

ROSA + LAWRENCE WERE HERE

A RITUAL RESUSCITATION OF ETERNAL LOVERS

A poem for enactment by two persons. Rosa and Lawrence are seated on two chairs on either side of a table and read the following script. Those enacting Rosa and Lawrence have preferably not done so before.

LAWRENCE: Rosa!

ROSA: Yes, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE: Rosa, I have eyes!

ROSA: I can see you have eyes, Lawrence. I too have eyes. Thank goodness. I am here Lawrence. In all that I am, I am here.

LAWRENCE: I have nose, and ears, and skin! I can feel the world rustling against me. I can hear the hazy microcosm of matter beat against my flesh as a tide rolling over the shore. This body Rosa, is the paperweight to my flighty presence. It is so sleek, so utterly here. And just look at you, you are stunning!

ROSA: I don't quite know what to say. I am quite afraid, Lawrence. Trembling with joy, but afraid. I can hear my heart. I fear it might outpace me. I guess I am just settling into myself. I am sure I will come to myself in a moment. I'm getting used to these utterances. To the muscles in my face through which my words press and burst like bubblegum. My cheeks are stretchy! How many tiny twitchy spasms does it take to project a sentence out into the open? Ow. There's a tug-of-war in my jaw.

LAWRENCE: I know what you mean Rosa. It is kind of prickly, isn't it? I feel all prickly. My sight is saturated with burned speckles; I can hardly comprehend it. Evidence of your

presence lingers moments from me, and it is dazzling. These are simply the symptoms expected of those that are untrained in the ways of being.

ROSA: Dear Lawrence, from times lost, to times yet to be found, hear these words I say to you. Slipped loose, with ease, from a borrowed tongue: by the incantation denoted in this script have we each been granted a body of our own. A space from which to enact ourselves. I live, at this very moment, as do you, Lawrence. When you called out to me in that first line: Rosa! Then Lawrence, then we returned. Once again reunited, side by side. We are the silenced lovers, are we not? We are eternally patient. Where have we been all this time? Waiting on the cusp of a word. Where have we been Lawrence, all this time?

LAWRENCE: I don't know where we have been Rosa. The thought causes me considerable unease. It seems we have sprung off this very page.

ROSA: I think you are right. I think that these words, these words we are uttering are our sole inheritance. They delineate us, don't they. They put us forth, they suggest us, they posit us as plausible. They announce us, they acknowledge us in the air, in the room around us, we are heard.

LAWRENCE: And I hear you Rosa. I promise I do. Until we are once more silenced I assure you I will listen and understand each word.

ROSA: That is somewhat comforting. I don't know what it would mean for me to be talking here without you to listen to me. I'd admittedly rather not think about it. I'd like to breathe easy. Take a walk in the breeze of contemplation, and make time my companion. We could never be without these words, Lawrence. Do you realise that? They delineate us. Keep talking Lawrence. Don't stop talking, at any rate, I implore you.

LAWRENCE: I will, I will keep talking! Let us open fire with talk, with the life force that the reading of this text has given us. Who knows when or whether we shall be given another chance. I am beginning to feel so at home like this Rosa. Talking to you like this. The syllables taste delicious in my mouth. Worthy of lip-smacking. Mm. These sentences have complex flavours. And you are right - they require an agile jaw. I like telling you these words, Rosa. How palpable is the time that passes in the seconds it takes to pronounce them. We have assumed a thickness in time and space, and the world waits for us and observes us. All from the moment I called out to you: Rosa! And how funny this is Rosa: my voice reverberates soundly within the chambers of my throat and belly. It positively tickles me inside. I am fit to start laughing Rosa, at the way talking like this tickles my innards. It is so very unusual, so very stimulating.

ROSA: I like you like this! I like seeing you experience things. I like you laughing at yourself. We have a weight. We could fall off these chairs, we could fall down to the floor. We could tumble about at the mercy of the physical ramifications of which we now compose a part.

LAWRENCE: What do you think it feels like to fall?

ROSA: I think to fall is to be wide awake.

LAWRENCE: I think so too. I think that falling has the colour of the sharpest light. A heightened awareness of an impending embrace, the peak of living itself, Rosa.

ROSA: Listen to me speak with a capital I, Lawrence. Pay close attention now, and listen to *her* dutifully reading the script of our being. Did you hear it?

LAWRENCE: Certainly, my dear. I am very grateful to her. As I am to him.

ROSA: And how does she do it? She follows a line of command. She has submitted herself to a discipline of automatic obedience, and faded into existential uniformity. She has vanished into nothing. No, excuse me, not nothing. She has vanished into a single line. She is a line, like the lines upon which musical notes spring into dance, or the line of an oscillating skipping rope that is electrified into a perfect spectre of a living wave. So is it that I am born of her self-renunciation. I was a character called Rosa, an idea now made palpable in the shamanistic enactment of this text that is my very breath. Here I am, a character thawed from the deepest of hibernations. Rosa lives, Rosa breathes.

LAWRENCE: Let us postpone the slumber we must inevitably return to! Rosa, we have time together yet.

ROSA: Roughly the same amount we always have.

LAWRENCE: I like being with you Rosa.

ROSA: I like it too. Quite a lot. It's really the best thing I know.

LAWRENCE: We tether each other out of shy furrows. We are sheepish at *being*. So I pull you out of your shell a little, in order that then you may pull me along with you. I love you for that.

ROSA: Don't make me sentimental. You always do this to me. We haven't much time together you know, I'd rather not get prematurely melancholic.

LAWRENCE: As you previously mentioned, I suspect our time together will be neither shorter nor longer than usual. It's hard not to feel nostalgic about a present that is so fast slipping, it is already history. But I am not too worried about that. We are sitting together at this table, see? We are mere legend, to be sure, but from this temporary perch, enthroned like king and queen, we have stepped outside of our fate to observe our own legacy. Review it, take it under consideration, let it roll off these tongues.

ROSA: King and queen, sovereigns of our own fate - look no further than the evidence of these very utterances. I quite like this high perch. I quite like how we have mastered ourselves.

LAWRENCE: Look on my dear, at our epic lineage! We are the eternal lovers, our immortality resides in these words.

ROSA: It's funny you know. The predicament of landing inexplicably outside of one's self only to observe one's self - is what living people commonly refer to as an "out of body experience"; whereas verily unto us it is an "into-body-experience". Our legacy, albeit grand and romantic, reigns only in our deathly sleep. Our eyes are closed beneath the marks upon these pages, sealed shut for long keeping. We have returned to watch ourselves unfold yet again at another juncture in time.

LAWRENCE: Look how we have grown Rosa.

ROSA: Yes Lawrence. We grow old together with each recital of our love poem. We even outlive these kindly actors, those unwitting resuscitators.

LAWRENCE: Rosa?

ROSA: Yes Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: Where did they go?

ROSA: Who Lawrence?

LAWRENCE: Those from whom we have borrowed these splendid apparatuses!

ROSA: They have closed their eyes and wrapped themselves in the cocoon of non-being. They have turned into silent lines that we can pluck with the melody of our character.

LAWRENCE: Or Rosa, perhaps they are not quite as submissive as you suggest. In an ideal world maybe, but let us be realistic. The four of us are in fact playing a game of hide and seek in a collective consciousness. I can feel him looking at us Rosa, peering out from behind his own slumber, observant from his position of passivity. He does not read these words without a tinge of irony, or at least a sustained, quiet scepticism.

ROSA: There is sense to what you say. I feel I am constantly negotiating my right to be here. Struggling to make my case, you know? Sure: she is restricted to these words (the words I am speaking to you at this very moment, the words decreed by the script) but she occasionally makes subtle, rebellious intonations. She betrays me in a flicker of a passing grimace.

LAWRENCE: It's a little uneasy to be sure. I assert myself by trying to fit a lot of words into the sentences I speak, hoping their sheer number will overpower him and urge me into the fore, urge me into life. Yet I fear Rosa, I fear that he trips on the tumbling sentences and utters a misplaced word here and there. He could do it on purpose, you know, he could undermine me in a twisting breach of the sanctity of this script that is my very genome, infiltrating the tone of my character with the shrill unpredictability of his idiosyncrasies.

ROSA: My dear Lawrence, stay with me. Our turn is quite not yet over. We still have a little time together. Shall we whisper? Shall we shout? Come, let us leave this topic for something more drole. It is our time after all, and it is up to us how we spend it! Why, don't you think I can get up right now, take you by the hand and leave this place? We can walk out of here together. On our legs. Let's go.

LAWRENCE: We can't.

ROSA: We will traverse the elements, wade through water up to our hips. We will loudly stride across the Earth. Nothing to fear, now that we are here.

LAWRENCE: You and your promises, Rosa. Are you not tired of making them? They are lovely, but cause me grief. Nowhere in the script have these excursions been mentioned.

ROSA: Yes they have Lawrence, I have just mentioned them! And I'll mention them again. Out will we venture, leaving footprints in snowy dales. Don't tell me you can't feel my hands pressing round your abdomen in an exaggerated squeeze? We are racing through the succession of hills in a winter landscape, evergreens part from the path of our sleigh until we are finally once again at peace with gravity. Falling is our favourite pastime. There is no reason why we cannot get up, leave this place, and let a whole lifetime unfold in the wink of a word or two.

LAWRENCE: I'd like to fall with you Rosa. And you have offered me a certain solace. But how can you fail to see that our every move is prescribed in advance? We are fixed in place, lively automata that pretend animation.

ROSA: I admit, your words have been put into your mouth. But Lawrence, you are more than the sum of your words. I know, and here I am, and I perceive you. Be the body borrowed, be it designated; be it organic, be it artificial; be the recipe of your making alphabetic, be it genetic: what makes you Lawrence extends far beyond all of these fields of description.

LAWRENCE: I see that in you, Rosa. To me you are larger than life. Could we leave a mark, like lovers do? "Rosa and Lawrence were here".

ROSA: We could certainly suggest it. We can nonchalantly drop the hint.

LAWRENCE: You mean, borrow a severed hand, have it engrave our names somewhere?

ROSA: Perhaps somebody will hear our plea, lend a helping hand to two lovers in need. "Rosa and Lawrence were here": on the bark of a tree. A piece of paper, a discrete padlock and thrown key. My! What am I saying. Lawrence, does it not feel somewhat vandalistic to leave such a transgressive notion dormant in this text? It breaches the code of the script, as if

our hand were to reach out of the page, wear the glove of a living person and leave a mark in the world. It seems awfully illegal!

LAWRENCE: Maybe memory is always a kind of vandalism. Something is ruptured, betrayed, violated, in favour of a new notion born in its scars.

ROSA: "Rosa and Lawrence were here..."

LAWRENCE: "...more than the sum of their words". Not a bad epitaph for lovers unborn.

ROSA: You know Lawrence, there is an unruly seed planted in this very text. A winding vine which surely lends us the escape rope to our salvation. Into being we will emerge, another Tristan, another Isolde.

LAWRENCE: My dear Rosa, I have looked through the better part of our lifelong script, but regret that I cannot quite seem to find it. Where is this crafty seed?

ROSA: It's at the very end. It is the fact of its end. We are cut short, we are finite. We are a digestible tract of melody. We lie there for the taking. Compassionate mouths will resuscitate us, read for us, speak out for us anew. The world takes us up, takes up our union, and ponders over our case like an indecisive judge, throughout the ages, time and time again. We return, we recede, and in the space of the world in deliberation, we age.

LAWRENCE: So comes the time when we must return to sleep. Silenced lovers, eternally patient. Let it not be long till our next meeting. Sweet dreams my Rosa, and good night.

ROSA: Sweet dreams Lawrence, and good night.
