

ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

Comedy

CHARACTERS:

THE MAN

THE WOMAN

THE MOTHER

THE NEIGHBORS

THE MAN. The candle was burning, and then when you left, it went out. It was burning for you. It just went out.

THE MAN. I had such a strong revelation, that I could, I don't know, I could write a book, a book about how we are all connected somehow, I mean, I had an epiphany. I mean, I actually saw how God actually distributed us, how he distributed us in general in this world. Everything — how and why we're needed and what's going on, everything became clear to me.

THE MAN. When we are, for instance, when we are floating together on the surface of our existence, of our day-to-day life, and of our life circumstances. It's this conversation that we're having right now that is deep, and honest, and understanding. But we're spending most of our time on the surface. And when I say on the surface, I don't mean the surface of our relationship, I mean each of us is floating on the surface. We're floating on the surface and while we're there, we're not, like, in-depth.

THE WOMAN. I understand.

THE MAN. I want to talk to you about a wholly different level, I mean talking about a different level. Because I too, I can't go on like this. It seems to me that you... It's just that I feel awkward saying this because it seems to me that you won't hear me, for some reason. And that's why I'm not believing it myself, because I feel that you won't hear me. And for some reason, I'm embarrassed about bringing it up in general.

THE MAN. I don't know why. But I can't talk honestly, for some reason. I can't talk in the way I want to talk, for some reason. There's a barrier blocking me.

THE WOMAN. I understand.

THE MAN. Actually, everything is fine. Everything's all right, I'm happy. I mean, lately, I've been kind of happy. I'm being useful to someone, I'm being useful to myself, nothing in my life contradicts anything, at home everything's in order. I'm alining up my vector in relation to you and to the others in a way in which not to aggress anybody, at least. I mean, I want to get to the reason why am I talking about happiness, about all of this. Thanks to everything I'm getting because of being with you, I've learned a lot, I mean a lot in terms of affection and everything. So far, yeah, there've been some fuck ups, yeah, there are some blockages. I consider I've done lots of things, I consider I've done lots of things in this world while being with you. Do you understand? Because I'm aware of what would I've done in any given situation before. Because there's only one main principle here: one step forward, two steps back, always one step forward and two steps back. And this principle is working everywhere, in everything, at any level. In my case, in your case, in our case, in all humankind. The whole humankind is moving one step forward, two steps back, do you understand? Everybody. All eras.

THE WOMAN. I just want you to understand that four years ago I realized that I could die at any given moment. Just like everyone else. That's why I made a tattoo saying «here and now», it's because I realized that if we are not living our lives, at some point we'll understand that we've fucked up everything. I'm very afraid that I'll fuck up everything.

THE MAN. You need to overcome this feeling. You've already been through this. You need to reset. Otherwise, why the fuck would you need me? Why would I be needed in your life? I mean particularly in yours. What would I be supposed to bring to your life? I didn't come to give you children. I didn't come to bring you success. I didn't come to give you anything. I only came here to help you fulfill your destiny. That's it.

THE WOMAN begins to meditate.

THE MAN. You need to overcome all of this. After all, we're not static, we're developing, and it's time for you to figure it out, and for me to figure it out. It's been quite a long time already. Where are we heading towards, where would we arrive, and by what means? But while we're heading somewhere, and we're still heading, we're literally facing a new level.

THE MAN. Although I'm somewhere on a superficial level of my consciousness, I've been thinking: what the fuck? My world won't stop spinning without you. Do you understand? But I realize that's kind of bullshit. It's this *I*, this *I*, this desire to prove to you that I don't need you, but that's not true. Because you need me.

THE MAN. I've got it, my *I* is very strong. Even stronger than your *I*. That's also because I'm a man. I mean, if we're discussing in terms of the categories of man and woman, the woman — after all, she always serves. The man serves the world. What's counterbalancing my *I*? I, I, I, I, I'm cool, I'm the best. What's counterbalancing it?

THE WOMAN. Love.

THE MAN. I know. (*Pause.*) It's like this — the woman serves, the woman expresses herself through love. I mean, damn, do you understand, that's what the world needs right now. And when I'm looking at what's going on nowadays... I'm not against the fact that... How should I put it... I'm not against the situations where the woman is ahead of the man, but I'm against the situations when the woman is taking a stand like a man, through war.

THE MAN. You can't roughen, you can't. If the woman won't interact with the world through love — that's it, it's the end, it's the breakdown, it's the apocalypse.

THE MAN. I'm off the subject right now, but I've started thinking about it. I mean, this issue is concerning the matter of destiny in general. And the matter of destiny is very important. I'm just not sure about it, and I can't guarantee it, and maybe I'm wrong because I don't understand if people believe in me, and if, for example, you believe in me.

THE WOMAN. What I'm saying is it's all about love.

THE WOMAN. And you see, knowing this is not enough. This knowledge is not enough.

THE WOMAN. You have to feel it; this «I know» of yours it's not enough, because just the rational knowledge — that's also ignorance.

THE MAN. It's like when I'm trying to remember a dream, and it feels like I kind of know it, but at the same time, I can't see it again, do you understand?

THE MOTHER enters.

THE MOTHER. I mean, maybe you could distance yourselves a bit from the fact that it's not working out?

THE MAN and THE WOMAN (*together*). But it is working out...

THE MOTHER. Is it working out?

THE WOMAN. Why are you saying that it's not working out?

THE MAN. We're talking about one thing, you're talking about something else...

THE MOTHER. So is this situation alright for you?

THE MAN. No, it's not alright for me, //

THE MOTHER. So what's to be done?

THE MAN. //that my activity is not bringing me any money, that I don't provide...//

THE MOTHER. So what's to be done?

THE MAN. //for my family, that I'm not living in my house. I mean, how could I be alright with that?

THE MOTHER. So what's to be done?

THE MAN. We'll see, we'll find out.

THE WOMAN. There are only a few options. To find some grant and to go somewhere to do something. That's it. So far, I can't find any. But probably, there ought to be some soon. In case we won't find some work by then. In that case, we'll take a grant and go film something.

THE MOTHER. What I wanted to say was that maybe you could get busy with something else. *(Pause)*. But if you don't want it, fine, just sit and wait for the grant. Sit and wait. I see what you mean. I've heard everything.

THE WOMAN. I don't know what else to say.

THE MOTHER. You don't have to say anything. Just sit and wait.

THE WOMAN. I'm telling you, it's not that easy.

THE MOTHER. Everything's complicated. Everything. I don't know what else to say to you.

Beat.

THE WOMAN. Poor Brodsky.

THE MOTHER. I'm speechless.

THE WOMAN. Poor Brodsky, he didn't even graduate from high school, he quit studying after middle school and started working as a loader.

THE MOTHER. And you think that's deadly, quitting after middle school? It's a deadly diagnosis, or what? Your father also quitted after middle school, and he achieved some pretty good results...

THE WOMAN. Dad eventually got his higher education, but Brodsky didn't.

THE MOTHER. But he also quitted after middle school.

THE MAN. Your dad had a totally different situation, what are you talking about?

THE WOMAN. I'm telling you about Brodsky. Do you know him? He's a poet.

THE MOTHER. I know he's a poet.

THE WOMAN. Ok, so I'm explaining to you, he used to work as a locksmith, as a loader, I don't know what he didn't do, he worked...//

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. //as a security guard, //

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. //as a janitor.

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. That`s the type of work he did.

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. Then he was summoned to court, he was accused of being a parasite, //

THE MOTHER. Ahem.

THE WOMAN. //because he`d been jobless for a while, and they told him he`s not bringing any benefits to the society, //

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. //and they`ve exiled him to Siberia... //

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. //for three years //

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. //where he was carrying rocks.

THE MOTHER. So.

THE WOMAN. Yes, rocks, he was carrying them.

THE MOTHER. So what?

THE WOMAN. Then, he was sent to a mental asylum, because he was saying that he was a poet, and everyone else was saying that he wasn`t.

THE MOTHER. Ahem.

THE WOMAN. Then he was eventually sent away from the USSR, and he was declared a dissident.

THE MOTHER. Ahem.

THE WOMAN. And after he had been declared a dissident, and after he left for the United States, he received the title of professor of Oxford University. Without having any studies!

THE MOTHER. Ahem.

THE WOMAN. Because he was a poet, he wasn't insane.

THE MOTHER. Ahem.

THE WOMAN. Yes, and he began teaching.

THE MOTHER. Ok, so what's your point?

THE WOMAN. I'm telling you. All of this time, he knew he was a poet, even if everyone around was saying that he was insane.

THE MOTHER. Am I calling you insane?

THE WOMAN. You're not calling me insane.

THE MOTHER. He was doing his thing.

THE WOMAN. How do you know that?

THE MOTHER. You're saying that he was writing, but they weren't acknowledging him.

THE WOMAN. Of course, now, at this point, it's easy for you to say that he was doing his thing. If I had told you about him in those times, when nobody knew he was a poet, you would have said that he was crazy, that he didn't want to work. I'm telling you, we've all got to carry our own crosses. That's got to be understood. No. (*Beat.*) There are, of course, people, for whom... People who got lucky and who can create commercial products. These are the two possibilities for success.

THE MOTHER. That's it? Only two possibilities? A harsh fate or a commercial product? You don't know of any other possibilities?

THE WOMAN. I don't know of any other possibilities, no. Only when at the beginning everything sucks, and then it turns out alright.

THE MOTHER. Ahem, only the harsh fate or the commercial product, nothing else.

THE WOMAN. As I was saying, you can't avoid your harsh fate. You never can. It's impossible. There are lots of artists in this world. And nobody awaits you with open arms.

THE MOTHER. You've told me about the artists already, I've been hearing this story. Why would you keep saying that?

THE MOTHER leaves.

THE WOMAN. I've asked myself such a difficult question because it's obvious that I want money, that we need to make a living somehow, 'cause I don't want to be eating just bread and water. And buckwheat.

THE MAN. You know, eating just bread and water and buckwheat — that's fine, but to deal with your parents every week...

THE WOMAN. I'm just saying that it's difficult for them. They grew up in a totally different world and they still live by its rules.

THE WOMAN. They're just, like, worried that we're gonna mess up, that we're gonna use up all the money and then, I don't know, start robbing old ladies. That's their issue, to put it bluntly.

THE MAN. The way your mom perceives me... S that we're gonna use up all the money and then, I don't know, start robbing old ladies. That's the ometimes it feels like in her eyes, I'm some sort of a crook, really, some gangster who, fucking shit, some gangster who arrives here and overturns everything — who throws away the chairs, the tables, who imposes his own rules, I'm telling you.

THE WOMAN. And I'm telling you, they are people who live by different rules, by another system. By them, you go to study...

THE MAN. But that's just a way of merely surviving, it's a waste of time.

THE WOMAN. I understand, but you see, the point is, like, you either separate a bit your work from your art, I mean you work in some other field and you spend the earnings on making art, or you decide that you won't work in another field, you'll only make art — but in that case, you'd still be making a compromise.

THE WOMAN. I understand that what I really want now, without thinking about money... Without thinking about anything, what I, kinda, really want is to free myself.

THE MAN. We keep on worrying about financial security because now that's the stage we're at. According to the Vedic culture, for example, according to it, there are three stages in a man's life — first, he has a hobby, then he should be working for at least three years, and then he could transform his hobby into something money-bringing. Of course, that's relative, it could work differently for everyone, but it has a point. And the point is, everybody should be ready for what they need to be ready for. 'Cause why the fuck did the man come here, in this world, in the first place? He has to study, he has to, he. *(Beat.)* Because the man is not born to die at 25, you see? That's why it makes no sense to be in a hurry.

THE WOMAN. My parents were ashamed to answer when people asked them how was I doing, they were ashamed of me, do you understand? They were ashamed that I decided to choose, instead of medicine, some stupid career that nobody understood what it was about. They were, like, in a depression for half a year, they couldn't have proper conversations with others. And then they started to understand that, apparently, that's not such a shitty career, that apparently there's something working out, kind of like this. And then I started hearing them and realizing something's changed in their attitude, and they weren't talking about money. I mean, it was not because I've started earning something.

THE MAN. You just have to feel yourself, to understand yourself. Not to drain yourself for your art, no to drain for all of this — for success, for a material base. This need for a material base — that's all bullshit. I've got to realize this. I've recently just got to realize all of this.

THE WOMAN. I've been having these dilemmas for quite a while. And now, I clearly know my answer. Because, no, seriously, I clearly know the answer now.

THE MAN. And what would this answer be?

THE WOMAN. The answer is that we're both artists.

THE MAN. And what's that supposed to mean? What does it mean?

THE WOMAN. It means that you're connected, that you can create, that's it, that's all it means. It doesn't matter what kind of creation it's going to be, that depends on you. You don't have to justify yourself to you or to anybody else.

THE WOMAN. I know that I'm an artist. I don't care how I define myself.

THE MAN. I also know that... I also know that I'm an artist. But that's not bringing me peace.

THE MAN. We haven't got to it yet. We're heading there, we're getting ready for it. Because this is very unusual, it's very unusual, you know, when the people in a couple are not from the same village. It's only possible nowadays, I guess. And this means there's a reason behind it, it means fate brought us together, it can't be otherwise. Fuck, we just have to get used to it, to get used to knowing this.

THE MAN. It's just that I'm curious about how are you completing me, how am I completing you, through what qualities? I mean, yeah, you are completing me, but how are you doing it? Actually, now I know how you're completing me, I mean, which ideas I've got from you.

THE WOMAN. Sometimes, two people are equals, they are standing at the same level, next to each other, and other times, one of them is higher, and the other is serving him you know? And the one being served might help the other, but they're definitely not equal in that situation. And he cannot create, because he's just being of service to the other. I'm just explaining this to you, I'm not blaming you, nothing like this, I'm just talking about the fact that — and it's not about me not wanting to make art with you or something — I'm just telling you that we also need to work on our relationship, and on our creative energy, and on how we're interacting with each other in this creative energy. We simply need to learn, we really need to learn and to understand how could the other create, under what circumstances, and to stay out of their way. And if we find this, if we find it, and if I actually deeply understand how could you create, and if you deeply understand how could I create, we will really get to a higher level of togetherness.

THE MAN. Okay, I want to understand, I want to feel, I want to hear, I want to find out what comes next.

Dream №1

A birth at home. THE WOMAN is giving birth. THE MOTHER is looking at her. In the background, THE NEIGHBORS are constantly drilling something.

THE WOMAN. Why is it that in order to destroy, one has to create?

THE WOMAN. Why is it that in order to create, one has to destroy?

THE WOMAN. I want to des-tro-o-o-o-oy!

THE WOMAN (*chanting a cheer*). My creative energy is setting itself free-ee-eee!

THE WOMAN (*destroying everything around*). I create.

THE WOMAN. Why is it that in order to create, one has to indulge?

THE WOMAN. Why is it that in order to indulge, one has to create?

THE WOMAN (*chanting the words like yogis*). My creative energy is setting itself free-ee-eee!

THE WOMAN (*as if immersing into a meditation state*). Inhale-exhale, inhale-exhale, deep inhale, and deep exhale.

THE NEIGHBORS stop drilling. They are screaming, together with the parents: «Push!»

THE WOMAN (*starts fooling around*). I create.

THE WOMAN. Why is it that in order to let go, one has to love?

THE WOMAN. And why is it that in order to love, one has to let go?

THE WOMAN (*pathetically*). I love!

THE WOMAN (*pathetically*). I love!

THE WOMAN approaches everyone (in the audience), gives them a push, and says: «I love» with the same pathetic intonation. She starts touching the last person in a seemingly erotic way, then she starts doing contact improvisation with them. Suddenly, she stops. THE WOMAN sits in lotus pose.

THE WOMAN. I am discovering myself.

THE MOTHER. Couldn't you have done it earlier? Or couldn't you do it later? We're sick of being here.

THE NEIGHBORS. Oh my god, is she dead?

THE MOTHER. Call an ambulance!

THE WOMAN. I pretended to die because, in order to get born, one must kill something, and in order to kill something, one has to give something in exchange. We're eating animals in order to give birth to babies in return.

THE MOTHER and THE NEIGHBORS are crying. The sounds of an ambulance are coming from the distance.

THE WOMAN. I was kidding!

No one is paying attention to her. THE MOTHER and THE NEIGHBORS keep on crying.

THE WOMAN. I was kidding! I was kidding!

The crying suddenly stops. The sounds of the ambulance are slowly fading away, until they're no longer heard.

THE MOTHER. What do you mean, you were kidding? You said that in order to give birth, one has to die!

THE NEIGHBORS. We could, of course, be crying, but the mother is right, in order to give birth, one has to die. How are you going to give birth now?

THE MOTHER and THE NEIGHBORS *(together)*. How are you going to give birth now?

THE WOMAN. I shouldn't give birth, I'm irresponsible. You were also telling me, mother, that I'm irresponsible. I was pregnant, but I wasn't ready to give birth. One day, the doctor came to me and said: «You have to give birth tomorrow». And I didn't even know if I've gained a bit of weight or there was actually a baby inside of me. I didn't even have time to talk to him, didn't have time to sing to him, didn't have time to make love to him, didn't have time for anything. How could I be giving birth, when I didn't manage anything?

THE WOMAN. How come I didn't manage to give birth when I've been wanting it for my whole life?

THE WOMAN. I wanted a dog.

THE MOTHER. You`re not allowed to.

THE WOMAN. I wanted a baby.

THE NEIGHBORS. You`re not ready.

THE MOTHER. Go on, have a baby, but know that you`re irresponsible.

THE WOMAN. I wanted to write this play in the forest. I wanted to live in the forest. I wanted to play out my life in the forest. I wanted to love in the forest, I wanted to make a baby in the forest. I wanted to run away in the forest, to run away from you and me. I wanted to give birth to a baby and to leave him in the forest so that at least someone had a house, at least someone had a connection with the earth, at least someone loved themselves, loved the others, at least someone knew, instead of «not knowing», like every other man on this earth.

The dream ends.

THE WOMAN. I`m just telling you, we won`t be reaching an agreement today, it just won`t happen. It needs a lot of work on unlocking our own potential for acceptance, potential for love, potential for discovering some of our blockages, of our influences on each other, I don`t know, of some of our confines, of some of our traumas.

THE MAN. I mean, there are things that we want, but that we cannot accept. We won`t be able to handle them. One has to simply be ready for them.

THE WOMAN. Well, 90 percent of the people don`t accept them, nobody accepts anybody.

THE WOMAN. Not their wives, not their husbands, not their parents, not their children, nobody accepts anybody.

THE MAN. Yeah but, fucking shit, one has to accept the other.

THE MAN. You have to, and I have to, and one has to accept their children.

THE WOMAN. One has to accept their parents.

THE MAN. Essentially, there are a few things that a person has to accept.

THE WOMAN. And just to accept now that I`m impotent.

THE MAN. Well, I don't think so, I mean, actually, I don't know, it's a difficult question. My whole life has been fixated on this subject. All of my rebellion is fixated on it, and my essence itself, because I wasn't accepted.

THE MAN. What I'm telling you is that my story is not about happiness, it's about trauma. And so far, the purpose of my creative path — I hope that's just for now, I hope I'll overcome it — the purpose is for me to be accepted.

THE MAN. And this drive to succeed, this whole fucking thing, you know? *(Beat.)* Sadly. *(Beat.)* I understand all of this, and I hope it will disappear, I mean, I hope something else will replace it, something like just working, just creating.

THE WOMAN. You just can't accept yourself.

THE WOMAN. To accept that you are you.

THE MAN. Well, when for example someone made five movies, he can say he made five movies.

THE WOMAN. So what? Good for him. Fuck, well, he made five movies, so what? So what does he get? What next? Well, you made them, attaboy! It doesn't define him as the person he is. It doesn't even mean that he made five good movies. It could mean he's a film director because his dad is a director, and so on, and so forth. It doesn't mean anything. Okay, you made them, good for you. What could be the meaning of it, I don't get it. Like, you made three children. So what?

THE MAN. Our key thing is co-creation. We're gonna have it in everything, in everything. Children, work, whatever. Our main thing is co-creation, it will permeate everything we do. It's gonna be the problem or the answer. It will influence everything.

THE WOMAN. I think one has to work on any relationship. And first of all on the relationship between husband and wife, even if you're going to have a baby.

THE MAN. The only thing I could say I succeeded in our working together, I'd dare to say that it's the very idea of a child.

THE MAN. I'd dare to say that it entered your soul.

THE MAN. Not the idea of making a baby, by the idea of a child itself.

THE WOMAN. Because if just the two of you, if just the two of you are unhappy together, then the child won't be able to be happy, even if you give him a hundred percent of your attention.

THE MAN. What's happening while the child is inside the belly, when he's been alive already, that's, of course, a big lapse, because a person can be born being cold already, he could be cold while being in the womb.

THE MAN. And all of these conditions for making this child. But there's something, something, something that's not working for me, I mean, something, something's not, something like a piece of the puzzle is missing, you know, in this, in this, right now, like, right now I've lost it, I can't, it's like, it's like I can't remember it, it's like something's missing here.

THE WOMAN. Please don't, please don't talk like this, because, well, I mean, look, I... for me this is a very serious issue, I mean, I mean, very serious, because I am a person who is meant to give birth to a child. Do you believe that I don't think about this?

THE WOMAN. When you say that you're a person who didn't get this, the acceptance that you need... Look, if our child is born sick, and someone tells me that it's because I didn't love him enough while he was in the womb, I'll fucking kill this someone.

THE WOMAN. Or that the child is working off my problems – I'll fucking kill this someone. Because, look, it's like, yeah, there could be different kinds of situations, seriously, I understand that all of this is important – our interaction, and the atmosphere in which the conceiving takes place, and how the baby grows inside the womb, and what stresses the mother, both in general and during the pregnancy, there are a lot of factors.

THE MAN. Wait, I understand what is all of this about – undoubtedly, it's about love. This that we're talking about, 'cause I'm not an idiot. This whole idea was about it. This is a tiny, tiny, miniature illustration of our life, which is like this little figurative child.

THE MAN. The problem is that one has to try to think clearly. Now, I don't know if I think clearly. Based on my behavior I would say no, but based on what's inside of me, I would say yes. It's just that I don't want to say something naïve or corny, because it seems to me that anything that I could say could trigger some negative reaction inside of you, like, say, that what I'm saying is only my experience. That's why I'm not really in a state to say something

wise, 'cause my words are partially received, partially not. (*Beat.*) And I don't have the willingness to accept this.

Long pause.

THE WOMAN. Do you feel comfortable in this relationship or not?

THE MAN. With you?

THE WOMAN. Yes.

THE MAN. I could, I probably could be squirming here, probably that's how it looks like, I don't know, and I could be arguing and everything, about happiness and all of this. But somehow I wake up fucking every day, and I feel happy here, do you understand?

THE MAN. That's probably the answer to your question. I mean no matter what I wouldn't be accepting, like, whether it's true or not. But I feel that it's, in the end, probably true, I feel fucking happy here. With you, here. I mean not particularly in this place, but with you now. That's it. It's a different question whether I feel ashamed for it, whether I accept it or not, but I just wake up like this, and it's kind of amazing. Yeah, what should I say, thank you, damn, for feeling this now, it just felt like a right moment in this conversation to express it. Because fuck, really, probably, all of these are fucking reasonings, mindfucks, but the opportunity I had now, to say that they are mindfucks, that's real, do you understand me? What I really feel, that's what that is, do you understand me? It's just that, just that everything is simpler, everything is actually simpler, and all of these thoughts and reasonings, they're all just a drag. Suddenly, it became clear to me that everything needs to be simple, and actually, everything is simple. First, the fact that when it's difficult for you, that's a problem for me too – this fact was a discovery for me. That when you feel that there is a problem, the thing is that your heart's been heavy, and it comes from within. Then I understood that it's just cool when you don't have all of this useless, all of these useless questions. So what's my point? This uselessness is filling my head now, and this conversation. That the truth is, everything is much more simple, actually, the fact that I wake up with a different feeling indeed, and all of this is useless – the heaviness of heart – that's not true, this is the answer, that the heaviness – that's never true. And that's why, I mean, that's why I

Blackout.