

## **The Fish Themselves**

### Part I

1.

*A largely empty stage, low lighting. Towards the back of the stage there is a bench on which the cast sits. The various props that will be required are placed unobtrusively, but easily accessible.*

*A young girl walks to the front of the stage, spotlit. In the half-darkness behind we see three female figures who take up their places behind.*

#1 – Who is this?

#2 – So young.

#3 – So pretty.

#1 – But so much pain. Do you see her eyes?

#2 – So much pain.

#3 – See it in her eyes.

Girl – On a bright sunny October afternoon this pretty young girl walks into a churchyard.

#1 – So determined, but so much pain.

#2 – Righteous anger in her eyes.

#3 – Anger?

#2 – Politics.

#3 – Nonsense.

#1 – Hush.

Girl – She is determined, but in a dream.

#3 – Can you smell it?

#2 – The petrol.

#1 – Oh no.

Girl – She takes the petrol can and unscrews the lid.

#1 – Mercy.

Girl – Pours it over herself. She closes her eyes, takes a deep breath. Almost chokes. The fumes. She takes a cigarette.

#2 – Do you remember the photograph?

#3 – The photograph?

#2 – The monk. You must remember it. Still, controlled, dead although not yet.

#1 – The pain.

#2 – To protest.

#3 – The pain.

#2 – Politics.

Girl – So simple. Light the cigarette and then it's done. All over. Poof.

#1 – What kind of pain can explain this?

#2 – Injustice. The state of the world.

#3 – The state of her soul.

#1 – Oh the pain.

*The three start moaning.*

Girl – The lighter. Cold metal. Held in trembling hands. The petrol dripping from her fingers.

*The moaning rises, louder, more insistent.*

Girl – Still. Calm. Emptiness. The thought. Now. Now. Now.

*Silence for a beat.*

Girl – Click.

*Immediately, the three pull and push the girl between them, spinning her, dancing, #1 screaming, #2 deep animal moans, #3 shrieking la-la-la-la, hands flapping round the girl like flames, all movement, frenzy, but the girl moving slowly, arms raised.*

Girl (*in a steady monotone*) – And a thud and a flash, and then the pain. Everywhere. Her lips, her mouth, in her throat, her eyes, her hands (*faster now*) a gasp but just fire, inside, her lungs (*the noise of the chorus increasing*) her legs, her breasts, her back, and the inner voice that says 'stay calm' gives out, it is not done, it is not over, it continues, oh God, the pain, it continues, it is not done (*louder, spinning faster*) oh God, it is not done (*and she screams*)

*Everyone still, the chorus a tableau behind the standing girl who is now facing front.*

Girl – She cannot stay still as she had planned, and stumbles from the churchyard to the blacksmith’s yard next door. The blacksmith and his son come from the forge. They smother the flames. She lies under the smouldering blanket as they cough and cry. They do not see her as a girl, how can they know, she has no eyes, no mouth, no face, they see her as a blackened twitching mass, coughed up by the earth, pain made solid. There is no point calling for help. What could anyone do? If she had her eyes, she would see the sky, but all is white; if she had her ears, she could hear the birds, still singing since they do not know what has happened here, but all is dull incessant roar, the pain is a hot heavy blanket that has sunk inside her, covers her from the inside out. She twitches and shivers and takes half an hour to die.

#1 – So young but so much pain.

#3 – What could have led to this?

#2 – Politics. Injustice. The state of the world.

#3 – You can’t think that. This is something else.

#2 – She felt the pain of the world. She was making a stand.

#3 – You heartless bitch. You always were a heartless bitch.

#2 – And you were always such a flighty little bird.

#1 – So young and so much pain.

#3 – Heartless bitch.

#2 – Ignorant fool.

#1 – Hush!

#3 – Bitch.

#2 – Fool.

#1 – Hush. We must settle this question. We will settle it here tonight. Time for the dead to pass judgement on the lives they have lived. [*To the girl*] Time to rest, my poor young child. [*The girl walks out of the pool of light, takes her seat on the bench at the rear of the stage*] Your life will come again. But we must return. To the beginning.

*She turns to the bench behind, calls out to one of the figures.*

Piers.

*Piers walks blinking into the light.*

Piers – Am I to be alive now?

#1 – Yes my darling.

*#2 and #3 size him up critically*

#2 – Too young if you ask me. No dignity, no weight.

#3 – I quite like him when he's young.

#1 – Hush. Go now. Your time will come.

*#2 and #3 return to the semi circle.*