THE LEADER

CHARACTERS
THE ANNOUNCER
THE YOUNG LOVER
THE GIRL-FRIEND
THE ADMIRER
THE GIRL-ADMIRER
THE LEADER

[Standing with his back to the public, centre-stage, and with his eyes fixed on the up-stage exit, the ANNOUNCER waits for the arrival of the LEADER. To right and left, riveted to the walls, two of the LEADER’S Admirers, a man and a girl, also wait for his arrival.]

ANNOUNCER: [after a few tense moments in the same position] There he is! There he is! At the end of the street! [Shouts of ‘Hurrah!’ etc., are heard.] There’s the leader! He’s coming, he’s coming nearer! [Cries of acclaim and applause are heard from the wings.] It’s better if he doesn’t see us... [The Two Admirers hug the wall even closer.] Watch out! [The Announcer gives vent to a brief display of enthusiasm.] Hurrah! Hurrah! The leader! The leader! Long live the leader! [The Two Admirers, with their bodies rigid and flattened against the wall, thrust their necks and heads as far forward as they can to get a glimpse of the Leader.] The leader! The leader! [The Two Admirers in unison:] Hurrah! Hurrah! [Other ‘Hurrahs!’ mingled with ‘Hurrah! Bravo!’ come from the wings and gradually die down.] Hurrah! Bravo!

[The Announcer takes a step up-stage, stops, then up-stage, followed by the Two Admirers, saying as he goes: ‘Ah! Too bad! He’s going away! He’s going away! Follow me quickly!}
After him! The Announcer and the Two Admirers leave, crying: 'Leader! Leader! Leader!' (This last 'Leader!' echoes in the wings like a beating cry.)

Silence. The stage is empty for a few brief moments. The Young Lover enters, and his Girl-Friend left; they meet centre-stage.

**Young Lover:** Forgive me, Madame, or should I say Madeemoiselle?

**Girl-Friend:** I beg your pardon, I'm afraid I don't happen to know you!

**Young Lover:** And I'm afraid I don't know you either!

**Girl-Friend:** Then neither of us knows each other.

**Young Lover:** Exactly. We have something in common. It means that between us there is a basis of understanding on which we can build the edifice of our future.

**Girl-Friend:** That leaves me cold, I'm afraid.

[She makes as if to go.]

**Young Lover:** Oh, my darling, I adore you.

**Girl-Friend:** Darling, so do I!

[They embrace.]

**Young Lover:** I'm taking you with me, darling. We'll get married straightaway.

[They leave left. The stage is empty for a brief moment.]

**Announcer:** [enters up-stage followed by the Two Admirers] But the leader swore that he'd be passing here.

**Admirer:** Are you absolutely sure of that?

**Announcer:** Yes, yes, of course.

**Girl Admirer:** Was it really on his way?

**Announcer:** Yes, yes. He should have passed by here, it was marked on the Festival programme....

**Admirer:** Did you actually see it yourself and hear it with your own eyes and ears?

**Announcer:** He told someone. Someone else!

**Admirer:** But who? Who was this someone else?

**Girl Admirer:** Was it a reliable person? A friend of yours?

**Announcer:** A friend of mine who I know very well. [Suddenly in the background one hears renewed cries of 'Hurrah!' and 'Long live the leader!'] That's him now! There he is! Hip! Hip! Hurrah! There he is! Hide yourselves! Hide yourselves!

[The Two Admirers flatten themselves as before against the wall, stretching their necks out towards the wings from where the shouts of acclamation come; the Announcer watches fixedly up-stage his back to the public.]

**Announcer:** The leader's coming. He approaches. He's bending. He's unbending. [At each of the Announcer's words, the Admirers give a start and stretch their necks even farther; they shudder.] He's jumping. He's crossed the river. They're shaking his hand. He sticks out his thumb. Can you hear? They're laughing. [The Announcer and the Two Admirers also laugh.] Ah...! They're giving him a box of tools. What's he going to do with them? Ah...! He's signing autographs. The leader is stroking a hedgehog, a superb hedgehog! The crowd applauds. He's dancing, with the hedgehog in his hand. He's embracing his dancer. Hurrah! Hurrah! [Cries are heard in the wings.] He's being photographed, with his dancer on one hand and the hedgehog on the other... He greets the crowd... He spins a tremendous distance.

**Girl Admirer:** Is he coming past here? Is he coming in our direction?

**Admirer:** Are we really on his route?

**Announcer:** [turns his head to the Two Admirers] Quite, and don't move, you're spoiling everything....

**Girl Admirer:** But even so...

**Announcer:** Keep quiet, I tell you! Didn't I tell you he'd promised, that he had fixed his itinerary himself... [He turns back up-stage and cries.] Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live the leader!

[Silence] Long live, long live, the leader! [Silence] Long live, long live, long live the leader! [The Two Admirers, unable to contain themselves, also give a sudden cry of.] Hurrah! Long live the leader!

**Announcer:** [to the Admirers] Quiet, you two! Calm down! You're spoiling everything! [Then, once more looking up-stage,
with the Admirers silenced.] Long live the leader! [Wildly enthusiastic.] Hurrah! Hurrah! He's changing his shirt. He disappears behind a red screen. He reappears! [The applause intensifies.] Bravo! Bravo! [The Admirers also long to cry 'Bravo' and applaud; they put their hands to their mouths to stop themselves.] He's putting his tie on! He's reading his newspaper and drinking his morning coffee! He's still got his hedgehog ... He's leaning on the edge of the parapet. The parapet breaks. He gets up ... He gets up unaided! [Applause, shouts of 'Hurrah!'] Bravo! Well done! He brushes his soiled clothes.

TWO ADMIRERS: [stamping their feet] Oh! Oh! Oh! Ah! Ah! Ah!

ANNOUNCER: He's mounting the stool! He's climbing piggy-back, they're offering him a thin-ended wedge, he knows it's meant as a joke, and he doesn't mind, he's laughing.

[Applause and enormous acclaim.]

ADmirer: [to the Girl Admirer] You hear that? You hear? Oh! If I were king ...

Girl Admirer: Ah ...! the leader!

[This is said in an exalted tone.]

Announcer: [still with his back to the public] He's mounting the stool. No. He's getting down. A little girl offers him a bouquet of flowers ... What's he going to do? He takes the flowers ... He embraces the little girl ... calls her 'my child'...

Admirer: He embraces the little girl ... calls her 'my child'...

Girl Admirer: He embraces the little girl ... calls her 'my child'...

Announcer: He gives her the hedgehog. The little girl's crying ... Long live the leader! Long live the lead-er!

Admirer: Is he coming past here?

Girl Admirer: Is he coming past here?

Announcer: [with a sudden run, dashes out up-stage] He's going away! Hurry! Come on!

[He disappears, followed by the Two Admirers, all crying 'Hurrah! Hurrah!']

[The stage is empty for a few moments. The Two Lovers enter.]

entwined in an embrace; they halt centre-stage and separate; she carries a basket on her arm.]

Girl Friend: Let's go to the market and get some eggs!

Young Lover: Oh! I love them as much as you do!

[She takes his arm. From the right the Announcer arrives running, quickly regaining his place, back to the public, followed closely by the Two Admirers, arriving one from the left and the other from the right; the Two Admirers knock into the Two Lovers who were about to leave right.]

Admirer: Sorry!

Young Lover: Oh! Sorry!

Girl Admirer: Sorry! Oh! Sorry!

Girl Friend: Sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry, so sorry!

Admirer: Sorry, sorry, sorry, oh! sorry, sorry, sorry, so sorry!

Young Lover: Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh! So sorry, everyone!

Girl Friend: [to her Lover] Come along, Adolphe! [To the Two Admirers:] No harm done!

[She leaves, leading her Lover by the hand.]

Announcer: [watching up-stage] The leader is being pressed forward, and pressed back, and now they're pressing his trousers! [The Two Admirers regain their places.] The leader is smiling. Whilst they're pressing his trousers, he walks about. He tastes the flowers and the fruits growing in the stream. He's also tasting the roots of the trees. He suffers the little children to come unto him. He has confidence in everybody. He inaugurates the police force. He pays tribute to justice. He salutes the great victors and the great vanquished. Finally he recites a poem. The people are very moved.

Two Admirers: Bravo! Bravo! [Then, sobbing:] Boo! Boo! Boo!

Announcer: All the people are weeping. [Loud cries are heard from the wings; the Announcer and the Admirers also start to bellow.] Silence! [The Two Admirers fall silent; and there is silence from the wings.] They've given the leader's trousers back. The leader puts them on. He looks happy! Hurrah! 'Bravos', and acclaim from the wings. The Two Admirers also shout their
acclaim, jump about, without being able to see anything of what is presumed to be happening in the wings.] The leader's sucking his thumb! [To the Two Admirers:] Back, back to your places, you two, don't move, behave yourselves and shout: 'Long live the leader!'

Two Admirers: [flattened against the wall, shouting] Long live, long live the leader!

Announcer: Be quiet, I tell you, you'll spoil everything! Look out, the leader's coming!

Admirer: [in the same position] The leader's coming!

Girl Admirer: The leader's coming!

Announcer: Watch out! And keep quiet! Oh! The leader's going away! Follow him! Follow me!

[The Announcer goes out up-stage, running; the Two Admirers leave right and left, whilst in the wings the acclaim mounts, then fades. The stage is momentarily empty. The Young Lover, followed by his Girl-Friend, appear left running across the stage right.]

Young Lover: [running] You won't catch me! You won't catch me!

[goes out.]

Girl-Friend: [running] Wait a moment! Wait a moment!

[She goes out. The stage is empty for a moment; then once more the Two Lovers cross the stage at a run, and leave.]

Young Lover: You won't catch me!

Girl-Friend: Wait a moment!

[They leave right. The stage is empty. The Announcer re-appears up-stage, the Admirer from the right, the Girl Admirer from the left. They meet centre.]

Admirer: We missed him!

Girl Admirer: Rotten luck!

Announcer: It was your fault!

Admirer: That's not true!

Girl Admirer: No, that's not true!

Announcer: Are you suggesting it was mine?

Admirer: No, we didn't mean that!

Girl Admirer: No, we didn't mean that!

[Noise of acclaim and 'Hurrahs' from the wings.]

Announcer: Hurrah!

Girl Admirer: It's from over there! [She points up-stage.]

Admirer: Yes, it's from over there! [He points left.]

Announcer: Very well. Follow me! Long live the leader!

[He runs out right, followed by the Two Admirers, also shouting.]

Two Admirers: Long live the leader!

[They leave. The stage is empty for a moment. The Young Lover and his Girl-Friend appear left; the Young Lover exits up-stage; the Girl-Friend, after saying 'I'll get you!', runs out right. The Announcer and the Two Admirers appear from up-stage. The Announcer says to the Admirers:] Long live the leader! [This is repeated by the Admirers. Then, still talking to the Admirers, he says:] Follow me! Follow the leader! [He leaves up-stage, still running and shouting.] Follow him!

[The Admirer exits right, the Girl Admirer left into the wings. During the whole of this, the acclaim is heard louder or fainter according to the rhythm of the stage action; the stage is empty for a moment, then the Lovers appear from right and left, crying.]

Young Lover: I'll get you!

Girl-Friend: You won't get me!

[They leave at a run, shouting.] Long live the leader! [The Announcer and the Two Admirers emerge from up-stage, also shouting: 'Long live the leader', followed by the Two Lovers. They all leave right, in single file, crying as they run: 'The leader! Long live the leader! We'll get him! It's from over here! You won't get me!']

[They enter and leave, employing all the exits; finally, entering from left, from right, and from up-stage they all meet centre, whilst the acclaim and the applause from the wings becomes a fearful din. They embrace each other feverishly, crying at the tops of their voices.] Long live the leader! Long live the leader! Long live the leader!
[Then, abruptly, silence falls.]

Announcer: The leader is arriving. Here's the leader. To your places! Attention!

[The Admirer and the Girl-Friend flatten themselves against the wall right; the Girl Admirer and the Young Lover against the wall left; the two couples are in each other's arms, embracing.]

Admirer and
Girl-Friend: My dear, my darling!

Girl Admirer and
Young Lover: My dear, my darling!

[Meanwhile the Announcer has taken up his place, back to the audience, looking fixedly up-stage; a hush in the applause.]

Announcer: Silence. The leader has eaten his soup. He is coming. He is nigh.

[The acclaim redoubles its intensity; the Two Admirers and the Two Lovers shout.]

All: Hurrah! Hurrah! Long live the leader!

[They throw confetti before he arrives. Then the Announcer hauls himself suddenly to one side to allow the Leader to pass; the other four characters freeze with outstretched arms holding confetti; but still say:] Hurrah! [The Leader enters from up-stage, advances down-stage to centre; to the footlights, hesitates; makes a step to left, then takes a decision and leaves with great, energetic strides by right, to the enthusiastic 'Hurrahs!' of the Announcer and the feeble, somewhat astonished 'Hurrahs!' of the other four; these, in fact, have some reason to be surprised, as the Leader is headless, though wearing a hat. This is simple to effect: the actor playing the Leader needing only to wear an overcoat with the collar turned up round his forehead and topped with a hat. The-man-in-an-overcoat-with-a-hat-without-a-head is a somewhat surprising apparition and will doubtless produce a certain sensation. After the Leader's disappearance, the Girl Admirer says:]

Girl Admirer: But... but... the leader hasn't got a head!

Announcer: What's he need a head for when he's got genius!

Young Lover: That's true! [To the Girl-Friend:] What's your name?

[The Young Lover to the Girl Admirer, the Girl Admirer to the Announcer, the Announcer to the Girl-Friend, the Girl-Friend to the Young Lover:] What's yours? What's yours? What's yours? What's yours? [Then, all together, one to the other:] What's your name?

CURTAIN