

Cecilie Løveid

**The Tightrope Walker
(Birth is Music)**

English version by Julian Garner

NORDISKA STRAKOSCH TEATERFÖRLAGET ApS

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characters:

Susanne approx. 40

Axel approx. 50

Rita approx. 20

Kristian approx. 20

Two Men

The Tightrope Walker is set in the present.
It can be reality, it can be the internal journey a woman makes as she lies in the labour ward having just given birth, waiting for her new life to begin.

ACT 1

MUSEUM.

Scene 1.

(A history museum.
A large display cabinet, lit, empty. Susanne,
dressed in black, elegant. Eyeing something she can
see in the cabinet. Smiles, secretively.)

SUSANNE

I have dreamt of silk
Of entering a different rhythm

I have dreamt
Backwards

Backwards
Backwards in time

First, sand on asphalt
as in a movie

Then:
Leap out from the time-mountain
Leap into a shape
which is the solution:
The Coil of Time

I love weights, scales
I love balance
That is my wish

I have a story
When I tell it
it sounds
like a story from
a woman's magazine

(Strokes her body)

Do you really want
my old sour milk?

(Smiles)

TURBULENCE

Scene 2

(Susanne and Axel's apartment.
Susanne is tense. She's been awaiting Axel's return
from a trip abroad. She is going to tell him she is
pregnant. Axel enters, wearing a pale-blue, light-
weight American suit. They anticipate each others
smile and embrace.)

SUSANNE

Is it you?
The plane, didn't it shake
just a little?
Turbulence

AXEL

Nothing to speak of
Were you so afraid
so lonely

SUSANNE

Where's my perfume?

AXEL

Your fragrance

SUSANNE

(Opens the bottle and sniffs)
Protection
You remembered it this time, also
I've enough now
for the next nine lives
at least
(Laughs)

(Axel kisses her)

SUSANNE

Suddenly you happened
to think of me
For the first time of the journey
My fragrance

AXEL

It's you I have danced with
always

SUSANNE

And I have danced
only with you

AXEL

(Uncertain) You should've come
Next time

SUSANNE

To warmer climes
With the baby

(Anxious as to his reaction.)

AXEL

Is that still
so important to you
What will you do with it?

SUSANNE

Stroke its skin
smell it
living

AXEL

Careful careful

SUSANNE

Careful?
Birth is music.

AXEL

And then
afterwards
it grows

SUSANNE

Be proud
picture yourself
pushing the baby-carriage through town
yellow carriage, green wheels

AXEL

Grandpa

SUSANNE

When I was little I met
a women who had twins
two girls
a bird and a butterfly
she said
as she put one to each breast

(Holds her breasts in her hands)

AXEL

Careful careful

SUSANNE

Why careful?

AXEL

And so, then?
What then?

SUSANNE

We've been given a new life
And so, then,
life goes on

AXEL

And she goes on
playing with her dolls
It's not like that
You know it never is

SUSANNE

Sitting up in a plane
Wheels pulled up
The plane flying
all you can do is sit there
Hoping they'll give you a drink
a movie to distract you
The Sound of Music
hoping they'll give you a hot towel
to wipe away your anxiety
Aren't you going to take your coat off?

(He takes it off)

God, we're falling -
Then I think,
It doesn't matter.
Axel will manage.
I have no dependants
If I die
what does it matter?

Cut through the clouds
Then I buy spirits
and remember you
your fragrance
and I buy you aftershave

(Grasps his hand.)

AXEL

Not a bad description
actually

SUSANNE

I'm thinking of the town
I discovered in the desert
One great corpse
People have lived
have filled and emptied
water-jars

AXEL

Life was
A confirmation
that we ARE. We're alive.

SUSANNE

Every time you go away from me
Are you trying to
say
I'm dead?
Are you rehearsing that?

(Axel shakes his head, despairingly.)

Maybe I'll die on a plane
Maybe that's where
I will die
while everybody flies on
and my body flies on

(Smiles.)

It would look good
on my curriculum vitae
if I died on a plane

(Laughs.)

AXEL

Each time you go away from me
Are you trying to say
consider me dead
Perhaps I'll never come
back.
May I not be permitted
to dance with you?

FLIGHT ALL FLIGHT

Scene 3

(Post coitus. Susanne lies as if dead. Axel strokes her back.)

SUSANNE

Now I'm back.
Haven't I always come back
to you?

(She rises, acts out the following.)

As a little girl
I could both
speak French
and dance the minuett

My father came with curb-stones in his hands
and said: Read

I lay on my back beneath the table
wagging my tail with delight

(Lies down, so Axel may scratch her behind the ears.)

He insisted that I read
each and every stone in the building
Dostoyevsky, Ibsen
the oriental religions
the history of art
I read
and read
Folklore
the art of curation
the lost objects
the wonders of the world
the lost thoughts
the lost techniques
the burned libraries
the huge loneliness of
a pair of human legs

struck me
they were
abandoned
to infinity

earth mountain
stone water

And so
I began
shouting by daylight
messages meant
only
to be whispered
in the dark

I looked up to Father
Axel
He pulled at me
He pulled out my hair
He lay more stones in my hands
Other stones
At first, they were comfortable
warm
as a heated floor

But eventually

(She burns herself and drops the stone.)

I looked up to him
like I look up to you,
now, Axel
to where the suit-stripes stop
and the neck-tie ceases
and I
loved him

I looked up
and many times
later
I have looked up to men
and seen nothing but
the air and sky

and there where the stripes stop
and an endless
'Match of the Day'
begins
He smiled
His face was a precipice

AXEL

And here, there's just air?

(Susanne doesn't answer.)

Shouldn't I have come back?
Shall I phone
your father
for you?

(Susanne tries to stare him out.)

SUSANNE

There's a telephone
on the market now
which shows you
the eyes
of the person you're talking to

AXEL

(Looks away.)
Just the eyes?

SUSANNE

(Teasing)
Just the eyes, what else?
The nose?
Just the nose?

AXEL

Isn't my smile
dangerous enough
for you?

SUSANNE

Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

AXEL

You think so?

SUSANNE

So it's always been
in the past
But I'm
the Red Queen from Alice
screaming
OFF WITH THEIR HEADS

AXEL

Ask to be excused
loving
Come back
from Wonderland

SUSANNE

Balance. I must have
balance

AXEL

With her it's flight
all flight

SUSANNE

Straight down
It goes straight down
Leap off

AXEL

Flight

SUSANNE

(smiling)
No!
I thought
because you liked jazz
and I liked jazz
you were someone else

(Laughs, somewhat hysterically.)

AXEL

Flight all flight

SUSANNE

I want to go back
to my time
to the 18th century
You know what I long for
(To herself.) His face
was
a precipice?

(Thinks about the child.)

I can't tell him
He'd kill it

AXEL

(Turns away from her.)
Flight all flight.

(Susanne begins to move away from him.)

Is that the solution to all women's problems,
to have a baby?

YOU'RE TOO OLD!

SUSANNE

Because
some of us
need

music

ACT 2

HARPSICHORD 1

Scene 4

(Susanne alone in her great OPEN LANDSCAPE. Curled up, turned in on herself. Two men in white overalls, their faces covered, come on, slowly pushing a white harpsichord. They stop, wipe the sweat from their brows. Susanne does not react. They continue towards Susanne. Stop and share a drink from a bottle.)

MAN

Where shall we put it, Ma'aam?

SUSANNE

Here
Right here

MAN

Here?

SUSANNE

Yes

MAN

Wouldn't it be
better
to put it inside?

SUSANNE

I can't
cope
without
music
Right here
where I am now

You understand, don't you?
you who are so musical

MAN

I wouldn't advise Ma'am to
let it stand out
in the cold
it will get
so out of tune

MAN

Snowstorms
and harpsichords

MAN

No good

SUSANNE

When a woman says
she needs something
she needs it

MAN

That's right, Ma'am
that's quite correct
So, what
you'll get someone else
to help you?

SUSANNE

Thank you for your help

(They go out.

Susanne begins to touch the instrument.
Then she spins it around, wildly, around and
around.)

Freezes.)

ROCOCCO NIGHT

Scene 5

(Night in the rococco garden. A castle in the distance, illuminated. A white parachute hanging from a tree, like the cadavar of a bird. Rita and Kristian arrive. They've come from a party and are heading for the castle, she in an evening dress and cape, he in a white suit and tail-coat. They are playing a game, but are not playful. Kristian virtually pulls Rita along. She's drunk.)

RITA

So tired so tired
Why did you stop in the middle of the Ravel?
You never do anything properly.
Why are you pulling me along like this?
I have
no energy
You said
something to me
In the middle of the Ravel
Soon, I'll be nothing
but a see-through dress
with nothing inside it to see

KRISTIAN

With yourself inside it
Only kids want to know
where are we going

RITA

This is abuse
is what this is!

KRISTIAN

Wake up
Tell me more
you haven't finished
you're almost asleep
Where were we?
Longing
desperately
for him
me

RITA

(Yawns) Yes
I'm lying, asleep, in the garden

KRISTIAN

With your hand, thus

RITA

I lie with my hand
thus
she lay with her hand, thus
realises it is night
and puts it to her face

(Sniffs her hand violently. Likes the smell.)

Hopeless
Letting me sleep
In the middle of Ravel

KRISTIAN

(Rita lets him sniff her hand.)

She's hungry
hence
the mouth

RITA

She's unsettled
frightened
resists it
but must
Can't you see I'm
dog tired?

KRISTIAN

Must have a man

RITA

She gets up
dresses quickly
he's practicing
each note costs him dear
You're using me, now

(Tries to break free of him, but he holds her,
tightly.)

KRISTIAN

Naked
but for a cardigan
What was it you
wanted me for?

RITA

My own
satisfaction
Taxi!
(She waves, he pulls her arm down.)

She comes to his room
every note
keen
she knocks on the door
repeatedly
peers through the keyhole
wants so much to enter
she sees him in there
At last he comes

KRISTIAN

Says it's impossible

RITA

He says it's impossible
She doesn't believe him
forces her way in
climbs onto his bed
He says, it's impossible
that Ravel was so elegant
in military attire

KRISTIAN

I want to be like him

RITA

But you can't
just reject a woman
like that!
Not accept me
accept me
who was so

KRISTIAN

But it was impossible
didn't you see that?

RITA

He said
I know it's impossible
to satisfy you

(They stand beside the parachute. Embrace,
hungrily. Go off to make love.)

HARPSICHORD 2

Scene 6

(The OPEN LANDSCAPE. Sharp morning light. Susanne has fallen asleep at the harpsichord. She wakes, slowly, and strokes the instrument as if it were a person. Listens for music inside it. She is happy. She gets up and is about to open the lid when the two men come back on. They approach her, threateningly.)

MAN

This instrument

SUSANNE

Yes?

MAN

It's not payed for

SUSANNE

Oh?

Send the bill to my husband

MAN

Can't you settle up here and now?

SUSANNE

Not payed for?

How can I settle up?

Do you know the way a soldier
rapes a woman?

MAN

No

SUSANNE

I shall show you

(She changes her demeanour, becomes a sexy vamp, pawing at their bodies. They try to kiss her, but she doesn't want that.)

No kissing

(She gathers her dress up over her head and ties it in a knot.)

That's the way a soldier
likes his victim to be

(They fuck her. Suddenly, she screams terribly. The men get off her.)

MAN

That was that

(Susanne stands, her dress still tied up over her head.)

SUSANNE

Are we settled, then?

(The men take the harpsichord)

MAN

Unfortunately, Ma'am,
we must have cash
How do you think our boss'd be
if we came back
without cash?

(They push the instrument off.)

SUSANNE

You should be paying
me!

MAN

Now that's what I call
a real woman

SUSANNE

(Shouts after them)
I can't
play

(Lights down)

THE NEW CURATOR

Scene 7

(In the Rococco garden, some weeks later. Summer. In the background, Kristian is practicing his violin. Rita is alone. She's working with the large white parachute, together with a lace shawl. Arranges them into a still-life, which she then moistens and sows with cress seeds. Nearby, is a music stand with the beginnings of several compositions upon it.)

RITA

Openings
 Beginnings is all he does
 I wonder if he ever
 When we were making love
 Ladies on the walls
 watching us continuously
 Their eyes noting each movement
 We were in a boat
 Rocking

A white bush
 of luminous roses
 approached
 drew nearer

Then, suddenly, the image was whisked away

(Susanne suddenly stands before her, stately, professional, with briefcase. Her dress, however, is inside-out. Rita greets her as a long lost friend. Begins stroking her clothes. Susanne reacts as if this were quite natural. Offers her hand.)

SUSANNE

I'm the new
 curator
 As I'm sure you know

RITA

Susanne
We've been expecting you
Now we shall see
some real activity
at the castle

SUSANNE

Some people think
I'm nothing
but a common
whore

evidently

RITA

What a divine colour

SUSANNE

You're not blind?

RITA

Blind?

SUSANNE

I'd been rehearsing
a meeting
with a blind woman
that she was blind
and the first thing she said was
What a beautiful
dress you're wearing
what a divine colour

RITA

Don't swoon
It's just the way I am
was it blue?

SUSANNE

Yes
blue
porcelain-blue
So you're Rita
I'm putting my soul
into this
project

RITA

Yes
I'm Rita

(They smile at each other. Kristian ceases playing.)

Kristian
he
always stops
in the middle of Ravel

SUSANNE

That isn't Ravel

RITA

What is it, then?
One
of his own?
(Laughs)
Divine colour.
(About the dress)

SUSANNE

I searched many years
 for the right colours
 my colours
 My entire wardrobe
 is based
 on a limited range of colours
 everything matches
 But then I began to long
 for something totally different
 I'm getting close

RITA

Red is quite becoming

SUSANNE

Blood soaking into sand

RITA

Red
 for sensuality and fire
 To be taken seriously
 forcefully

Blue
 for bullet-proof
 energy

White
 the most powerful colour
 or non-colour
 diamond wisdom
 calm

Black
 for mystery and oblivion
 Black
 Draws energy from others
 for career-women
 and nuns

SUSANNE

Black
I've been taken
for a common
tart

RITA

Black
is fine

SUSANNE

It makes one look
every bit
one's age

RITA

I've sown cress here
As they do in Poland
on the bridal veil
It means luck
of course

SUSANNE

But I have
some clothes
whose colours
clash completely
with all the others
I don't know what to do

RITA

Why is it
one so often
confides
in complete strangers?
Despite the fact
they hardly listen?
Barely give one a
second glance?

SUSANNE

One doesn't share real experiences
or pain
Besdies, I'm not telling everything

RITA

Do you have
a lover?

SUSANNE

Yes.

(Rita takes of one of Susanne's shoes, attempts to
place in it in her still-life.)

RITA

Often I'm afraid
of being crushed
destroyed
by love
but then I'm saved by
what is it saves me?

SUSANNE

Have you ever tried
to put a end
to it all?

RITA

I've yet to discover my colours
I prefer to go naked

You look like
the cover of a magazine
You were on the cover of a magazine
That was when we tried to contact
you
You
could save
the castle

SUSANNE

You didn't answer me

RITA

I'm one of those
who helps themselves
As I'm doing now
I've no wish
to be numbered
amongst the broken,
the damaged
So the answer is no

By the way, a letter came
for you
(Takes out the letter. Susanne opens it.)
There.

SUSANNE

Listen!
Madame, all I can say is that I love you!
Yes yes yes and it continues:
Farewell, dearly beloved and most
beloved
of all women
I embrace you with all my
heart

RITA

Goodness, how wonderful
Your husband?

SUSANNE

No, not him
No, it's a duke
writing to
Marie Antoinette
in 1789

RITA

She who recommended
the starving
eat cake?

SUSANNE

That was just a vicious rumour
put about
afterwards
What she recommended was amour

RITA

My workshop
is this way
Everything there is white
floor cieling everything
I'm happy there
in white
But I don't suppose one can
isolate oneself
in one's white little world?

(Touches Susanne.
Susanne strokes her cheek.)

SUSANNE

Actually,
I have many lives

RITA

You too?
It's quite normal
is it not
to have many lives?

(Rita lies on the ground and stares straight up
into the air. Susanne reads the music on the
stand.)

SUSANNE

Nocturn for Rita.

(Kristian comes out. He goes to the music stand and demonstratively turn the music back over. Susanne walks over to the parachute and puts on her other shoe. Rita closes her eyes. Kristian touches her, not with his hands, but with his foot. She smiles but does not open her eyes. Susanne watches them.)

KRISTIAN

How pretty you are today, Rita
Something about you
Something happy
Something secretive
What is it?

RITA

Nothing
A dream come true
There

KRISTIAN

Is that what makes
you so happy?
Just that?

(Rita turns away from him. Susanne sweeps forward in her inside-out dress.)

SUSANNE

I am happy
only the nose
is beautiful
I don't believe
we've been introduced?

CONVERSATION GALANTE

Scene 8

(Susanne and Kristian go into the castle (or it opens out). A Rococco drawing-room, containing numerous antique objects. We see a number of rooms at once. (In perspective?) A four poster bed. The interior is indicative of a new era's neglect for the old. The furniture is covered in plastic sheets, there are punk-objects from Rita's business. The coffee-table is an electronic game based on Star Wars.)

SUSANNE

(to herself)

Your eyes are so clear
that I can read
all your thoughts

You're wondering why
I'm not at home
with my husband
why I'm not
a mother

How I could
embark upon this

(To Kristian)
How's the service here
in the castle?
Are the servants friendly?

KRISTIAN

There's no service
No servants

SUSANNE

Oh?
How disappointing

KRISTIAN

Teabags and cigarettes
Wine at night
Wine-cellar aristocrats
Dead or alive
straight from the cellar
A turbid muddle or
a clean spirit!

SUSANNE

Sounds exiting
Music?

KRISTIAN

Don't mention that word!
I can't bear it!

SUSANNE

No

KRISTIAN

This is the best place
on earth
for the imagination
In winter it's freezing
Dead rats tumble from the rafters
Black ice on the floors
But you won't be here that long
will you?

SUSANNE

You wish
to keep her
to yourself

KRISTIAN

Yes

SUSANNE

Don't worry
This is merely
a staging post
for me
a temporary shelter
I'm searching
for the hole in the wall
through which I may enter
the picture
Through the looking glass

(Rita comes in, irritated to find Kristian enjoying
Susanne's company.)

Yes, I'm sure the wine-cellar here
is most exiting!

RITA

We're at a standstill
we stand and we're still
but it only happens once
a year

SUSANNE

What about my breakfast egg?
Two, if possible

RITA

One lifts the hen
thus
that one might see

Cluuuuuuck

SUSANNE

One never has
the hen into bed with one?

RITA

What one does with one's hen
is entirely one's own affair
Noone meddles
with
the curator's business

SUSANNE

Good
Then I'll keep chickens
Grow my own saladings
and hand-make
chocolate
ice-cream

KRISTIAN

Have you any baggage
I may help you with?

SUSANNE

No.

(Rita and Kristian exchange glances.)

Basically
I'm used to most things
having lived in the Sahara
where I excavated a city

RITA

An entire city!
Goodness, what an
exhausting project
that must have been!

SUSANNE

I love it
once I start
I simply cannot
stop
It's a game

RITA

It must have been
lonely

SUSANNE

There were people there the whole time
I wanted not to emphasise
the fact I was a woman
so I shared a tent with the men
the archeologists
and their assistants
Though eventually
it became filled
with kings
princesses
Mummies
What was it I did
that was so terrible?

RITA

What an exiting life!
Like being commissioned
to decorate
the Arctic Sea

SUSANNE

The first white women
ever to go to the desert
was stoned to death
I was the second

RITA

Did you die?
I would have have died

SUSANNE

I wanted not to draw attention
to the fact I was a woman
and so, no, I didn't die
I took no house-plants with me
Not once did I cry

Not one tear
I completely forgot my gender

RITA

You were happy

(Susanne smiles radiantly at her. You understand me!)

You were happy?
I see it on you

SUSANNE

Once I sat above the desert
in an aeroplane
looking down at
sand sand sand sand

Obsessed
by the thought
of what might lie
beneath the sand
I had to go down
Under
We found a city
with streets and squares
and people
with water-jugs
and seeds
which sprouted after
a thousand years
It was quite a successful project

RITA

That city should be named
Susanne

SUSANNE

Now, Susanne wishes
to discover what lies beneath time
beneath The Now

(She begins feeling her body, nervously. She realises something is not as it should be, because she cannot locate her pockets.)

SUSANNE

I want
to enter the 18th century
To go back

(She realises from the feel of the seams that her dress is on inside-out.)

There used to be pockets here.

RITA

It's inside out, that's all

SUSANNE

So it is

(She pulls the dress off and turns it right-way-out, then puts it back on. A long, meaningful action. Beneath the dress she is wearing a three hundred year old corset and stays. Her body is white as chalk. She moves away, into her OPEN LANDSCAPE.)

KRISTIAN

Her arse swings so beautifully
when she walks

(RITA snuggles into him.)

THE TOUCH

Scene 9

(Susanne in her OPEN LANDSCAPE. Axel comes in, up right, wearing his pale-blue suit. He walks, slowly, diagonally across to where Susanne is standing, centre stage. She senses his presence and arches her head backwards into his hands. With his finger, he traces a line from the crown of her head across her face to her throat and back again. Leaves her, moves slowly diagonally up left, and out. Susanne traces the same line from the top of her head across her face to her throat and back again.)

SUSANNE

Flight
all flight
Flight

(Reaches out for Axel in a gesture of longing)

What were we promised
which so holds us
to our
side of the bargain?

(Fiddles with her hair.)

What would be our reward?
Coffee and cake at a conditori?

(Lights down. In the dark, Rita sits down at the space invader's table. Green lights, computer sounds, music, full of pain.)

ACT 3

WHALE MUSIC

Scene 10

(The castle interior. Some weeks later. Autumnal light. Susanne walks around, alone. Gathers up books, old letters, clothes, all 18th century, and places them in a trunk. She appears unconcentrated. Comes to a halt, feeling strange, has to sit. Stands again, forces herself to continue. Rita comes in with boxes and bags.)

RITA

Hello!

SUSANNE

Have you got it?

RITA

Yes, yes, fusspot

SUSANNE

Show me!

RITA

Be patient

SUSANNE

Why wait?
I want to see

RITA

Have you no sense of drama?

SUSANNE

No

(Rita takes out a roll of material, blue silk,
shakes it out.)

500 metres
It's begun

RITA

Raw silk

SUSANNE

My dream

RITA

Exclusive
Expensive

SUSANNE

Send the bill to my husband

RITA

How tense you are
It's just a party
There's enough here
to make a Big Top

SUSANNE

Don't worry about
the price

I've already sold my soul
Money is no object

RITA

Nonesense

SUSANNE

Did you remember
the accessories?

RITA

Lace
embroidery thread
sequinnes
applique
jewels

SUSANNE

Spare a thought for the lacemakers
goodness
how they laboured
so I might
go to my grave
in this

RITA

EXQUISITE

SUSANNE

They collapsed
exhausted
continued counting stitches
in their sleep
simple
though it appears so
complicated

Now all we lack
is a whale

RITA

A whale?

SUSANNE

Yes, a whale. For the crinolines
I must be laced up properly
the skirts must stand out
so the wind
really catches them

(Drapes herself in the blue material.)

Actually, my figure
is perfect
don't you think, Rita?
I don't even own a pair of trousers
they're not my style
A slender waist
and broad hips
Like a bottle of something fine
Let me look at you
Hm

RITA

Hm?

SUSANNE

I hope the corset
is suitably robust
Oh I'm fainting
Smelling salts!

(longingly.)

If only we had a whale
Whale music
You know they sing?

RITA

Seen it on t.v.

SUSANNE

They love
They love each other
They love with hearts

weighing twenty kilos each
The heart of the grampus
is something I can respect
A twenty kilo heart
thumping with desire
the ocean shivers
And they sing
To the ends of the Earth
they sing

But now, they can no longer
reach one and other

RITA

Saw the programme on t.v.

(Goes up close to Susanne. Looks at her closely.
Gently touches her breasts.)

Congratulations, Susanne!

SUSANNE

Thank you. With what? Something I did?

RITA

You're with child.

SUSANNE

Yes
No no
It's not true
it just seems I am
I refuse point blank
It must be someone else

RITA

Tender?

SUSANNE

No-o

RITA

(smiling)
 Birth?
 What's that to a woman like you?
 Shvuuuup! then
 sling it up on a pile of books
 and read on
 eat the afterbirth with a green salad
 Congratulations
 You'll go back to Axel, now
 Missing you already!

(Susanne stands, perplexed. The material slides slowly off her.)

SUSANNE

No!
 Never
 I'll put fifteen seamstresses to work
 cutting
 so we get production moving

Day and night
 they shall sew for me
 though the earth quake
 and storms blow
 danger plagues the women
 willingly
 what do they think they're making
 costumes for a carnival!
 Yes
 Let it be a carnival

Every stitch hand-sewn
 though it must pass
 through five and sixty layers
 of cloth

Whilst I remain here
 and relax from it all

And after night and day
 day and night
 the dress is ready
 And I shall board the dress
 shall be laced up
 laced
 changed

become cleaner
more silent
a lady behind her fan

(Rita begins fingering Susanne's hair. They have a contact now which they have never had before. Caring, erotic, tender, happy.)

RITA

I love you
Like I love
strange
countries

SUSANNE

Then I shall journey
to countries
beyond those
stranger countries
still

It is far
But I will let myself fall

RITA

Fall? From the plane?

SUSANNE

The time-mountain

RITA

And if the parachute
doesn't open?

SUSANNE

Then I shall fall
gently
for the first time

Gently into
the other place
behind everything

RITA

But I love you
as I love
strange
countries

(They kiss each other.)

(Ocean light. Music.)

RITA

We're whales
We sing to one and other
as we swim
We sing and we
fall in love

SUSANNE

We fall in love
with our children

RITA

Disturbing love songs
uninterrupted
by any other
wave or signal

(Kristian's practice theme emerges from the music.)

SUSANNE

You shall stay, little one
I shall not tear you out
You shall be

(Music continues. Rita and Susanne exit.)

QUESTIONS

Scene 11

(Kristian and Rita sitting on the four poster bed.
They are in the middle of a conversation. It is
some weeks later.)

RITA

Go back?

Back to the same blood-bath
we have now?The soup tureens are still
padlocked against the starving
why does she wish to go back?

KRISTIAN

She desires luxury
She desires servants

RITA

Massage
Decoutage

KRISTIAN

She desires to be her queen

RITA

And bear children
Poor children

KRISTIAN

It's a fairytale
Susanne is a fairytale

RITA

(Anxious)
I won't let you!

KRISTIAN

What?

RITA

Is this person real?

KRISTIAN

Try sticking her
in her side
with a needle!

(He pinches Rita so she squeals.)

THE DANCE AROUND LE GATEAUX CHOCOLAT

Scene 12

(Susanne enters with a huge creation of cake and fruit. Wine. She's clearly suffering with travel-fever.)

SUSANNE

Come children out of bed
Welcome!
(Curtsies deeply)
Candied oranges
le gateaux chocolat
sprinkled with orange-blossom water
I purchased from a little
17th century apothecary in Florence.

A thing worth doing
is worth doing well

RITA

We have decided
what you need
is a good masseur
and decouteur

SUSANNE

Correct

(Allows Rita to tend to her, whilst Kristian takes out a magazine with a picture of Susanne on the cover. He reads.)

KRISTIAN

(Reads) "There are those who find
Susanne O

the curator and art historian
 at Løvby castle
 a little spooky
 Not only does she appear
 old-fashioned
 (Susanne laughs, flattered)
 and speak of Marie Antoinette
 as if they were
 friends and confidants
 there is something else about her
 Something in her look
 a knowledge
 of a different time
 a different way of living
 which makes people doubt
 in fact
 whether she truly lives
 in the here and now."

(Susanne snatches the magazine from him.)

SUSANNE

"Yes, she says,
 some might believe that I believe
 I've had
 a previous life
 in the 18th century" (Laughs)
 Oh, that journalist
 he was such a sweet young man
 terrified
 I wouldn't like his curls

I told him contraception
 didn't belong in the 18th century

And when he wished to sleep with me
 said I
 Goat-gut, perhaps?

He got his
 interview
 He got it all

Today, my dress
 is not on inside-out

RITA

Have you tried to have children
before, Susanne?

SUSANNE

Tore it out

He thought of them as small
cuddly crocodiles
which threatened to become
big eaters
screamers
biters
yet more creepy-crawlies in a world
already
gone to the dogs

What will you do with them
he asked me

And now
they crawl around
in the sewers

Three metres long
eating shit
and anyone else
who happens to fall
down there

RITA

What a scumbag!

KRISTIAN

But you?

SUSANNE

You think I wanted this
They hindered
my travels

My concentration

(Lifts up her hand to see the children wriggling about in it.)

RITA

Do you have a mother?

SUSANNE

(Shouts)
Don't mention her!
I just get angry

More cake?

See
I'm a perfect birth machine
Look at my hips

A child shouldn't
stop me doing
anything
I travel
I read
I travel
I write

and soon now I shall travel
back in time

The birth will be easy
Like music

I'll feel the child coming
Spread my legs a little
thus
plopp
and it's out.

I lay it on a pile of books
And continue writing

RITA

But
the breast

SUSANNE

It shall have my milk
for the first four months
Only milk
Cheers!

Aristocratic. (ie the wine.)

RITA

But

SUSANNE

Of course,
he'll need washing
occasionally

KRISTIAN

But

SUSANNE

You can both accompany me
And we can celebrate
with champagne rose
I shall serve the afterbirth
with a green salad
Better than liver
better than kidneys
better than steak!

(Kristian wretches.)

You, who are so refined
Kristian
It's hard for you
to stomache
Nonetheless
it's what I propose
to do

(They meet in an unashamedly erotic gesture.)

KRISTIAN

You
exite me
Were you aware of that?

(He buries his head between Susanne's breasts.)

SUSANNE

We shall all go
I'll have a green coach built
with lemon-coloured wheels
like the one in which Marie Antoinette
escaped Versaille
We shall flee

RITA

Where

SUSANNE

You need to ask?
We'll lack for nothing
not wine
not nightingales
silk
And on our way
we'll find beautiful small children
at the roadside
for me to gather up and kiss
Kristian
prepare the coach!

KRISTIAN

I shall endeavour to
fulfill Madame's wish (Goes out.)

SUSANNE

He's so handsome
So sexy
He touches me, here!

(Without warning, grabs Rita between the legs.)

RITA

(sulkily)
When it came to Spring
I was happy
to be a little
promiscuous
brazen even
but come the evening
I was too weary

SUSANNE

(calls after Kristian)
Kristian, wait
a courtier's foot
should never leave the floor
but glide graciously forward
as if he were skating on ice!

KRISTIAN

Oh?

SUSANNE

You're waddling!

(Laughs exaggeratedly, runs across to Rita and
embraces her, then puts a record of gallant music
on the gramophone.)

Watch me
attempt to glide forward
As if
on thin ice

(Demonstrates the dance.)

This you must be able to do
I shall teach you to walk

RITA

Walk?
Why should you do that?
Shouldn't you teach me
to fuck
instead?

SUSANNE

Shouldn't this be authentic?

RITA

What's the point?

SUSANNE

If you know how to walk
you can always
pass as
a lady of importance

RITA

Obviously
you're the boss
Susanne

SUSANNE

Boss
what an expression
You're already a little
tired of me,
aren't you?

You must have poise
There are two ways
of walking
Positively
quite quickly
Always elegantly
(Demonstrates.)
Like Marie Antoinette
She was an expert
You're musical?

RITA

Am I?

SUSANNE

A sense of rythm?

RITA

Well

SUSANNE

Then this is no problem

Women can't walk anymore
trousers have destroyed
femininity

(Continues to demonstrate. Rita tries to copy her,
but is clearly without talent. The reult is rather
comical.)

The other way is thus
Swaying
lazily
no, more subtle
perhaps
carressingly
is better
thus

(Rita tries, but the effect is vulgar.)

(encouraging)
Very good!
Perfect
But now, less sexy
Simply glide away
promising nothing
you couldn't
care
less

RITA

Nothing is more important than
firm shoulders
sparkling eyes
a direct look
Femme fatal
That's something I've learnt

SUSANNE

(Smiling)
Nonsense!
Who told you that?
Now watch me

(Dances.)

(Rita stops beside the computer game, sets the
electronic music playing.)

SUSANNE

(Has danced some distance away)

You know why
they danced so beautifully, Rita?

The wind caught their skirts
and they could only
follow
They abandoned themselves
to fate

(Laughs happily, dances alone.)

PARACHUTE SILK

Scene 13

(Rita by the space invader's game. Kristian enters.)

RITA

Soon, I shall be nothing
but a see-through dress
with nothing inside to see

KRISTIAN

Not you

(They cross to the parachute.)

Here you are
This is you
Not that
escapist game
in there

RITA

Once
a dead man hung
from the parachute
Who was that?

And those
who went amongst the trees
to pick
bridal veils
had first to pluck
awat death and putrification
before they could find
the living the succulent
the powerful the new

KRISTIAN

That fine strong
silk
had bourn and flown

RITA

And failed

KRISTIAN

First they had to clear away
death and putrifaction.
But the birds
had been most helpful in this

And now you use
the parachute
to make
your version
of the truth
What is that
you've sewn there?

RITA

Cress
an idea
Of good fortune

KRISTIAN

From the story
of my mother and father?
Of when they were married?

RITA

Yes
It was nice
The parachute silk
they'd plucked from the trees
the silk she used for
her bridal gown

KRISTIAN

And
after the ceremony
as they emerged from the church
it began to rain

RITA

And the dress became
transparent
And everyone saw her

KRISTIAN

That was how I saw you
the first time
out here in the snow

I was shocked
at your nakedness

RITA

You're such a romantic
You'll end up with Susanne
I'm sure

KRISTIAN

Does she resemble a bride?

RITA

No
A fugative queen

The worst thing is
she makes me feel
as perculiar
as she is

I dream
about you
About you

You're standing at the foot of a slope
Entrails and scraps of food
are spread about
on the terraces above
like the aftermath
of a party or a slaughter
They lie there
quivering, steaming
One is supposed to
tread upon them

And all the time I hear
your music
Your unfinished music

And you begin to climb
the terraces
The entrails quiver and move
cry out
They're no longer alive
but they promise to behave
as if they were

KRISTIAN

Am I scared?

RITA

And I begin to sing
right into your face

KRISTIAN

Honestly
I thought
it was our
wedding
we were planning

RITA

Now, when it's over?

KRISTIAN

Isn't it always like that?

(They console one and other.)

NAKED

Scene 14

(Susanne in her OPEN LANDSCAPE:
She comes in, slowly. She's naked, her hair free.
She's holding various games, dolls, musical boxes
playing. She leans right forward.)

SUSANNE

It's you I have danced with
always

And I have danced
only with you

(Lights down.
Musical boxes continue to play.)

FAREWELL TO THE MOTHER GODDESS

Scene 15

(In front of the parachute. Rita's painting of a nude woman wearing a mask, a large coil painted on her stomach, a crescent moon in her hair, her arms are outstretched and each hand emits a powerful flash of lightning. Rita has positioned Susanne in front of the parachute. In front of her, along two axes, she places a number of sparklers supported in lumps of clay. She ignites the sparklers one by one and records the result both with a polaroid camera and on video. Susanne has remained passively compliant during this. Suddenly, she reacts violently to the proceedings.)

SUSANNE

(Kicks out at the sparklers and the painting)
Won't!

I am not a thing to be worshipped
It's pitiful
Unworthy
Guilty
no innocense in this world
Why can't I be allowed
Why can't I be allowed
to die?

(Approaches Rita, drapes herself on her.)

No no

Help me!

(Rita lets the video camera run. She lies on the ground, pulls her skirt up over her head, crosses her legs and becomes a little boy guiltily masturbating.)

RITA

Sissel!
Sissel!

SUSANNE

I feel a certain
responsibility

RITA

Sissel!
Sissel!

SUSANNE

What are you doing?

(Susanne stands. Watches Rita, fascinated.)

RITA

The sun is shining
the grass is green

And the little legless crocodile-child
look
I've no legs
he has no legs
do you see?
He lies in the grass
before you

SUSANNE

The sun is shining

RITA

Sissel!
Sissel!

SUSANNE

But Sissel isn't
my name!

RITA

Sissel is the name he calls
How should a little crocodile-child know
what you are called?
He knows no better
Sissel could have been
your name

SUSANNE

Yes, my parents
could
why not
have called me Sissel
But I don't

RITA

Who is he?
Is he the child whose legs
you tore off
when you ripped him out
that time?
Who is he?

SUSANNE

No no!

RITA

You could go to him
and say:
Good morning, Crocodile-child
your Sissel is here
and sucked his cock
for him
and he would be
happy
because he has always
believed this

would cause
his legs to
grow anew

And you came

SUSANNE

I did

RITA

And you came

SUSANNE

I did?

RITA

And you took him into your mouth

SUSANNE

Yes
I did
that's true

And his legs and feet
began to grow

And they grew and they
grew
and soon he
was a man!

(Rita stands.)

How happy he was!
In the grass and the sun shining
and noone could detect
any flaw
anywhere
and noone
had any thought
of dying

They'd forgotten that

(She and Rita very close, exhausted.)

RITA

Shall I make a copy for you?
We could call it
the birth

SUSANNE

(confused)
Have you
recorded that, too?

What have you done
How vulgar
How cheap

How could you
trick me so

RITA

Trick you?
It was what you wanted

All I want
is

SUSANNE

You little shit!
You fucking shit!
Go away
Go away!

RITA

Yes I'm going

(She leaves. Susanne remains, shattered.)

RITA'S FAREWELL TO THE CASTLE

Scene 16

(Rita approaches Kristian.)

KRISTIAN

Rita
my little Rita

I shall
miss you

deep down
inside

RITA

When the flax blossoms
in the field below the castle
when it turns blue
you must photograph it
it's something I have never done

Something I
never did

KRISTIAN

I shall do it

RITA

I cannot
remain here
I cannot bear
to watch any more
Take care of her

She has
opened me

(Touches him)

You have a lovely
nose

She's made
an opening in the
white
through which
darkness
pours forth

A picture

I dare not look at

I'm frightened
of what
will happen next

(Kisses him.)

My hands
shall dream of
this nose
The hands
dream
of the nose

KRISTIAN

(smiles)
And the rest?

RITA

Dreams also
of the nose

(Begins to leave.)

Remember me
Forget-me-not

Remember me
Forget-me-not

(Lights down. Music.)

HARPSICHORD III

Scene 17

(Susanne's OPEN LANDSCAPE:
Wind, winter. Susanne approaches from afar. Pushing
the harpsichord in front of her. She's heavily
pregnant and utterly wretched. Positions the
harpsichord centre stage and opens the lid. On the
inside of the lid is an old fashioned picture of a
couple making love.
Susanne is holding a piece of knitting. A tiny
baby's jumper of yellow wool.)

SUSANNE

Aren't you singing?
If I sing
noone will believe
in me

Whenever my mother wanted peace
she would go to the barn
and bury herself in hay

She had five children
She buried herself nice and deep

I'm not sure which animal
I should compare her to

whichever one
buries itself deepest
to attain
freedom

Hides itself away
to be free

There was never a scream

It was quieter
that usual

it was quiet
and we children
couldn't
jump in the hay
and laugh.

(Axel comes in. He's wearing the same suit, but is less immaculate than before. He breaks into Susanne's OPEN LANDSCAPE, and the lighting changes. Susanne reaches out, blindly, trying to grab hold of him. He approaches her at a tangent.)

SUSANNE

RITA!

AXEL

Aren't you even
going to say
you're pleased to see me?

SUSANNE

(still addressing Rita)

Can you see
Look
See
how the skin around my eyes
has changed hue?

(She suddenly realises it is Axel. Reacts with fear, as if seeing a murderer.)

AXEL

Susanne

(She runs away. Axel chases her, captures her, drags her back. She struggles to break free. He holds her tightly.)

SUSANNE

Do you know how soldiers
rape a woman?

AXEL

No
But I must decide
quite simply
whether or not
I wish to go on living

If I shall go on living
without you
because I have
no other
dreams
than you

SUSANNE

Actually, Axel,
I have more than one life!

AXEL

I know

SUSANNE

I'm not
what you think I am

AXEL

I know

SUSANNE

(has her first contraction)

There are dead children
hanging from you
Can't you see them?
Go away!

AXEL

I don't understand

SUSANNE

Just sniff at me
smell me
What do I smell of?
Can you use me
as your lover?

Or should I
be put to some other
task
Sewing or
washing?

AXEL

Are you happy now?
Have you found
someone else?

SUSANNE

No

AXEL

I thought
so long as she's not sick
dead
I have had many a glimpse
of you

I sit dreaming
Incapable
of
work
incapable of
discussion

Perhaps she's hurt
sick
dead

SUSANNE

I'm not dead
I'm standing on the mountain
I'm smiling!

(Has her second contraction. Axel pulls her up from the harsichord, drags her after him, ignoring her protests.)

AXEL

You can't stay out here
you should be in bed

SUSANNE

(Protesting.) NO!

HARPSICHORD IV

Scene 18

(Susanne and Axel on the ground by the harpsichord.)

SUSANNE

I don't feel
as you do
I'm thinking
Is he who he says he is
Before I continue

risking destroying
my life
I want to put the whole thing
to the test

Give myself a
trial run

The man who had control
over me
must have been a
gangster!

AXEL

Who is the father
of this child
Old-Erik?

SUSANNE

You are!

(Axel laughs, contemptuously.)

AXEL

I think it's quite
amusing
that you're having
another go

(Susanne has her third contraction.)

SUSANNE

Remember you said,
Fat men
make the best lovers

AXEL

I'm your husband

SUSANNE

You were also
quite fat

AXEL

This thing's
nothing to do with me

SUSANNE

Nor me
(Laughs)

AXEL

Perhaps it didn't happen

SUSANNE

I think there was something
between us
A marriage

AXEL

It's all very vague

SUSANNE

And
in the meantime
I've travelled
so far

AXEL

You were at it
With the postman
With the butcher
With everyone
Everyone!

SUSANNE

I'll never be able
to explain, properly,
who I am
I've been mistaken
for a common
whore

How sad
All I wanted

was to enjoy myself in cafes

But there's nothing
more
sexy
than me
with a briefcase
Obviously?

AXEL

Come here
make love to me
Come

SUSANNE

Do you remember
when I chopped our bed
into pieces
with an axe?
No

AXEL

You're so beautiful

Never before have I
seen you so beautiful

(She stands before him, provoking him with her
nonchalance.)

SUSANNE

I've had a dream
come true
of course
I'll not let you
destroy it now

You killed them
time and time again

AXEL

Forgive me
Forget it

(Susanne has her fourth contraction.)

SUSANNE

You killed this one
Because you couldn't control
the outcome

Whether it would be
white or black
A child or a calf

Yours or mine

A little normality is
too much to ask for

But one should
ask for the moon

You weren't interested
So I had to
look elsewhere

Why do men never see
that the road is open
that escape is possible?

Straight through the wall
and away

You build your houses
on the great body
of the Earth

Certain you'll never
be shaken off

Why can't you be
a part
of the Whole?

What have you been promised
which so holds you
to your
side of the bargain?

What's your reward in the end?

Coffee and cakes at the conditori?

Is my only reward
the knowledge that
Haitian ladies
paint their bottoms blue
whilst their Parisian counterparts
paint their faces
white?

(Axel is beside her. He strokes her, kisses her,
she cries. He lays her down, tries to undress her.
He doesn't understand she's in the process of
giving birth. She resists him.)

SUSANNE

(Smiling.)

Now I remember
Suddenly!
You traced a line
down my face
like this
isn't that right?

And you said
You're the one I've danced with
always

When I made love to you
Your face
was
a precipice

AXEL

Susanne

(They relax, lie still.)

AXEL

Be here
Here and now

SUSANNE

I am here

AXEL

Just here
Just now
Feel it

SUSANNE

(Rises, turns her back to him.)
I'm not here
I'm free!

AXEL

You betray
reality
with your games, Susanne

SUSANNE

(Thrusts her stomach at him)
Isn't this real enough?

AXEL

Were you looking
for an opportunity
to
really commit yourself?

I wish
I could provide it for you

SUSANNE

Here I am
Take me

AXEL

That's a strength
easily misunderstood
it's seen as
weakness

SUSANNE

You think
you're begging for punishment
for all the sins
you have committed
But sins are first punished
then
committed

AXEL

I'm talking about loving

SUSANNE

And I'm talking about
finding
a different life

(She has her fifth contraction)

It did mean something!
Why open up
Why leap off

why fall
if it's all arbitrary
if it has no
meaning?

AXEL

You stage-manage
your life
You stage-manage
your lovers
you stage-manage
a child

Count me out

I won't take part
in your planned leap

You have more talent
for problems
than for happiness

I came here
to make an impression
on you
To finally get you out
To open your eyes

Forget defence

I love you

SUSANNE

I didn't think
I could
satisfy you

I didn't think
it was possible

THE BIRD'S BIRTH

Scene 19

(Same place. Kristian arrives, dressed for travelling, carrying luggage. The men size each other up. The wind is stronger, the lighting suggests night.)

AXEL

(Morose.)
Is this him?

SUSANNE

(Radiant.)
This is Axel
my husband

KRISTIAN

(Rude)
Yeah yeah

(Susanne has her seventh contraction)

What's the matter
are you ill?

SUSANNE

Can't you see
I'm giving birth?

You are alive
really
help me give birth
naturally
like music
Birth is
music

AXEL

Do you not want...

SUSANNE

I want to be here
with both of you

Kristian
my dress was finished
can I have it now?
Where is it?

(Searches, cannot find it, desperately searching.)

Where is it?
It's been stolen
Who has taken it
My dress
Where is it?

Fetch it

AXEL

Which dress?

KRISTIAN

One she had made
specially

Women always want
dresses
Always wish they lived
in another age
They love cancelling
themselves out
Dissolving themselves in water
They're made only
of love

SUSANNE

I must have it
quickly

(She plasters herself with white make-up.)

AXEL

Is this it?

(Picks up the parachute.)

SUSANNE

No!

KRISTIAN

That's a bridal gown
It's made of silk
Rita should have

SUSANNE

Rita should have had it
I want it
Bring it here!

(Puts it on. Calms down.)

The skin must be white as possible

AXEL

And the arse we paint blue!

(Susanne laughs)

SUSANNE

If you like

KRISTIAN

I thought you were crying
I heard you crying
I wondered
why a woman

should cry
when she had
everything

(They bring out champagne, they drink first to
quench their thirst, without toasting. Then they
look up, remember to toast each other.)

SUSANNE

That's precicely when
they do cry
Cheers!

(Insolently.)
Why should I go
into hospital
when we can celibrate the birth
here
in a whirl of pleasure

Feel my belly
Say hello to it!

(Has her seventh contraction. She hangs onto the
nearest person, scared. It's painful.)

AXEL

I think you should
lie down now

SUSANNE

No
Don't let go of me
No!

(The birth is not at all as she was expecting. It's
a terrifying, hysterical experience, but she won't
lie down. She hangs onto the two men, exhausting
them as she pushes and pushes and pushes. Screams,
wildly.)

It's a cow!
A crocodile!
It has hooves!

AXEL

Do you want a drink?
Is it painful?

SUSANNE

Of course it's not fucking painful!
It's wonderful!
Like a cat
stretching!

(The birth is imminent. Kristian fetches a tub of water.)

KRISTIAN

He shall be born
in the first
element

(The child is born.)

See, it's swimming!

SUSANNE

How wonderful

AXEL

He's dead

KRISTIAN

Dead?
How? Why?
He's just been
born!

(Susanne reaches out for the baby, wants to hold him.)

(Wind and rain without. Music?)

SUSANNE

You smell
like nocturnal herbs in Provence

A dark fragrance
Night sweet
Not music

It's inside you

I cannot hear it
But I think there's
something inside you
playing

(Axel wants to take the baby from her, but she protests.)

AXEL

Everything's in place
but for the music

(Susanne lets go the child. Axel is unsure what to do with it, so he he puts it into a plastic bag.)

SUSANNE

Murderer!
Bloody murderer!
Murderer!

(Feverishly, takes out her knitting and tries to knit. She's shaking.)

AXEL

How can you
do that, now?

SUSANNE

I must do it
it's not
finished

(Susanne knits, but suddenly stops, as if realising something Slowly, she stands and unravels the knitting, row by row.)

SUSANNE

I want to be alone
What are you doing here?
Alone!

What do I know about taxidermy?

Not much
it will take time
practice

My first attempt
probably won't
be very wonderful

But
I want him to be eternal
He shall always be
with me

(Axel strokes her tenderly. She leans into him and capitulates to the situation.)

SUSANNE

It threatens us
I'm beginning to be fond
of this time
nonetheless

(She takes the baby out of the plastic bag, it has changed into a wild bird, alive and beautiful. She moves centre stage, followed by the men.)

SUSANNE

Can it ever become human
do you think?

TABLEAU

Scene 20

(Susanne stands in the soaking parachute-dress. It has become transparent. She's holding the bird. Axel and Kristian stand on either side of her, figures, respectively, of light and dark.

Rita enters through the auditorium, dressed in full rococco attire, dress, make-up. hair, etc.

She sees everything, but holds her head high and light, not allowing herself to take anything in, because she is in another time.

She approaches the display case, which is lit from above. Enters it. Silence. Then: the birth cry of a new born infant! Music, sound of the space-invaders machine.)