

The Fist

A man of forty and a woman of seventy are sitting in a kitchen.

Teddy Lost in your thoughts, Cecile?

Cecile I am.

Teddy What are you thinking about?

Cecile My mother's kitchen.

Teddy Why is that?

Cecile When I was little I used to get dressed by the fire.
Then I'd sit and watch it burning.

Teddy A wood stove?

Cecile My daddy used to bring in wood and fill a box. It sat
by the stove, and when mother told me, I had to open
the firebox and put in a piece of wood.

Teddy And the handle? Was that hot?

Cecile Mother had a pad, that hung from a hook. I used it
to grip the ...

Teddy The grip?

Cecile It was a fist. It was tiny, really, but it was nearly as big
as my little fist, and I thought it was big.

Teddy The handle was a fist?

Cecile I knew it was made of iron, but I thought of it as
belonging to somebody.

Teddy Whose fist was it, did you think?

Cecile Ah!

Teddy You did think it belonged to someone?

Cecile (nodding) That was the mystery. Whose was it, this
fist that ruled the world?

Teddy It ruled the world?

Cecile So I thought for many years ...

Teddy (amused, but pensive) I suppose I still think that big
fists rule the world!

Cecile So did I for many years, and then I changed.

Teddy What brought about the change, Cecile?

Cecile I thought of something ...

Teddy Are you going to tell me?

Cecile Have you got a good imagination?

Teddy It works okay.

Cecile Then let it loose. For me. Now. (She sways back
on her seat and the things she talks about happen in
front of us.) Once upon a time ...

Teddy ... long, long ago ...

Cecile ... there was a young woman dreaming by a fire ...

Teddy What was she dreaming?

Cecile She was trying to think about how ...

Teddy How?

Cecile ... she could fit everything in the world underneath
her skirt.

Teddy That's a big ask!

Cecile So she took off her skirt and it wouldn't even cover
the seat she was sitting on. (A young woman whom

we shall call G'day does as Cecile describes.) Then, as she studied the problem, she noticed men looking at her legs. (A man, whom we shall call Tomorrow, comes on to do so.) It seemed to her that there was power directed at her that she needed to convert. If she was smart, she could turn it into something else. (G'day sits; Tomorrow looks at her body.) One of the men, however, was curious to know what she was thinking.

Tomorrow G'day, G'day; you're lost in your thoughts.
G'day They're travelling on a line. They'll reach you very soon.

Tomorrow What will happen then?
G'day Neither of us knows.
Tomorrow We might travel together for a while.
G'day I'd like that.
Tomorrow I think it's starting to happen.
G'day What's your name?
Tomorrow Tomorrow.
G'day That's what I thought you'd say.
Tomorrow I said G'day to you, so that must be your name.
G'day It is.
Tomorrow We fit. Today and tomorrow. We've got a future!
G'day Futures have to be made.
Teddy (after a pause) And did they last, as a couple?
Cecile For many lifetimes, actually.

Teddy (laughing) Not a bad run! What was the secret of their success?
Cecile He fitted under her skirt.
Teddy Ah, how am I meant to take that?
Cecile Every way you can think of.
Teddy Okay. He fitted. Good. No infidelities?
Cecile Quite a few, on both sides. That's only counting the serious ones.
Teddy They didn't restrict each other, then?
Cecile I didn't mean to be restricted.
Teddy This lady G'day; she's you, is she?
Cecile Yes. (pointing at Tomorrow) Do you recognise yourself?
Teddy I think I do, actually. You bugger! What a trick!
Tomorrow The name of the game is duplicity.
Teddy How did you come to that?
Tomorrow When something's done to you enough times, you can't help knowing.
G'day It's the thing we all know best. So we fight against it ...
Tomorrow ... with declarations of eternal love!
Cecile Bravo!
G'day (to Tomorrow) On your knees and tell me you love me!
Tomorrow You're too old. Ah! (A beautiful young woman has appeared. She crosses the scene as if followed by a camera.) What shall I call you?

Demain Demain.
 Tomorrow That's my name too. I'm tomorrow.
 Demain If you ever get there.
 Tomorrow What's to stop me?
 Cecile (loudly) You'll find out!
 Teddy Cecile! What's come over you?
 Cecile Watch, my boy. Watch what happens!
 Demain (mysteriously) There is the nature of things ...
 G'day ... and one of those is jealousy! Which translates as pure hate!
 Demain Oh la la!
 Tomorrow You're making me laugh, and that fires me up.
 Cecile Soon we'll open the door, and shove in wood!
 Teddy I'm starting to see what you mean.
 Demain (to Tomorrow) Tell me the future as you would like it to be.
 Tomorrow I wake up, thinking I'm alone, and then I remember ...
 Demain ... a night of love?
 Tomorrow As day dawned, we slept ...
 G'day That's the magic hour. That's when it happens.
 Demain (smiling) She knows too. I'm close to her. We're allies. Partners ...
 Tomorrow ... experienced in love ...
 D & G ... in what we do with love.
 Tomorrow Eh?
 Demain Love starts out as a star, twinkling in the night ...

G'day ... then it becomes a will o'the wisp, calling you on.
 Tomorrow I'm not falling into any swamp for a woman! You'll serve me as long as I've strength in my arm!
 Teddy They all say that.
 Cecile Watch, wait and see.
 G'day I never knew what was going to happen. Oh sometimes I did.
 Cecile (calling to her) Such as when? Tell us, make us wise.
 G'day I'm called G'day, meaning now, but I'm really the future, waiting its chance.
 Tomorrow And what does that make me?
 Cecile You'll find out! Like this one (Teddy); he'll wake up one day, when it's too late!
 G'day It happens to us all. None of us knows our nature, except a few cunning ones ...
 Demain Oh la la ...
 G'day ... like this one. She's the enemy of us all, because she can't pretend she's innocent! She's the shameless one ...
 Demain Oh la la. (to Teddy) You're sitting there, all on your own.
 Teddy I'm a happy man. I've got company, a good fire.
 Cecile Put a bit of wood on, Teddy. Take the cloth and grip that fist.
 Demain (scornfully) Don't you know what to do?

Teddy (standing up) I've got a fair idea. (He takes Demain in his arms, admiring her, turning her a little so he can look at her face, her body, her hair, which he touches tenderly.) Welcome. You'll never be anything but loved as long as you're here.

Demain Will I be contented, or must I fill with scorn, and leave you as I found you?

Teddy Whatever I may be when you leave, I won't be the same.

Cecile Silly man. (to Tomorrow) What about you? Are you going back to her? (G'day)

Tomorrow If she'll have me.

G'day (also scornfully) What are you offering?

Cecile (addressing the audience) This is how it goes. Nobody ever learns a thing.

Demain We can make love, and then we can fall in a sleep as wide as the world ...

Teddy ... and when we wake ...

Demain ... everything will be changed. (She embraces a willing Teddy.)

Tomorrow If you're tomorrow and I'm today, I'll embrace the future on your terms.

G'day Too good to refuse.

She moves into his arms. G'day and Tomorrow move into the dark on one side, while Demain and Teddy do the same on the other side.

Cecile This is when I turn the fist, and open the door. (The light of a huge fire illuminates her face.) In goes the wood, one two three four. Teddy, who used to look after me so sweetly, that awful Demain. And today and tomorrow, such unassuming people. You'd think they didn't have it in them to be so silly. But everyone's the same. The cleverest people are the silliest when they fall in love. All those carefully thought out plans, then they do the stupidest things. Nobody ever knows. The sum total of human wisdom all flies out the door. Everyone says they want to know what their future's going to be like but the last thing they really want is to know. They'd rather find out. Let's build up those flames!

She takes a pair of bellows and fans the fire she sees in front of her; it blazes higher and higher, and causes the two pairs of lovers to cry in the agony and joy of their loving.

Tomorrow I've left the world behind, my love. I'm on a journey with you to worlds never seen before!

Demain I've taken you in, we'll never be the same again!

G'day This fire's consuming me, I'm changing ...

Teddy ... when I emerge, I'll be a new man, something new in this world!

Demain (emphatically, passionately) Oh la la!

Teddy You're changing too!

G'day Every touch transforms me. I can't come back the same!

Tomorrow Can the world be changing too?
Cecile It's time to find out. Ding-a-ling! Time to wake up now. Reality's beckoning, that cunning old wretch!

Demain emerges, followed by a sheepish and uncertain Teddy.

Demain Still here? They'll be looking for you at your work.

Teddy If I ever get there ...

Demain You should be full of vigour.

Teddy My energy's drained away.

Demain (smiling to herself) Good. (to Teddy) I've given you something to remember.

Teddy More! More of the same.

Cecile Not only do they never learn, they never understand what's happened.

Demain Your journey's taking you away from me. I know how you feel.

She makes it clear by her stance and the movement of her hand that she is sending him away.

Teddy That isn't all?

Demain Unfortunately it is. Experience will help you become a lover.

Teddy I thought that's what we were.

Demain 'Were' means yesterday. It's a place I never go.

Teddy (moving towards the seat he had at the beginning, near Cecile) So I'm back where I started?

Cecile No! I don't want cast-offs trying to hold my hand!

Teddy So I'm not wanted at all? (Both Cecile and Demain remain silent.) So. It's a new life or it's no life, that's the choice I've got to make. (He goes off sadly.)

Demain Living, loving, learning, that's all there is. Until we grow old.

She looks at Cecile, who suddenly realises her own loneliness.

Cecile You ungrateful bastard! Come back! (He doesn't.) I don't want to be on my own!

G'day and Tomorrow emerge; G'day has a baby in her arms.

G'day Took a while to get ready. Life slows down when you've got a child.

Tomorrow Speeds up a bit too. Not so much sleep!

G'day It's the same every time. I don't care about myself any more, except ...

Tomorrow Except?

Cecile Except?

G'day Except I have to stick around to be mother to my child. This little one has drained all my importance out of me ...

Tomorrow Revolting! (moving away a little)

G'day ... and given it back again, but in another form.

Cecile The fire's dying down. I'll build it up again. (reaching for the fist.)

G'day No need. She's warm enough. Guess what? I haven't given her a name.

Tomorrow (aware she's looking at him) What's it matter?

G'day Nothing on earth matters more. Little one? (She inspects her baby.) She's opening her hand! Look! She's closing it again! Oh wonders! Heaven!

Cecile (not interested) I'll make some tea.

G'day Keep the hot water. I'll give her a bath.

Tomorrow The little shit's become the centre of the universe.

Cecile You want the fire built up, don't you.

Tomorrow Well, I suppose I do. Maybe it'd be better if I just disappeared.

G'day She wants you, father. She's beckoning with her hand.

Tomorrow Beckoning my fat arse. She's flexing her fingers, that's how they learn.

G'day It's you that's got the learning to do. Come and hold her while I get things ready for her bath.

Tomorrow (moving back) I'll be there in a moment.

G'day I haven't got all day.

Tomorrow I've just remembered ...

G'day What?

Tomorrow I'd forgotten something important. Yes! Must be elsewhere, should've been there half an hour ago ...

G'day Come here and take the child! Are you her father or not?

Tomorrow Ah, er ... well, I suppose I am ... there being no other suspects ...

Cecile (seeing him weaken) Ding-dong! The bells are ringing for you my boy.

Tomorrow (accepting the child) G'day little one. That was your mother's name, come to think of it.

G'day (scornfully) Come to think of it!

Tomorrow Where's this little hand?

G'day Try looking under your nose. It should be obvious.

Cecile I'll open the firebox. We could try making the fire big again.

G'day Too hot! Don't do that. You're warm enough. You just want to be important and guess what, you aren't any more. This one's the centre now.

Cecile (calling) Teddy! Where are you? I'm lonely. This little bitch that I nursed doesn't care about me any more.

Teddy (in the distance) My time's over. They say they'll give me another go one day, but right now I'm fading.

Cecile Where are you Teddy? I want you back beside me, now!

Teddy (fading) Aaaaaaaaahhh ...

G'day He's gone. Bath's ready. Give her to me now. Put her on the mat.

Tomorrow That little hand ...

G'day Gets you, doesn't it. She's aware. She knows. My little ... (suddenly she becomes excited) ... Elsa, that's what we're calling her! Elsa! It came in a flash. I had no idea, then it came to me, right out of the blue. Say it Cecile, say it darling.

Tomorrow Elsa. Yes, that sounds good. Sounds right. How did you think of that?

Cecile Elsa. There's been lots of famous Elsas, Er, Elsa ... (she can't think of any) ... er ...

G'day Elsa. This is Elsa's bath. Darling, feel the water with your toes.

Tomorrow Dip her hand in to know it's not too hot.

G'day It's not too hot. It's just perfect for my little girl. No it's not, there's a breeze under the door. We'll go in the next room, father. Daddy. You take the bath, I'll carry our little girl, all rugged up till we put her in the bath ...

G'day, Tomorrow and baby Elsa go off. Cecile, sitting by the stove, notices Demain returning.

Cecile (selfishly) I'm not alone any more.

Demain You will be, as soon as I find a man. Nobody about, though.

Cecile You got rid of Teddy too quickly.

Demain He didn't interest me. He didn't understand ...

Cecile What?

Demain ... mystique. What perfume is to the body, mystery is to the world. Without it, we're nothing, nobody's anything. Who wants to live in a world with no strange forces? Not this one, take it from me.

Cecile You're young, you'll get a man.

Demain The man will get a woman, if I give myself to him.

Cecile Give me your hand.

Demain (doing so) What do you see? Any lines of fortune?

Cecile You've got rings. There's a mind behind this hand, and it rules the world.

Demain Don't go too far, darling. The heart of the thing is conflict, and that means the winner is the one that's smart.

Cecile Smart. I'm seventy and I don't know what it means to be smart.

Demain I'm twenty-two and I have to be smart. I don't have time to think.

The actor who played Teddy returns, looking entirely different.

Teddy I slept in the open last night. Can I sit by your fire? Thaw out a tiny bit?

Cecile You sit right there. If you're not hot enough, open the firebox door. (Teddy looks vacantly at the stove.) You simply twist that fist there ... see it? ... then slide the door back ...

Demain ... and we start all over again.