

# A Lover's Dismantling: Fragments of a Scenic Discourse

by Elena Guiochins

*Translated from the Spanish by Andy Bragen*

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*“A Lover’s Dismantling” was written between October 2008 and February 2009, during a rehearsal workshop with the Mexico City based theatrical troupe Conjuro Teatro. The characters at that time were given the first names of the actors who developed the piece. In this version, the character names listed are the first names of the actors involved with the 2009 US-Mexico Playwright Exchange at the Lark Theatre, where the translation received a workshop. The names should be changed to match those of the actors in future workshops and productions.*

Performers in original Mexico City Production:

Carolina Contreras  
Alejandra Marín  
Héctor Hugo Peña  
Julio Escartín

Performers in Lark Workshop:

Crystal Finn  
Annie Henk  
Armando Riesco  
Gerry Rodriguez

*Do we mean love when we say love?*  
-Samuel Beckett

1. IN TRANSIT

*An airport. Two men in the boarding area. Each one drags a rolling suitcase. They sit down beside each other.*

GERRY: "There are only two kinds of thoughts: memories and imagination". That's the phrase that ran through Armando's mind, like a kind of mantra, whenever he was about to board a plane.

ARMANDO: I was alone. It was night. The flight was running over three hours late. But what are three hours on eternity's clock? Gerry was the first to break the silence.

GERRY: Looks interesting...

ARMANDO:...

GERRY: The book.

ARMANDO: It's not a book.

GERRY:...

ARMANDO: Characters and events shape our life stories. Whenever my thoughts return to that precise moment, that night in Jakarta airport, I picture that man who wouldn't stop asking me questions. I think about everything around me, and try to understand my life's meaning, its specific events. Like a wounded dog, I have sniffed out tracks of my existence disguised as coincidences; they have shown me the power, the will of destiny...

GERRY: *(Referring to Armando's suitcase)* Heavy, right?

ARMANDO: Huh?

GERRY: Excess baggage...

ARMANDO: ...

GERRY: Suddenly it came to me. Our context determines how we interpret everything that follows. For me, it all goes back to the beginning.

## 2. POSTCARDS FROM OUR STORY

*Armando and Annie are seated in front of a judge: Gerry. Nearby, Crystal, the lawyer.*

JUDGE: Name of wife: Mrs. Annie Small, will not keep her husband's name, will retake her maiden name: Castle. Husband and Wife reside separately, have since November 7, 2007, Mr. Small having moved out as was stipulated in the interim agreement. Forfeiture of matrimonial rights. Husband and Wife own no real estate in common. Ms. Castle retains the rented apartment. Mr. and Mrs. Small executed the division of furniture as specified in the addendum to the interim agreement. Husband and Wife acknowledge having taken possession of all clothing, objects, and jewelry belonging to them personally, or belonging to their respective families. The parties do not share any bank accounts or common lines of credit. With respect to children: The Husband and Wife have one son. Amado Small Castle was born on September 23, 2001 in Mexico City. Husband and Wife choose to share joint legal custody. Both parents shall retain full parental rights and responsibilities. Both parents shall confer with one another so that major decisions affecting the best interests and welfare of the child may be determined jointly, where reasonably possible. We further agree that Mrs. Annie Small will have sole physical custody of the child. The parties agree to share in an equitable fashion the child's birthday, holidays and all vacations. Furthermore, the parties agree to allow the other parent to have a frequent and liberal visitation with the child. The non-custodial parent will have the right to be with the child at least, but not limited to, as follows: the first, third and fifth weekend of each month from Thursday afternoon, and Friday afterschool, until Sunday evening at 7. The Father will pick the Child up from, and return him to, the Mother's residence. During the first half of school vacations in even years and the second half of the same vacations in odd years, the child will reside with the Father. Mr. Small will pay a monthly sum of eight thousand pesos for the support and education of his son. With regard to alimony, the Husband and Wife declare that no disparity exists between their incomes and thus it is not necessary. Conforming to the regulations of article 265 of the civil code, Mr. and Mrs. Small are cancelling the payments that they have mutually contributed to their life insurance policies, and likewise any other contribution stipulated throughout the length of the marriage under any form. The costs of the divorce will be equally shared, as will the legal fees. *To Crystal* Do you have anything to add, Counsel?

CRYSTAL: No, Your Honor, you'll need to check with my clients.

JUDGE: Madam, is this acceptable to you?

ANNIE: Yes, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Mr. Small?

ARMANDO: Yes?

JUDGE: Is this acceptable to you?

ARMANDO: Yes, yes, it's fine. Everything's fine.

JUDGE: I then certify this divorce on this day, the 20<sup>th</sup> of March 2009. Sign here please. Madam....Sir...If you please, initial the first three sheets.

*Annie and Armando sign in silence.*

### 3. FRAGMENTS OF A DISCOURSE

GERRY: I saw her first. That night in Jakarta airport, you were wearing your flight attendant's uniform. You crossed the room rapidly while I tried to speak with that double of mine from the future who misunderstood the meaning of my words. His interpretations became his experience, not mine. I saw you first.

GERRY: Are you travelling alone?

ARMANDO: No.

*Armando opens a suitcase from which a woman emerges.*

ARMANDO: I'm travelling with my wife.

ANNIE: *(Extending her hand to Gerry)* Annie. Nice to meet you.

GERRY: Gerry...

ANNIE: Are you travelling alone?

ARMANDO: Gerry thinks that the meal he had on the previous flight must have disagreed with him even though he can't remember what exactly he ate, possibly shrimp, it always does him in. What did the flight attendant offer him while they were crossing the sky? Chicken or pasta? And that woman who just asked the question: did she actually come out of the suitcase?

GERRY: If a surgeon were to enter my brain right now, he'd end up lost and famished, and he'd have no idea what I ate today.

*A flight attendant offers dinner.*

CRYSTAL: Chicken or pasta?

ARMANDO: Pasta.

ANNIE: The same.

CRYSTAL: Chicken or pasta?

GERRY: I don't know...

CRYSTAL: There are no wrong answers....Chicken!

### 3.1 FRAGMENT/AFTER DINNER

*Annie and Armando finish clearing the dinner plates*

ANNIE : They look like they're very much in love.

ARMANDO: They won't last.

ANNIE: It seems to me like they adore each other.

ARMANDO: She's very young, too young.

ANNIE: The age difference isn't necessarily an obstacle, at least not between them. Crystal strikes me as very intelligent and mature.

ARMANDO: All she ended up doing was showing off her own ignorance.

ANNIE: You're very harsh, did you know that?

ARMANDO: My brother specializes in shallowness. This too will pass soon, no doubt.

ANNIE: I saw him as too in love.

ARMANDO: That expression seems so absurd to me: "Too in love". Who ever heard of anything that was "too beautiful"? Too in love is a banal notion.

ANNIE: Are you going to open the other bottle?

ARMANDO: You don't think it's "too much"?

ANNIE: I think that your notion of love is banal. Too much so.

*Time change*

### 3.2 FRAGMENT/AFTER-DINNER CHAT

GERRY: Everything was delicious. *(To Annie)* You're a mar-vel-ous chef.

CRYSTAL: Pour me some more wine?

ANNIE: How long have you two been together?

CRYSTAL: Hard to say. We haven't been counting time.

ARMANDO: For someone so young, you seem to have seen it all.

GERRY: My brother is obsessed with time. He fixes clocks, did I mention that?

ANNIE: Armando and I have been together for ten years.

ARMANDO: An eternity.

CRYSTAL: I don't worry so much about time.

ARMANDO: Cause you're a baby, that's why.

CRYSTAL: Do you have any children?

ANNIE: One. Amado, he's six.

CRYSTAL: Amado, the Beloved. What a beautiful name.

ANNIE: How did you and Gerry meet?

CRYSTAL: On a speed date.

ANNIE: A speed date?

CRYSTAL: They're high-speed singles events.

GERRY: A system of quick dates among groups formed through consideration of member profiles and, in some cases, religious orientations.

ARMANDO: And you guys were in which category: God is optional?

ANNIE: Now I remember, a friend of mine told me about these kinds of gatherings a while ago.

CRYSTAL: For someone who travels as much as I do, it's a good way to meet people.

GERRY: Crystal is a flight attendant.

ARMANDO: So thanks to this metaphysical casting call you met the man of your life in seven minutes?

ANNIE: Does anyone want more dessert?

*They all shake their heads no.*

ANNIE: Are you sure? Well, I do.

GERRY: The first time I saw Crystal was in the airport.

ARMANDO: You may have mixed her up with another flight attendant from the same airline – in their uniforms they're all the same.

GERRY: No way. *(To Crystal)* It was you. *(To Annie)* That dress really suits you.

CRYSTAL: Yeah, you look super cute.

ANNIE: I haven't worn it in a while. So, I'm still not clear: Did you meet in the airport, or on a speed date?

CRYSTAL: Through friends...

GERRY: Whom we met on a speed date.

CRYSTAL: Exactly.

GERRY: First, I saw her in the airport, and then one year later these friends introduced us.

ARMANDO: How does it feel to spend so much time up in the air?

ANNIE: You must travel a lot.

CRYSTAL: Yes, all the time. But that's what I like about it.

ARMANDO *(To Gerry)*: She's not right for you. I know these sorts of women. When they're up in the air they're one thing, and when their feet land on the ground, they're something altogether different.

CRYSTAL: I don't seem to be making a very good impression on your brother.

GERRY: Nothing makes a good impression on Armando, and when he's got wine in him, it's even worse.

ANNIE: It's not hard for you two?

CRYSTAL/GERRY: What?

ANNIE: To spend so much time apart?

CRYSTAL: No, it's fine.

ARMANDO: How old is this girl?

ANNIE: Why are you so concerned with her age?

ARMANDO: He's my brother, I don't want to see him hurt.

GERRY: I'm happy. What are you talking about?

ANNIE: *(To Armando)* You're acting like an idiot.

ARMANDO: We're among family, no?

ANNIE: Anyone want more wine?

CRYSTAL: Yes, thanks.

GERRY: My brother is the ultimate contrarian.

ARMANDO: Like I said, I don't want to see you hurt.

GERRY: One drinks however one can from one's own cup. I drink mine, and you yours. Cheers!

ARMANDO: Nonsense. Shallow minds slop from the same trough. Cheers!

ANNIE: Hunger is desire. Where there is nothing, I beg for something. Cheers!

CRYSTAL: A hungry person is a creature on the hunt. I'm always starving. *(To Armando)*. I'm twenty.

ARMANDO: Who are they trying to kid?

ANNIE: *(To Armando)* Don't you think you've had enough?

ARMANDO: I already have a long enough list of things I'm expected to hide. Who cares!?

GERRY *(To Crystal)*: You're going already?

CRYSTAL: Yes, it's getting pretty late. I'm supposed to drop by Taquito's place.

GERRY: Do you want me to come with you?

CRYSTAL: It's just going to be techno music and a bunch of kids dancing. I don't think you'd have much fun. I'll call you once I'm there.

GERRY: All right. Enjoy yourself.

*Crystal says goodbye and leaves.*

ANNIE: She's adorable.

GERRY: Yes, she is.

ARMANDO: She's a lost teenager!

GERRY: Once again my brother has made a snap decision about my destiny.

ANNIE: *(to Armando)* The disproportion of your comments is irritating. Really Armando...

ARMANDO: What do you want: To devote my life to the greater good, I'd have to go through some real shit first.

GERRY: Love doesn't need to be suffocating.

ARMANDO: Now you sound like your gay friends.

GERRY: What has come into my life is beauty. Period.

ARMANDO: I'll just add that to your list of gay sayings.

ANNIE: Okay, that's enough.

*Annie put on some music. SOMETHING by the Beatles.*

ANNIE: Who wants to dance with me?

*Armando pours himself another drink. Gerry and Annie dance.*

#### 4. ARMANDO

*Armando sings SOMETHING by the Beatles.*

ARMANDO: I was born in a house where romantic love didn't exist, on the contrary, any reference to it was promptly ignored. The dictatorship of the feminine: a house of women, of solitary women. My widowed grandmother, eternally grief-stricken by my grandfather's abandonment. My mother (apparently alone), full of mysteries when it came to what she referred to as the sentimental terrain. Her relationship with my father, blurred by the passage of time, was always kept in the greatest obscurity for me. Later I would discover that the true sentimental terrain of my mother wasn't beside a man.

GERRY: I met her at a speed dating event. Mexico City. Saturday afternoon. Present day.

#### 5. SENTIMENTAL SITUATION.

*Two couples seated face to face at cafe tables. The sound of a bell starts the dialogue for each couple, and will also indicate its completion, the changing of partners at the adjacent table emulating the standard dynamic of a speed date. Each one of the actors has a nametag pasted on his/her chest.*

CRYSTAL: Your family is dysfunctional too...we have so much in common. Can you believe it? And what do you do?

ARMANDO: I sing in a bar. And I fix clocks.

GERRY: I'm feeling something here. (*gesturing to his stomach*) It happens whenever I'm nervous. I'm feeling little sharp pains. No, it's not what you're thinking, it's not an ulcer. Truth is I'm very healthy.

ANNIE: I'm the middle child, and I'm the only one who entered the world via natural birth. My sister arrived with forceps, and thanks to that she's always so tense, the poor thing ...my brother via caesarean, I came straight out the chute - animal-style!

GERRY: What's most important to me in a woman is that she be pretty and sincere...above all pretty....

CRYSTAL: ...Generosity, having confidence in the other, communication, playfulness, smiles, learning together how to listen, mutual respect, neither hoping nor insisting that the other respond just how I want him to.

ARMANDO: You're demanding.

CRYSTAL: I love passion, caresses, humor, lots of kisses, pampering, and getting pampered. No complaints! More kisses, dreaming together, saying I love you, knowing when to shut up, no violence! Sharing time, either one child or two, though three is my favorite number!

ARMANDO: It seems like this cake is half rancid, no?

CRYSTAL: What?

ARMANDO: The cake...try it...it tastes terrible...

CRYSTAL: I can't, I'm on a diet (*writing in her diary, whispering full of irony*): How charming: the guy wants me to try something terrible.

GERRY: And I haven't changed a bit. Except with her it lasted a little longer, 10 years. Imagine that, I spent 10 years with the same woman!

ANNIE: No, I can't imagine...

GERRY: Did you know that a body releases 250 substances when placed before a being whom it finds attractive? It only needs four seconds to form an opinion. Did you know that?

ANNIE: Here they give you seven minutes, presumably to avoid making a mistake.

GERRY: 250 substances. Hormones, acids, gases issued...*(Belching without meaning to)*  
Pardon me, it must be the coffee, it gives me heartburn... Do you want me to take my glasses off so you can see me better?

ANNIE: You're right, four seconds is more than enough.

*The bell rings. Change of couples.*

ANNIE: There are many kinds of kisses, and many ways of kissing. There are pecking kisses, where the lips barely meet.

ARMANDO: Right, with puckered lips.

ANNIE: There are marking kisses, violent kisses that come with bites, those that leave their trace in the form of hickeys.

ARMANDO: Hickeys. I'm more the romantic type...

ANNIE: And hot kisses too, with lip nibbles, and subtle licks. Or doggy-style, with the tongue hanging out, drooling on your face, and which tend to come with a juicy passionate fuck.

CRYSTAL: Hypocritical, treacherous kisses, those you don't even feel.

GERRY: And the hypoallergenic ones, that taste of toothpaste, or headaches or sugar free gum.

ARMANDO: Drunken kisses, thanks to a wild night, some pleasant to recall, and others not.

ANNIE Amnesiac kisses and mental gaps, the fault of memory, or of slow-arriving shame...

*ARMANDO and CRYSTAL kiss.*

*The bell rings.*

*They wake up next to each other after a drunken night.*

CRYSTAL: Me, with that dude? No fucking way! And they took our picture!

ARMANDO: What did you say your name was?

CRYSTAL: Crystal.

ARMANDO: Nice to meet you, Crystal.

*The bell rings.*

*We return to the world of the cafeteria.*

CRYSTAL: No need to pray to Cupid for a miracle, cause this is a Speed Date.

ARMANDO: All in all there are all sorts of kisses. What are you thinking about?

ANNIE: That there are good kissers, and not. Memorable mouths, and kisses worth remembering...

ARMANDO: And not.

CRYSTAL: My first kiss was so incredible that I can't even remember it...

GERRY: I was fourteen, had gone to the movies with a girl I liked, I knew the kiss was inevitable, believe that both of us were hoping it would happen.

ANNIE: Today I want one of those kisses that soaks your panties, a kiss that gets me hot, and which almost always leads to something more...

CRYSTAL: Those are my favorite...

ARMANDO: Those women were eager to love me.

*GERRY looks toward Crystal and Annie*

ARMANDO: No, not them...my mother and my grandmother, they gave up everything, including their own selves, just so I could feel loved. When I was a baby, that love was luxurious, but little by little the luxury turned into a burden, a burden that brought about reproaches, pain, and a whole lot of sacrifices that drove my grandmother to her grave, and my mother to an overwhelming loneliness. In my maternal home I learned that whatever comes, it all ends up empty and forgotten.

ANNIE: Despite his tender age, I had two years on him, rumor was he was a great kisser, so my expectations kept getting more elaborate, more intense...

GERRY: We were at the Belle Epoque Movie Theatre.

ARMANDO: The Belle Epoque! Neither that theatre nor the beauty of that era exist anymore.

GERRY: I don't remember what the movie was but obviously that was the least important thing to me.

CRYSTAL: More popcorn?

*Armando chokes on the popcorn, coughs and gags.*

*Annie ends up banging him on the back so that he can get his breath back.*

GERRY: Cold, sweaty palms. Soon a glance, saucy eyes, twisted mouth, five, four, three, two...

CRYSTAL: My heart beats faster, I knew that something was about to happen...

ANNIE: Lips that brush, that join, everything is almost perfect...almost, cause despite his tender age, the gentleman kisses very well, the only downside is that he drools too much, his saliva is excessive. Gross, I feel like a wet dog. All I want is for it to end. He insists, and I plot my escape.

*Crystal launches herself toward a glass of water*

ARMANDO What's going on!?

CRYSTAL: I spilled my soda. I'll be right back. I'm going to the bathroom!

*A mirror game in the bathroom between Annie and Crystal.*

ANNIE: My mouth's all red!

CRYSTAL: Like a slut...

ANNIE: I don't like it, I'm not liking this "new experience" that I'm supposed to love.

CRYSTAL: I'm a slut, a slut, a slut...

ANNIE: My first encounter with the world of shared saliva is disgusting.

CRYSTAL: This will be the first of many kisses in the story of my love life.

ANNIE: It tastes bad.

*A bell rings. Change of couples.*

ARMANDO: At the end of sixth grade I met Marisa, my first girlfriend. We were classmates, with neighboring desks and homes. I liked kissing her. She was two years older than me. We blew kisses to each other in the gardens of our local park. We both entered junior high, and continued dating until our second year there. One Friday night Marisa and I were playing Hide and Seek with some neighbors. While I was concealed in my hiding-place, a neighbor found me to tell me that my girlfriend was kissing other boys, that even he had had the chance to kiss her. He broke my heart in an instant. I went to find Marisa to tell her what I'd heard. She denied it and left. There I remained, in the door frame of my house, crying. I didn't want to believe her. I preferred drama. I'd claimed my family legacy. After her fifteenth birthday party, Marisa spoke with me, and told me that we couldn't keep going out cause she wanted to date an older guy, a 17 year old. A little while later, I asked her little sister to be my girlfriend. She accepted. We didn't last long. It was my revenge on Marisa. One in, one out. It worked. From then on, the kissing bug stayed with me, and I practiced with any girl who'd let me.

*A bell rings. Change of couples.*

ARMANDO: Is this your first time?

CRYSTAL: What?

ARMANDO: Is this your first time on a speed date?

CRYSTAL: Why? Is it obvious?

GERRY: Some people revel in their own humility. That's not my problem. Where were we?

ANNIE (*rotely, out of inertia*): You were telling me about your family...

GERRY: Chapter 11: On how I began beating myself up.

ANNIE: Aha...

GERRY According to my analyst, those women trained me to love another woman, an extension of them. They...

*Armando looking toward Crystal and Annie*

No, not them...My mother and my grandmother taught me that fidelity redounds to your credit, that gentlemanliness is repaid with respect and admiration, that a woman doesn't deserve to be hit, or slapped around, even if her mouth has let out the most hurtful of insults, the most cutting slander, the most thoughtless irony.

CRYSTAL: How conscientious of your mother and grandmother. I would have loved to have met them.

GERRY: Whenever you want! They're still alive.

CRYSTAL: Don't make such a fuss...It's just a manner of speaking.

ARMANDO: They raised me to be a sensitive man. And they succeeded! I began falling in love, and I don't say that lightly. Starting at age five, I'd fall in love, suffer, and rend my clothes; love was a fortress to conquer, a continent to populate, a hope: the only one. Until I discovered the true creative and destructive essence of love.

*The bells indicate the end of the speed date.  
Everyone looks over their notes.*

GERRY: Number four, no...number five, even less.

CRYSTAL: How ridiculous with his arrogant swagger, suavely sliding his finger along the edge of his cup...no, there was definitely no chemistry between us.

ANNIE: Number six, no, I don't like divorced guys, they're too crafty.

ARMANDO: Number 3, number 3...what was she like? Right! She was the one who drew imaginary figures on the tablecloth with her index finger, and then crossed her legs to stop me from looking at her thighs...maybe...she has a nice body.

### 3.3 FRAGMENT/THE CHILD

ARMANDO: What do you want?

ANNIE: I don't know.

ARMANDO: Do you want to keep it?

ANNIE: I don't know. Let's just say that getting pregnant wasn't in my immediate plans. I'm about to start grad school and...truth is I don't know.

ARMANDO: But, do you want us to have it, yes or no?

ANNIE: You don't have a job, and my salary alone isn't enough. I don't think this is the right time.

ARMANDO: The right time for having a child doesn't exist, Anna.

ANNIE: But the reality of it is overwhelming, at least for me.

ARMANDO: Me, I do want it...

ANNIE:....

ARMANDO: What do you want?

ANNIE: I feel like everything's come to a stop. I don't know which way to go.

ARMANDO: You have doubts, but I believe that we can get through this, entirely whole, and with our child.

ANNIE: For six months, I've been paying all the bills, including the rent. When are you going to make money? You couldn't even manage to look after your family's clock shop. A child is a big responsibility, and I don't want to bear that burden alone.

ARMANDO: I already told you that I'm going to get a job soon, it's not my fault that they let me go from the business and that things are the way they are.

ANNIE: Tell me then: how are things, according to you?

ARMANDO: Fucked.

ANNIE: And yet you want us to have a child. Honestly, I don't understand you.

ARMANDO: It seems like having a child with me would really get in your way.

ANNIE: No. It's just that I have common sense, and I don't want to get stuck in a risky situation.

ARMANDO: What are you saying? A risky situation! That's life.

ANNIE: It's so easy for you to just drift along, since I'm the one who always picks you up when you fall, who always takes responsibility.

ARMANDO: If you're Miss Responsible, why did you let yourself get pregnant?

ANNIE: You're an asshole!

*Annie breaks down crying.*

*Transition.*

ARMANDO: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to say that...

ANNIE: What am I going to do?

ARMANDO: What are we going to do? You're not alone in this.

ANNIE: So what are we going to do?

ARMANDO: Solve things.

ANNIE: Lately, I feel like the love that's been solving our problems is the same love that's been fueling them in the first place.

ARMANDO: So then the same love that's led to the problem is the one that will lead us to a solution.

ANNIE: Making a baby is something that you do and at the same that just happens.

ARMANDO: Having a child with you is not in any way a problem for me.

ANNIE: For me having a child feels almost threatening.

ARMANDO: I suggest that we head in a different direction.

ANNIE: Where?

ARMANDO: Toward love, not fear.

6. IN JAKARTA AIRPORT

*Gerry and Armando are seated in the boarding area of Jakarta Airport.*

ARMANDO: Toward love...

GERRY: What did you say?

ARMANDO: Huh?

GERRY: I didn't quite hear what you said.

ARMANDO: I didn't say anything.

GERRY: Sure, you said something about love.

ARMANDO: Maybe it was a fragment of someone else's conversation.

GERRY: Maybe. Where'd your wife go?

ARMANDO: My wife?

GERRY: Yeah, your wife.

ARMANDO:...

GERRY: The one who came out of your suitcase just a moment ago.

ARMANDO: Are you feeling all right?

GERRY: I feel fine, I'm not hallucinating, I assure you.

ARMANDO: If you say so, I believe you.

GERRY: Where's your wife?

ARMANDO: I'm traveling alone.

*Crystal, the flight attendant approaches Gerry with affection*