off the screen.

HER: Forget it.

HIM: That image bothers me.

HER: Think about something else.

HIM: Easier said than done.

Time passes.

HER: Do you remember the name of that beach in Gaspesie? The beach we used to go to?

HIM: Miguasha beach?

HER: It started with an M.

HIM: Right. Miguasha beach.

HER: M like emerald, emirates, amorous...

HIM: The beach was called Miguasha.

HER: M like emotion, embellish, emitting...

HIM: Mi... gua... sha!

Time passes.

HER: Emptiness...

HIM: It's eight hundred kilometres away from here. Miguasha beach.

HER: When do we leave?

HIM: We're not going there! Eight hundred kilometres away, are you kidding? That's too far. And it's polluted now. It's dirty (...) We're not going anywhere. (...) We're staying put.

Time passes.

HER: It didn't use to be.

HIM: What?

HER: Polluted.

HIM: No, I am not sure. I think it was from the get go.

HER: You mean from the very beginning?

HIM: Yes.

Time passes.

HER: That's strange.

HIM: What?

HER: I don't remember that.

HIM: Is that really you saying that?

HER: Yes. (...) There's no one else here (...) Back then, did we use to go swimming?

HIM: Where?

HER: At that beach, in Gaspésie, we used to swim there, right?

HIM: Of course. Chaleur Bay, Miguasha beach... Of course we used to swim there.

HER: I do remember that. And also, that there were children. Lots of very young children.

HIM: Not ours.

HER: Children who pushed little boats along with bits of wood.

HIM: They weren't ours.

HER: No (...) There were little boys and little girls...

HIM: The boys were the bravest ones.

HER: Uh! That would be a change!

HIM: When they wandered too far away from the shore, their parents would call them back.

HER: The girls?

HIM: The girls and the boys.

Time passes.

HER: Yes.

HIM: They yelled: "Come back! You're too far from the shore!"

HER: "You're too far! Come back!"

HIM: They came back.

HER: They came back but not for very long.

HIM: That's true. They always wandered off again. They slowly strayed away. Like if the waves pulled them away a little further each time.

HER: Their parents would read or just lay in the sun.

HIM: Once in a while, a parent would look up and glance toward the children. They would spot the little blond head or the little curly head or the blue bathing suit of their progeny...

HER: Their progeny?

HIM: Yes. *Homo parentus* only cares about his own progeny. And only for two or three seconds: he lifts his head, spots the fruit of his loins, assesses the situation...

HER: The fruit of his loins?

HIM: Yes... He assesses the situation with a glance to make sure his offspring's safe and then goes back to reading again or closes his eyes. (...) He forgets about them almost instantly.

HER: That's true. But a couple of minutes later, the children wandered away from shore again... one parent would notice and yell:

HIM: "Come back! Come back! You're too far from the shore."

HER: It's kind of a game.

HIM: It's more than that. It has everything to do with biology.

HER: Biology?

HIM: Yes. You have to think of beaches as nesting grounds. They do what any seagull would do: they brood over their young.

HER: That's true. But seagulls are way more conscientious.

HIM: That's because unlike the seagull, *homo vacationus* has nothing to fear. He has no predators.

HER: Did you say *homo vacationus*?

HIM: Yes. *Homo vacationus* is at the top of the food chain: He doesn't need to worry about survival! He is the conqueror! The top dog of all the beaches of the world!

HER: There you go, exaggerating again.

HIM: No, no. I think that this little game with the children wandering away from shore and the parents bringing them back with their own special call also had another goal. I think they were rehearsing.

HER: You mean for later?

HIM: Yes. For later, when they're children grew up. For the time when they really wanted to leave, move away from home.

HER: You mean cross the ocean and never come back?

HIM: Yes. (...) There isn't much time left.

HER: To cross the ocean?

HIM: No. For everything else.

HER: How do you know that?

HIM: It seems obvious. I think there isn't one plane left in the sky now.

HER: Did they decide planes should be the first to go?

HIM: Not that I know.

HER: So?

HIM: It's not that simple. It's not just the planes. Everything else has to go away too. It's complicated... it requires a lot of planning. (...) They have to do it in sequence. (...) They can't make everything disappear in one shot. It would be chaos.

Time passes.

HER: And the house?

HIM: What about the house?

HER: Does it have to go away too?

HIM: Of course it does. The house, like everything else.

Time passes.

HER: The veranda?

HIM: The house, the veranda, everything.

Time passes.

HER: When I think the weather channel predicted a warm spell for the coming days!

HIM: They're always wrong about the weather. (...) There won't be any coming days.

HER: That's true. You're right.

HIM: Of course I'm right. They're invariably wrong about the weather. It's one of the last things we can count on.

Time passes.

HER: Every summer, I was sad that we couldn't go back to Miguasha for the holidays.

HIM: Too polluted, yes. It wasn't worth travelling eight hundred kilometres to end up on a polluted beach.

HER: We have some nearby; it's true. But that's not why.

HIM: No.

HER: It's because of the children.

HIM: Our children have nothing to do with this.

HER: We don't have any children.

HIM: I know what you mean.

Time passes.

HER: There were always children on that beach, every year. Then one time, there weren't any and we never went back there.

HIM: I know.

Time passes.

HER: You didn't want any.

HIM: Any what?

HER: You didn't want any children.

HIM: You didn't insist.

Time passes.

HER: It wouldn't have worked

HIM: You should have insisted.

HER: No. Of course not. I didn't want to. When we first got married, you made yourself perfectly clear: you said you couldn't stand children.

HIM: It's true that they get on my nerves. It's true that they poison my life.

Time passes.

HER: We never had children.

HIM: In your shoes, I would have insisted.

HER: You weren't in my shoes and I did not insist!

Time passes.

HIM: I could have grown to love children. It's easy. It's all about letting them get close enough. No one can resist them for very long.

HER: It would have been no use. I think they would have left, like the others.

HIM: Who?

HER: Our children.

HIM: We don't have any children.

HER: The children we could have had.

HIM: Not our children. No. Our children would have stayed.

HER: You're idealizing them.

HIM: They would have stayed all the way. To the very end.

Time passes.

HER: I'd have done anything to make you change your mind.

HIM: You could have tried.

Time passes.

HER: You wouldn't have listened. (...) You never listened to anything I said.

HIM: I would have listened to you.

HER: That's a lie. You would have done what you always do: you would have used all your arguments. First your light guns, then the cavalry, and then the full battalions. You would have bombarded me with objections. You would have crushed me before I even opened my mouth. (...) Children... I mean... There were many at first, and then over time...

HIM: They vanished.

HER: Exactly. It all happened very fast... in the space of... I don't know... a few years?

HIM: There are a lot of questions that will remain unanswered.

HER: Do we have a choice?

HIM: Such as who screwed up. Where did the orders come from? The question we must always ask ourselves is: who profits?

HER: Yes. No one.

HIM: It's true. What matters is that there will be no follow-up.

HER: No appeal. No sequel.

HIM: No second chance.

Time passes.

HER: It's much better this way.

Time passes.

HIM: No. I think we should make an inventory.

HER: An inventory of what?

HIM: Of all that has or will disappear.

HER: Or is disappearing as we speak...

HIM: It's the same thing.

HER: No it's not. All things considered, there are more things disappearing right now than at any other time since time began.

HIM: You can't say that.

HER: I just did.

HIM: There is no way you can know for sure.

HER: I don't know for sure. Certainties were the first things to go.

HIM: That's true. (...) I have to agree with you there. And then... critical thinking...

HER: Freedom of expression.

HIM: Democracy.

HER: Many things disappeared before we could even notice.

HIM: Most of them did it quietly.

HER: The Great Auk.

HIM: *Pinguinus impennis*.

HER: The Tahitian Sandpiper.

HIM: *Prosobonia leucoptera*.

HER: The Tahiti Rail.

HIM: *Gallirallus pacificus*.

HER: That one's name sounds like some kind of train.

HIM: There was also the sea mink...

HER: ...the woodland caribou...

HIM: ... the Labrador duck...

HER: ... the passenger pigeon.

HIM: Messenger.

HER: No. Passenger. I know what I'm saying.

HIM: Then there was... the Amazon jungle...

HER: ... the boreal forests...

HIM: And then everything else. I mean... there are so many small things we should not lose sight of. (...) tiny little things.

HER: The death throes of a fly on a windowsill?

HIM: Yes, but in a more general way.

HER: The death throes of millions of flies on millions of windowsills?

HIM: That's more like it. Concentration camps, mines, cable television...

HER: But not just that... some nicer things too.

HIM: Less compromising.

HER: Well, the stuff of life! Like long walks by the river or full moon nights in August.

HIM: Some of Bach's sonatas too, D.H. Lawrence's novels, the... the little blue skirt you wore that summer on Miguasha beach.

HER: Feeling the sun's warmth on our skin, French wines, cherry trees...

HIM: Yes, all that!

HER: ...chocolate, strawberries, caramel...

HIM: ... cotton candy, golden delicious apples...

Time passes.

HER: It's not going to work.

HIM: What?

HER: We can't go on and on like this, indefinitely.

HIM: But an inventory is only good if it's complete, exhaustive and precise, otherwise it's not an inventory but only an estimate. (...) There was blackberry jam, fresh spearmint, picnics on the grass...

HER: This is going nowhere.

Time passes.

HIM: I disagree. I think we have a duty.

HER: That would be a change.

HIM: No. I think we have a duty to history. (...) It's already hard enough to think that even the inventory of all that has disappeared is bound to one day also disappear...

HER: You can't help it.

Time passes.

HIM: I don't think I'll ever manage to get used to it.

HER: Try to see the glass as half full.

HIM: Half full?

HER: Wars have also disappeared.

HIM: Yes.

HER: AIDS, the government...

HIM: Banks...

HER: Cancer in all its forms...

HIM: Child slavery...

HER: Hunger...

HIM: We didn't even have to try.

HER: Stupidity...

HIM: Injustice...

HER: Ignorance... (...) It doesn't help.

Time passes.

HIM: It's true. You're right. We'll never list everything.

Time passes.

HER: We just have to tell ourselves that it's normal.

HIM: Yes. (...) You know, I think that the Prince of Miguasha should be listed in the inventory.

HER: The Prince?

HIM: Yes. The Prince of Miguasha.

Time passes.

HER: Who's that?

HIM: You don't remember the Prince? Don't tell me you... you know... the... (...) It was a fish... (...) You've got to remember: a very old fish... on display in the museum, remember.

HER: In Miguasha?

HIM: Yes.

HER: It rings a bell.

HIM: You even read the inscription out loud: "The Prince is a fish about three hundred and sixty millions years old that was discovered right here in Miguasha."

HER: A grey fish, yes. You're right. On display.

HIM: That's because it was fossilized.

HER: Fossilized.

HIM: It means: prisoner of the rock.

HER: I know what it means.

Time passes.

HIM: Three hundred millions years, it dates back to the Devonian Period.

HER: I know what it dates back to.

HIM: Eusthenopteron foordi... that's the Prince's Latin name. Eusthenopteron foordi is an important evolutionary link... somewhere between fish and primitive tetrapods.

HER: Yes. Tetrapods.

HIM: Because the Prince of Miguasha's fins look like legs.

HER: I know. (...) Quite an odd fish, with legs.

HIM: Well, strictly speaking they're not really legs. More like stumps.

HER: Yes little stumps. (...) Is that a redundancy?

HIM: Little stumps?

HER: Yes.

HIM: I guess so. (...) Yes I guess it is.

Time passes.

HER: Tell me, are redundancies going to disappear too?

HIM: Yes, most certainly.

Time passes.

HER: The first time I saw that fish...

HIM: The Prince?

HER: Yes. (...) I thought it looked monstrous.

HIM: You mean *malformed*?

HER: No. I mean monstrous. It really looked like something abnormal.

HIM: A mutant.

HER: Do you think pollution can cause this kind of mutation?

HIM: You really don't get it. It wasn't a living fish, but a fossil, a specimen dating back three million years.

HER: Three hundred millions years and a bit, yes I know. (...) In that case it must have been old age.

HIM: What?

HER: I said: In that case it must have been old age that caused its mutation, not pollution.

Time passes.

HIM: You don't know what you're talking about. It was neither old age nor pollution; it was evolution.

HER: Will pollution remain, you think?

HIM: I am not sure. (...) It's certainly the one thing that might remain long after everything else.

Time passes.

HER: You know, I can't even manage to feel it's an outrage, or even a shame.

HIM: Back then, news like this would have monopolized the attention of the media for two or three days.

HER: Maybe a little more.

Time passes.

HIM: The Prince never made the headlines. But it was a star, in a way. I mean he was unique, after all.

HER: You talk about it as if it was a sideshow attraction.

HIM: Yes. But you know the Prince's little stumps are not the only things that set him apart from other fish.

HER: I know.

HIM: He has lungs, imagine that! It's a fish that can breathe in the open air!

HER: A fish that can breathe in the open air is in constant danger of drowning.

HIM: Not the Prince, no! Because he *also* has gills. He has both lungs *and* gills.

HER: Like a whale?

HIM: Like nothing else but himself. The Prince is unique. The whale is not a fish; it's a mammal, a cetacean.

HER: I don't see why you're losing your temper.

HIM: Me neither. (...) Maybe I just need to know I can still do it.

HER: Do what?

HIM: Lose my temper. Be outraged. Even for no reason.

HER: Uh! That's the one thing you'll be able to do to the bitter end.

HIM: I just think that the Prince is special. He represents a unique moment in our evolution.

HER: You say that as if it was going to go on.

HIM: I say what I think: The Prince had lungs, gills, fins and legs...

HER: You're saying the same thing I'm saying: you're saying it's a monster.

HIM: No! I'm saying that he had everything to succeed and he failed.

HER: There is no way you can know whether he failed or not.

HIM: Well, one way or the other, he did disappear.

HER: Like everything else.

HIM: It's the only constant.

HER: Yes. (...) Listen: The dogs have stopped barking.

HIM: Yes.

HER: It's been quite a while since we heard anything.

HIM: Yes.

HER: What could that mean?

HIM: Not much.

Time passes.

HER: Sometimes I wonder why we stayed. I think we should have left a long time ago.

HIM: But you know that it's always been too late.

HER: Yes but the others were... so... so...

HIM: Impatient?

HER: No. (...) Distraught.

HIM: Don't think about it. It's nothing.

HER: I think they were scared.

HIM: They were all very scared. It's only human.

Time passes.

HER: If they needed to come, they already would have.

HIM: I think that maybe they came and then just left again.

HER: Maybe they didn't have to come.

HIM: I think they simply didn't want to bother us.

HER: They might have forgotten about us. Pretended we don't exist.

HIM: Don't be silly! We've been among the statistics for so long!

HER: Someone may very well have deleted us by mistake. By pushing the wrong button.

HIM: The wrong key.

HER: What?

HIM: We say: the wrong key.

HER: I don't care. (...) I mean... to err is human, no?

He laughs

I don't see what's so funny.

HIM (*laughing*): No, you never see anything!

Time passes.

HER: Well tell me! What's so funny?

HIM: You wouldn't get it.

HER: Of course not. How could I possibly get anything?

Time passes. He keeps laughing.

C'mon tell me!

HIM: What's funny... is that they thought they were safe!

HER: Safe from what?

HIM: There was no way for them to know. When we think we're safe, we don't know what could happen. We don't know because we're just not thinking about it. We feel safe and that's it. Nothing more.

HER: Well they all left, that means they must have known something, don't you think?

HIM: They left because they were scared. Since when do people know what they're scared of? Do you?

HER: I am not scared.

He takes the woman's hand in his.

HIM: Me neither.

Time passes.

HER: Then why is your hand shaking?

HIM: My hand's not shaking.

HER: Are you cold?

HIM: No. (...) You're right. (...) It is shaking a bit (...) I think there is something, inside me, that is starting to lose it.

HER: It's nothing.

HIM: It's true. I am terrified... terrified at the thought of all there is left to do. (...) No. I am terrified at the thought of all that will be left hanging. Unfinished.

HER: The veranda?

HIM: What about the veranda?

HER: You never finished it.

HIM: I don't mean just the veranda.

HER: Do you think you'd feel better if the veranda was finished?

HIM: No.

HER: Then what?

HIM: I was thinking about other things. (...) I can't explain.

HER: Then don't.

HIM: See, See! That's what I mean: It terrifies me to leave things hanging like that, that's what I can't stand. (...) I have something important to tell you.

HER: Nothing is really important anymore.

HIM: No listen. This is important. (...) I am not trying to complain. If I could do it all over again I wouldn't change a thing, you know? Except for that woman I murdered.

HER: Shut up! You didn't murder anyone.

She pulls her hand away.

HIM: I remember almost nothing about that woman.

HER: Don't you start. It's ancient history.

HIM: Exactly, that's what I mean: I've forgotten what her face looked like. She doesn't have a... face anymore.

HER: Just add her to the inventory and that's it. No need to mention her anymore.

HIM: How could I possibly forget the face of the woman whose life I ended?

HER: It must have been a pretty average face.

HIM: Tell me how I ever did that? (...) Exactly, average, yes. That's true.

HER: You see.

HIM: Yes, I remember.

HER: You're not responsible.

HIM: No. I can't say that; that I don't feel responsible...

HER: But you aren't.

HIM: I can't say that. (...) She was only twenty-six years old, after all.

HER: You did nothing wrong.

HIM: I really tried to convince myself of that, during all those years. I swear (...) I kept telling myself: I did nothing wrong, I did nothing wrong, I did nothing wrong...

They talk over each other.

HER: I kept telling myself: I am walking on the earth, I am walking on the earth, I am walking on...

HIM: Sometimes, I managed to believe it. For brief moments I even managed to completely forget it.

Time passes.

HER: What?

HIM: That woman's face. (...) But for years, every time we made love...

HER: Shut up, it's in the past.

HIM: Well exactly, that's what we need to clear: the past.

HER: And what for?

HIM: That's all we have left. (...) When we made love, the two of us...

HER: There's no point even trying.

HIM: ... when we made love...

HER: That's a cruel thing to say.

HIM: There are much crueller things...

HER: Don't talk about it.

HIM: ... that will all have to be entered in the inventory. Every time we made love...

HER: It's pointless.

HIM: ... the two of us...

HER: The stupidity of men lies in being intent on belonging to the world, to live in the middle of all this as if they belonged. (...) They don't belong. (...) That's what you men are like, you know.

HIM: Do you really think we could have done otherwise? Behave as if none of it mattered?

HER: That's what we did. Look around you. (...) Do you see anything?

HIM: No.

Time passes. He bends down.

HER: What are you doing?

HIM: Nothing.

HER: Don't drink that water!

HIM (*sitting up*): I am thirsty.

HER: Don't drink it.

HIM: There's not even one bottle left in the basement.

HER: There's nothing you can do about that. (...) Cant' be helped. (...) Do not drink that water!

HIM (*drinking*): You know, when I think about it, I seem to remember that the water at that beach was not so polluted, after all. Well not at the very beginning.

HER: That's what I was saying: It's old age that caused these mutations, not pollution.

HIM: It was a very old fish it's true, but still...

HER: A very old soul, you mean. (...) Anyway, they said it would come from the water. That's what they said.

HIM: You just made that up. You were so starved for details that you made that one up just to feast on.

HER: Sometimes you disgust me. (...) I am not crazy and I made nothing up. They said it would come either from the water or from the air.

HIM: Who said that?

HER: A voice on the radio. (...) It hasn't said anything for a long time now.

HIM: That's true. They said it would come either from the water or from the air, from fire or from the earth. Which means: nothing specific at all! They simply stated it would come from one side or the other!

HER: Did they specify a time?

HIM: Not that I know. It doesn't matter anymore anyway.

HER: I don't agree. I think I would have preferred to have an idea about the time... to get ready... to be focussed when it happens.

HIM: I know. (...) There are so many things that we don't understand. (...) Maybe in this case they just couldn't specify a time.

HER: See, that's what bugs me. I hate surprises. I would have liked them to be precise. They gave us no details.

HIM: Well, they botched the press release. You're right about that.

HER: A real piece of trash. Nothing comforting. Not even a symbolic word, or a hint of nostalgia... Nothing!

HIM: Only the official announcement. The account of the cold hard facts. Not much at all, really.

HER: It read like a decree. The voice on the radio said it in exactly the same way as if it had been talking about the closing of a factory or a pile-up on the highway.

Time passes.

HIM: They could have done better.

HER: Another voice said that everything had been arranged in the strictest secrecy by a circle of initiates.

HIM: You mean, some weirdoes who wear facemasks, perform sacrifices or turn into werewolves on every full moon?

HER: No. They never mentioned lycanthropy. They simply stated that several key elements of the affair had to remain secret. They even made sure to mention that the best way to do that was to pile news on top of other news, to add to the confusion.

HIM: It's true that on this point they outdid themselves.

Time passes.

HER: Do you remember what the voice said at the end?

HIM: What voice?

HER: On the radio. What's the last thing it said?

HIM: I can't remember. Something about God. Must have been... hum... "May God help us!", "God be with you!" or "May God have pity on us all!"

HER: I didn't really understand what God had to do with all of this.

HIM: Probably nothing.

HER: Since he died, God is much more terrifying than before.

HIM: His way to get back at us.

HER: I could've done without that, but I'd still like to know exactly what the voice's last words were.

HIM: Why does it matter so much?

HER: Because they were the last words. It upsets me to think that these words and no others are the last ones that will travel through space in our name.

HIM: Nothing is travelling in space in our name you know that.

HER: I'm talking about waves. I heard that they travel for a long time. (...) I'm not being nostalgic.

HIM: No.

HER: Nostalgia vanished a long time ago.

HIM: I know.

HER: It's just that I would have felt better if there was something left of our passage, a testimony.

HIM: It doesn't matter that much, you know.

HER: It wouldn't have to be much at all. Just something that would tell our story; what we've been through.

HIM: Do you mean something symbolic?

HER: Anything.

HIM: A kind of emblem?

HER: Yes. (...) It could even be a simple line drawn on the ground that would outline the shape of our body...

HIM: Like at a crime scene?

HER: Yes

HIM: That's morbid.

HER: I know but... that or something else.

HIM: A totem?

HER: Something like that, yes. (...) Something that would be beyond us. That would tell of our insignificance but without pointing a finger at us, without making us feel guilty.

HIM: You mean something that would recap the inventory...

HER: No. (...) Something that would be the inventory all by itself.

Time passes.

HIM: Maybe the Prince could be that.

HER: I am not sure.

HIM: The Prince of Miguasha. (...) There's an interesting vestigial remain.

HER: Well, why not?

HIM: A fossil.

HER: With little stumps.

HIM: Lungs and gills...

HER: All kinds of advantages.

HIM: You can say that again.

HER: Even with both lungs and gills it's hard to breathe when you're in a rock.

HIM: It's almost impossible.

Time passes.

HER: What do you think, will we have little stumps in three hundred and sixty million years?

HIM: Little stumps of wings, yes.

Time passes.

HER: Is that a redundancy?

HIM: A metaphor.

HER: Will metaphors also...

HIM: Yes, of course.

Time passes.

HER: What about periphrases, chiasmi, and anacolutha?

HIM: Yes, them too. (...) Things haven't really changed, you know; we're still pretty much in the same spot.

HER: It's a horrible way to go.

HIM: The death of the woman I hit by the side of the road in the middle of the night, that was a horrible way to go.

HER: Shut up.

HIM: I suppose that for us, they've planned something extravagant.

HER: Who *they*?

HIM: I don't know! Whoever! There must be some people who are responsible somewhere! Not everybody can be as innocent as the lamb!

HER: You mean the whole hierarchy?

HIM: If that's what it takes.

HER: You mean the idea men, the actors, the performers? (...)
Even the roadies?

HIM: The whole crew, yes.

HER: I guess it calls for a well-trained team.

HIM: A very tight one.

HER: Will they be wearing the kind of outmoded protective gear we see in movies: you know, these kinds of facemasks and pink plastic overalls?

HIM: I doubt it.

HER: And why not?

HIM: I don't think they'll be wearing that.

HER: It would be in very bad taste, you're right.

HIM: Like a striped sock or an empty shoe abandoned by the side of the road.

HER: A striped sock or a garbage bin filled with organic waste...

HIM: Biomedical.

HER: What?

HIM: Biomedical waste. That's how we say that.

Time passes.

HER: You're always correcting me. I hate that! If I had meant *biomedical waste*, I would have said *biomedical waste*; I wouldn't have said *organic waste*. You always twist everything I say.

HIM: You're the one who...

HER: Shut up, already! Listen!

Time passes. The dogs howl.

Did you give water to the dogs?

HIM: No. (...) I think they get scared at night.

HER: It's already nighttime?

HIM: No. I think it's still too early. (...) But it just got colder all of a sudden.

HER: You figured that out by yourself?

HIM: It doesn't change a thing.

Time passes.

HER: I think they're thirsty.

HIM: I can't tell from here.

HER: You should have brought them in.

HIM: What for? There's no way I could've known.

HER: You should have sensed it. I sensed it.

Time passes. The howling stops.

It's been churning in my gut for months.

HIM: You may have felt it but there was no way you could've known what it meant.

HER: Nobody could've known. (...) Do you know what it means?

HIM: No. (...) It makes no difference.

HER: The difference is that I'm a woman.

HIM: So what?

HER: Women sense these kinds of things. They know when it happens to them. It's not a sixth sense thing... It's something extra that was given to us.

Time passes.

HIM: You mean a kind of bonus?

HER: Yes... and no... What I mean is that we suffer more than you men do.

HIM: I think you're mistaking suffering with loss of efficiency. Women are simply more fragile. They deteriorate faster than men do.

HER: That's not true. You always turn everything into a joke. You're exactly like a man.

HIM: I am a man!

HER: Yes. But what I'm talking about is the true capacity women have to feel pain.

Time passes.

HIM: I don't see what difference that makes.

HER: I'll show you. Do you see the orange spots dancing in front of your eyes?

HIM: They aren't dancing.

HER: Whatever. Do you see them?

HIM: They kind of pulsate.

HER: So you see them?

HIM: Yes.

HER: Do you feel something?

HIM: No, they eventually go away.

HER: Do you suffer?

HIM: No. They go away, but then they reappear right away again.

Time passes.

HER: See! You don't suffer!

HIM: We could say that they don't go away easily. (...) I don't know. (...) I just realize that I got scared over nothing.

HER: You have to look at it as an experience.

HIM: Right. (...) Fear is so often pointless.

HER: That's true. (...) Sometimes I really feel like none of this is actually happening.

HIM: It's a matter of perspective.

HER: I feel like none of this is really happening.

HIM: I know what that's like.

HER: I feel that someone could just burst in here and yell: "Surprise!"

HIM: I know what you mean.

HER: "Gotcha!"

HIM: "From the beginning!"

HER: "From your first feeding!"

HIM: "Your first bicycle!"

HER: "Your first day at school!"

HIM: "Your first puppy love!"

HER: "Your first hangover..."

HIM: "Gotcha!"

HER: "You fell for it!"

Time passes.

HIM: Someone opens the curtain.

HER: Tada!

HIM: Everything is as it was before. Nothing's changed.

HER: And it goes on.

HIM: Everything goes on as if nothing happened.

HER: Yes.

Time passes.

HIM: I guess I don't care anymore, now.

HER: What?

HIM: That that woman died.

HER: Oh shut up! Shut up!

HIM: She wasn't hurting anybody. (...) I remember her name.

HER: Shut up. Don't say it.

HIM: Joan Smith.

HER: Don't you say her name.

HIM: Joan Smith had her fifteen minutes of fame thanks to me.

HER: Right before falling into total oblivion.

HIM: Not really. They put her picture on the front page of the newspaper. (...) I've got it somewhere, her picture.

HER: I threw it out.

HIM: I don't know where I put it.

HER: I threw it out.

HIM: It was a weird picture. It just showed her left foot with a striped sock on it sticking out of a red blanket. According to the article...

HER: Don't say her name.

HIM: Joan Smith was an industrial laundry plant machinist. "She leaves behind her husband, Richard, their two children, Rebecca and Jonathan. Her parents, her brothers and sisters and..."

HER: That has nothing to do with us.

HIM: ...her colleagues at the laundry plant held a heartfelt service in her honour."

HER: It's out of our hands.

HIM: They wrote that in the article: "heartfelt service..."

HER: Out of our jurisdiction.

HIM: Word for word: "heartfelt service..."

HER: They write a bunch of crap. (...) Makes no difference.

Time passes.

HIM: All I'm saying is that she wasn't hurting anybody.

HER: She had no business being there, that's all.

HIM: She was just walking on the side of the road! That's not a crime!

HER: That's not the point. It's dangerous.

HIM: I used to do that a lot.

HER: It's dangerous to walk at night on a country road. You have to stay on your toes; she must have known that!

HIM: Maybe she did. I'm not sure.

Time passes.

HER: Maybe she wanted to leave. Maybe that's what she wanted: to cross the ocean.

HIM: You mean die?

HER: I mean leave. (...) You never thought that maybe she had decided to end it all?

HIM: No. (...) A fraction of a second before I hit her I saw in her eyes that she wasn't expecting it.

HER: You just made that up.

HIM: No.

HER: You're making it up as you go along.

HIM: No. (...) I mean that when a woman is twenty-six years old she has her whole life in front of her.

HER: Not all.

HIM: What?

HER: Not all women.

HIM: No. Not that's true. I deprived her of the best years of her life.

A long time passes. He lights up a cigarette.

HER: Put that out.

HIM: But even death row inmates are allowed one last cigarette!

HER: Not true! Not all of them! Not you.

HIM: But it's a tradition.

HER: Put that shit out.

HIM: You're pissing me off!

HER: Don't be rude!

He smokes.

HIM: You were already a bitch when I met you!

HER: Shut up!

He coughs.

HIM: No, you've gone too far. This time you're gonna hear me out. You won't keep me from talking anymore. (...) You know when I saw that woman on the side of the road...

HER: Oh please, not again!

HIM: I could have steered away to avoid her. (...) I could have done it. (...) I had, all in all, one second to do so... One teeny tiny second to avoid her... but I didn't do it. (...) I hesitated.

HER: One teeny tiny second is not hesitating. Your reflexes were simply too slow.

HIM: I hesitated one fraction of a second too long.

HER: What does it matter now anyway? You always complicate everything.

HIM: No, it's quite simple. It's just... a slightly blurred image that won't come off the screen.

Time passes.

HER: She died on impact.

HIM: I never believed that. No. I never believed she died on impact...

HER: That's what they said.

HIM: But I never believed it. Nothing dies right away. The heart may stop beating, it's true, but the brain goes on living. The hair and nails keep on growing for a while. It's a phenomenon that we can't observe with the naked eye of course, but it happens; it's real. The hair and nails of the dead keep growing as if all was normal, as if they didn't know they were dead. No one told them. It's a scientific fact. So what can we do against that?

HER: Against what?

HIM: Against the impossibility of death! Against the fact that life persists, wants to continue in spite of

everything, in one form or another? (...) How can we explain that?

HER: I don't.

HIM: Take the accident, for example, how do you explain that twenty years later I still remember the whole scene exactly as if had just taken place yesterday...

HER: You'd do better to continue your inventory instead of saying such stupidities...

HIM: ... but that I totally forgot her face? I can still remember how she flew over the car like a wounded or lame bird... but her face... it's just...

HER: You said it yourself: An incomplete inventory is pointless. It's only an estimate!

They talk over each other.

HIM: The strangest thing is that for years that woman really occupied my mind... She came into my life at the exact moment I took her out of hers.

HER: The Northern Lights have disappeared. The forests, the lakes...

HIM: In a way, I could even say that she kept on living in me.

HER: There are the malls, underground parking lots...

HIM: Through me.

HER: ... registered retirement saving plans...

HIM: When we made love, the two of us...

HER: ... credit cards, bank statements...

HIM: I used to imagine that I was making love to her, to the dead woman. I would fantasize about her body and it turned me on...

HER: Pig.

HIM: It's the truth.

HER: I'll never forgive you.

HIM: I know.

Time passes.

HER: Even the sun is trying to disappear now.

HIM: Anyway, it's not really anybody. Just an image that...

HER: So why do you have to talk about her all the time?

HIM: Maybe it's a hormone.

HER: A what?

HIM: A hormone, you know: a substance secreted by a gland hidden inside our bodies and that forces us to tell the truth.

Time passes.

HER: A truth serum?

HIM: If you like.

HER: At a time like this?

HIM: Yes.

Time passes.

HER: So is that it? You're obsessed with that woman? Is it because of her that you stopped touching me?

HIM: No. (...) That would be too easy.

HER: Maybe you thought I didn't understand? You thought I didn't notice anything.

HIM: No.

HER: Of course. True to yourself. You planned the whole thing, is that it? You waited until the very end to throw all this crap in my face, is that it? (...) I can surprise you too, you know? Did you know that on that beach, in Miguasha, I found out for the first time in my life that I could have been a mother?

HIM: Even hyenas can do that.

HER: Shut up. I would have been a good mother.

HIM: So can spiders, lice... (...) It's true, sorry. You had the right capacities.

HER (*furious*): Capacities?

HIM: Yes... on the physiological level. (...) I mean, you had all the necessary equipment to produce offspring but you didn't do it.

HER: Produce?

HIM: Yes, spawn! You had all the necessary equipment needed to spawn and you didn't do it. Your womb dried up.

HER: You... piece... of... shit. (...) Well! I did do it! Hah!

HIM: What?

HER: Spawn!

A long time passes. He looks at her for the first time.

HER: It was on that last trip, when we came back from Miguasha; I went to a clinic. It didn't take very long. They removed it as if it had been just a simple excrescence, a piece of useless, bothersome flesh.

HIM: You? You had...

HER: It only took a few minutes.

HIM: You had an...

HER: The staff was very polite.

HIM: Abortion? An abortion is not spawning! (...) Why didn't you ever tell me?

HER: I didn't tell you.

HIM: Why not?

HER: I have no regrets. How could I have regrets? I never told you.

Time passes.

HIM: You're sure you didn't want it?

HER: That's not what I said. I said nothing about what I wanted.

Time passes.

HIM: So you've never had regrets about getting...

HER: Shut up.

HIM: ... about not giving it a chance?

A long time passes.

Did you know that at some point in its development, the human embryo looks like it has gills, exactly like a tadpole? (...) Exactly like the Prince.

HER: You're horrid. (...) Albert didn't have gills.

HIM: Who?

HER: Albert, our son.

HIM: You're really starting to lose it.

HER: I am not. (...) I know what I'm saying. I'd decided to call him Albert. When I had the abortion I was in my fourth month.

HIM: Albert, what a name!

HER: I've always honoured the memory of his name.

HIM: The memory of his name! Honestly! In the fourth month I'm willing to concede that it's *almost* a human being...

HER: Almost? You stupid old fool! But that little lump of flesh that was secretly multiplying in my womb and that threatened to erupt into our lives like

an elephant in a china shop, I killed it because you didn't want it!

HIM: You didn't kill anybody.

HER: So you thought you'd cornered the market, eh? You thought you were the all-around champ of domestic murders, of dirt and slime? Well no, buddy, guess what? My hands too are covered in blood!

HIM: Stop. You're only hurting yourself.

HER: Hah! But at least, I never stooped as low as necrophilia!

HIM: That's completely different; in my fantasies she was always alive.

HER: You disgust me.

HIM: You just don't get it.

HER: Of course not. How could I possibly get anything?

HIM: You're right. It's none of my business. (...) It's a meaningless murder, just like millions of others.

HER: You will never cease to amaze me. (...) You're so much more of a coward and a wimp than I had pegged you for.

HIM: I can leave you alone if you'd prefer.

HER: No need. (...) I'm the one who's leaving.

HIM: Where to?

HER: I'm leaving. (...) and that's the truth.

HIM: Well go on then.

HER: I'm leaving.

HIM: I won't hold you back. (...) You won't make it any further than the veranda.

HER: It's none of your business! It doesn't concern you. I'm the one who's leaving and I'll do it my way. Don't butt in!

HIM: Fine.

HER: Stay out of it!

HIM: As you wish.

HER: Don't tell me what to do!

HIM: No worries.

HER: Shut up! Shut the hell up!

HIM: I won't say another word.

HER: I told you to shut up!

HIM: But... you're the one who...

HER: Shut up, will you?

Curtains.