



The author writes:

This text should be delivered by one performer; a female — of any age.
Though there are two voices in the following dialogue it is not necessary
to be concerned with distinguishing one from the other.

Cover: Rosalind Nashashibi, still from *Flowers and Shoes*, 2018,
16mm film transferred to HD, courtesy of the artist

She's doing well, he said. I'd heard, he said. I'm sure you have, he said — people are talking, he said, they are beginning to take notice. I'm pleased to hear that, he said, it's what she deserves — she deserves to be recognised. As a matter of fact I saw her at the hotel, he said. You went to that? he said, it didn't appeal to me at all. Yes, he said, I always try to get along to it — I was on the advisory board, you see, for many years. Oh, that's right, he said, you were indeed — I wasn't aware that she was taking part, he said. She wasn't programmed to take part but Zollaberg had to pull out last minute, he said. I see, he said — Zollaberg is notoriously mercurial, it's a wonder he still gets invited to participate in these things. It's a chance worth taking I guess is the way they see it, he said. I suppose so, he said, indeed, everyone loses their mind over Zollaberg, when by some miracle he does show up — so she was, in a way, brought in last minute to replace him? Well, I don't think anyone quite saw it that way, but yes, you could say that, he said. A baptism by fire then, you might say — it must have been very busy, he said, it's always extremely crowded anywhere where people even suspect Zollaberg might appear. It was terrifically busy, and events by that time were as usual way off schedule, he said, but she was not in the least bit fazed. She has great spirit, he said, and can be very adaptable, I'm sure — whatever the circumstances, he said. Yes, he said, she seemed perfectly at ease in fact — in her element, as they say, he said. Had she been drinking do you think? he said. Oh sure, he said, sure, everyone had by that time — except for those two who don't at all at any time — but she was absolutely clear all the same and her sense of timing was entirely unimpaired — she didn't miss a beat. I'd heard, he said, I'd heard about her poise, about her cadence — and her rhythm. I also heard about how she moved her eyes around the room. You heard that? he said. Well now, that's a relief, he said, for the reason that I wasn't sure if I was simply imagining it, he said — So, it's true after all; she was looking right at me from time to time. She saw you? he said — she knew you were there? I think so, he said — I think she saw me. Well that's a good thing, he said, isn't it? It's good that she saw one of us — that she knows one of us was there? Yes, yes, you could be right, he said — on the other hand, I'm not sure at all it's so important to her whether or not one or other of us was there when there are so many others who were clearly quite enthralled. I'm glad to hear that, he said — I'm glad that so many people are interested and entertained and that it makes hardly any difference at all if we are

represented or not—even so, he said, I’m sure that when her eyes moved around the room and came across you right there amongst the enthralled throng she must have felt something. She must have felt pleased, or reassured, or enlivened even—something, he said. It’s possible, he said—it’s possible she felt something when her eyes came across me in the room, and if I had to distinguish what that thing was that she felt exactly, I’d say it was defiance she felt—and, after all, he said, I can’t say as though I’d blame her if that is in fact the very thing she felt, standing up there and seeing me in the room amongst all these people who were so clearly enthralled by her. Is that so, he said. And who else, if I may, was there exactly? Oh a great many people, he said—pretty much anyone you suppose was there was very probably there, and plenty more people besides. More people in addition to the ones I might suppose? he said, well now, give me a “for example.” Alright, he said, that’s no problem—for example, one of the people you might not have supposed to have been there but who was in fact very much present was the actress. Had just come off the plane more or less and took a seat up front right away. Had someone been keeping a seat for her? he said. Oh yeah, yeah, I’m sure someone was keeping the seat for her, he said, she arrived when the place was practically full, all on her own, and went right on up to the front. I see, he said, of course—are you referring to the actress with the white hair or the one married to the very famous actor? he said. I don’t mean the one with the white hair, though come to think of it I think she was there too—there was a woman after all at the corner of the closed bar with hair long and white who could very well have been the other actress. And what about the actress who is married to the very famous actor, he said—are you certain it was her? Oh yes, he said, without doubt, he said, everyone could see it was her. She was probably very tired, he said, if she’d just come off the plane—did she seem very tired to you? Not really, he said—she closed her eyes from time to time but since she had her fingers pressed together against her mouth I’d say it was because she was moved they were closed and had nothing at all to do with being tired. Well that’s marvellous, he said. Isn’t it, he said. I hear she has a terrible time with him, he said. Is that right? he said. Oh yes, can’t control himself at all apparently, and completely blatant about it too, he said. Poor man—he’s had some extraordinary leading ladies, he said. He certainly has, poor man, he said, and everyone knows all about it. That surprises me, he said, I’m surprised to learn he is lacking in discretion—that’s a very impolitic

way to handle things. Yes, it is surprising, he said, and very disappointing — particularly when you consider how sophisticated his performances invariably are. She, on the other hand, he said, is discretion itself — doesn't give the merest hint of anything being amiss. Really? he said. Not at all, he said. Isn't that remarkable, he said, and I believe she's in great shape, would you agree with that — did she seem in great shape to you? Certainly she is. Great physical shape — from what I could see of her anyhow; one doesn't like to gawk of course! he said. Naturally, he said — did she see her do you think? When her eyes roamed about the room, did they, do you think, come across the actress married to the very famous philanderer? I don't know how she couldn't have done, he said, the actress was sitting right there in front of her — I don't know how it would have been possible for her not to have seen the actress — in any case, he said, they were talking together a while later. The actress stayed a while? he said. Yes, he said, she stayed for quite some time in fact, so I guess she couldn't have been in any way exhausted from her trip. These theatre people have remarkable energy, he said, and I'm sure she must have had a drink. In all likelihood, he said, she was very probably staying there, at the hotel, he said. Oh, you think so? It is a very smart hotel actually, he said. I think it's possible she could have been staying there, he said, though, at the same time, she is very well-connected and could have been staying at any number of smart addresses. She's from here, isn't she? — I mean originally, he said. That's correct, she is originally from here, so easy to overlook that for some reason — in any case, wherever she was staying she seemed very at ease, he said. Naturally, he said — Did you notice who she was with? he said. A young woman, he said, no one I recognised, a niece perhaps, they seemed close in that family kind of way. Not one of her daughters then? he said. No, he said, no no no, I'd recognise one of her daughters in a flash. So she was talking to people then, in an ordinary sort of way? he said. She wasn't exactly mingling, he said, if that's what you mean, and naturally actresses on her level don't go to the bar themselves — that's where everyone is, of course. Well naturally she doesn't go to the bar herself, he said, though I don't expect for one moment that she was ever without a drink! I can't say I noticed, he said, though I did notice, he said, that a bit later on, she moved across the room and took her seat. Whose seat?! he said. *Her* seat, he said. Oh! And where was she? he said. Oh she'd gone to the bathroom, I suppose, he said — or else out for a cigarette. She's still smoking then? he said. And

when she came back from the bathroom, or from her cigarette—yes, I believe she still smokes occasionally—she discovered the actress sitting in her seat at the table she'd been sitting at, with all of her friends. Perhaps the actress knew one or other of her friends? he said. Oh no, he said, it didn't look to me that way at all. Then what on earth was she doing? he said. She was waiting for her of course, he said. That's how it looked? he said. Without a doubt, he said—without a doubt the actress was waiting for her to return because she wanted very much to congratulate her. Well that's marvellous, he said. It sure is, he said. Just wonderful, he said. She was radiant, he said. You saw her, when she returned? he said. Yes, he said. And you saw the actress congratulating her? he said. Yes, he said, when she returned the actress got up out of her seat immediately, stood up right away, smiling, warmly, and put out both her hands. Did she really? How wonderfully dramatic—and what did she do?—how did she react? She must have been overcome, surely? he said. No, no, not at all. She quite simply took hold of them. She took hold of the actresses' hands, both of them, and she tipped her head forward ever so slightly so she could hear what the actress was saying to her—the actress appeared to be speaking very quietly and very intently. That's extraordinary, he said, them both standing there like that, holding hands. Quite a picture in fact. I wonder what she said to her. Were they holding hands like that for a long time? Quite some time, yes, he said, but perhaps not quite in the way you imagine—it actually wasn't in the least bit dramatic; they weren't doing it for anybody else's benefit. Well, well, he said, isn't that just marvellous, that they can both be so perfectly natural with each other like that—I hope all this wonderful recognition and so on continues, he said. Oh, marvellous—absolutely—yet it's no more than what she deserves, he said. Quite, he said—I always knew, really, that she had something, he said. Is that right? he said. Did you really? Oh yes, he said, well of course—I can spot that sort of thing you see—From now on, he said, we won't be able to go anywhere without there being somebody saying something about her, this is just the beginning, you mark my words.

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