

LOOK AT ME WHEN I'M TALKING TO YOU

A play

by Monica Isakstuen

Translated from the Norwegian
by Peter Dupont Weiss

Characters

*The play should be performed by no more than two actors,
one woman and one man, of approximately the same age.*

Part 1:

I..... actor A (woman)
MY SON..... actor B (man)

Part 2:

Iactor B (man)
MY DAUGHTER actor A (woman)

PART 1

The room is neutral. It has three doors and a few windows. One sofa, one table, perhaps a couple of chairs. Nothing definite can be said about the room, what kind of room it is, if it is a living room or a waiting room or a conference room or the communal room of an institution or a panic room, and it is impossible to tell for how long the room has been open or closed.

The two performers represent all ages.

- /

- *MY SON*

I enter through one of the doors.

I

Now, this is important.

Just to sit down once in a while.

Even when it's not a good time.

There.

Like this.

You have to do that once in a while. Lean back and rest for a while, relax your back, shoulders and head.

There.

And your stomach. Relax the muscles down there. I think that's the hardest thing to do. Just let your belly spill over the top of your pants and let it all go, close your eyes.

There.

It's easier to let the belly spill over the top of your pants and let it all go when you close your eyes.

And it's easier to breathe deeply, too.

Breathe out – and in. Out – and in.

And when you've done this for a while you should ask yourself: How am I really? Is there anything inside of me that needs to be dealt with? In here. What am I feeling right now?

Because it's only then, sitting like this, relaxed and connected to yourself, that you can really probe your inner emotions.

How am I, *really*?

What am I feeling right now?

Joy, I believe?

Yes.

Joy.

I'm fine.

I'm more than fine.

There's so much for me to be happy about.

Spring outside, days growing longer, my child in there –

My son.

It's the sort of day for a bike ride.

Rock-a-bye baby, in the tree top

When the wind blows the cradle will rock

If the bough breaks, the cradle will fall

*Down will come baby, cradle and all*¹

¹ In the original Norwegian text the author quotes 'Claus Climbermouse's Lullaby' from Thorbjørn Egner's Norwegian children's book classic, "Claus Climbermouse and the Other Animals in the Huckybucky Forest". The lyrics of the song go something like this (in literal translation): "All quiet, little man, // now the day is over. // Every mouse in every land // is fast asleep by now. // All quiet, walk on tiptoe, // sleep, my little boy. // The fox is also sleeping now // its head resting on its tail."

When you have children –
you become so sentimental.

Don't you.

Or, rather: You become such a crybaby.

Baby is drowsing, cosy and fair

Mother sits near in her rocking chair

But... yes!

I have an awful lot to be happy about.

It's so very easy to forget the multitude of things in life worth savouring.

Which is why I find it such a good idea to write down lists.

On the top of the page I write, *Things I savour*.

And then colon:

Spring, days growing lighter, my child next door –

Or little things, like the crackling of the crust on a freshly baked bread.

Soft butter seeping into the bread.

And plants. Green, life-giving plants.

The fact that I can get up myself.

All the separate parts of me, the fact that they still function.

Things that you take for granted most of the time. A body. A strong heart. Nerves transmitting messages to your muscles, making them contract and release.

Fatty tissue, connective tissue.

When everything that is screened, scanned, searched for defects looks just as it should. One can't take *that* for granted.

In this very moment, for instance, there is another woman in another room writhing in pain, a pain caused by something inside of her and she doesn't know what it is, yet, because her body hasn't been scanned, yet, but when eventually they do scan it, they'll find something, a lump which just might kill her, slowly.

That's not the case with me.

Here I am.

Healthy.

That fills me with joy.

At some point you learn to appreciate the really small things. Like the fact that I can put one foot in front of the other, you know.

There. Like this.

And then that foot. And then this. In front of that.

I suppose you could say, that my ability to feel joy over really small things does bring me a certain amount of joy.

The fact that I can get up myself, put one foot in front of the other, put my hand on a doorknob, walk out of a room, close the door behind me.

MY SON enters the room.

I

What're you doing here, at this time?

It's late?

MY SON

Not really.

I

It is. It's late. And you're not supposed to be here, you're supposed to be in there.

I sang for you, I stroked your hair, I said goodnight, I walked out of the room and closed the door behind me, you were asleep.

MY SON

I wasn't asleep.

I

You were.

MY SON

OK. If you say so. I was asleep.

I

Then why are you here? That's what I want to know.

MY SON

I suppose I must have woken up.

I

Woken up? What could possibly have woken you up?

MY SON

I'm not saying that I was woken up. I'm saying that I *suppose* I must have woken up.

If I was asleep, that is.

I

So you don't know.

MY SON

No.

I

Whether you're asleep or awake.

MY SON

No, I suppose I don't.

I

Now, there's a peculiar thing to say. Not knowing what state you're in. Two conditions as diametrically opposed to each other as that, being asleep or being awake. If I were permitted to express my opinion on this matter, I'd say you're fast asleep.

MY SON

If you say so.

I

I do. Because what could possibly have woken you up?

It's dead quiet here.

Not a sound.

At this point THE SON might begin to slowly walk towards the door he entered from.

I

All right, all right. Come here.

Come over here.

Sit down.

Put your head in my lap.

Yes, that's it.

MY SON

But I might fall asleep in here.

I

You do that.

MY SON

Perhaps in a dream - a boy gets out of bed and leaves the room and walks down the hall, walks over shoes, makes his way past coats and satchels and wet hats laid out to dry, he just walks on, he walks on, towards the front door, it's heavy, a child has to put all his strength into pushing it open and he does, he puts all his strength into it and he opens it, he's outside now, the door slams shut behind him and no one hears.

I

His mother hears.

MY SON

But she doesn't understand what she hears.

A far-off noise, just loud enough to make her start, she sits up in bed staring into the dark, confused.