

SOMEONE ELSE

A play by Pyotr Gladilin

Translated by

John Freedman

John Freedman
jfreed16@gmail.com
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CHARACTERS

HE

SHE

SETTING

A room. Chair, window, table. The usual setting in common room. SHE is by the window. It is murky dark. The doorbell rings and she opens the door. Wearing an overcoat, a hat and holding a case in his hand, HE enters. There is a wind instrument in the case.

HE

Hey, Natasha.

SHE

Hello. How did you know what my name is?

HE

Look at you. Just as I imagined you. Allow me to introduce myself. I'm your husband.

SHE

My husband?

HE

Yes.

SHE

You mean I'm married?

HE

Yes.

SHE

How charming! I had a suspicion I was married. I have good intuition, you know. But why stand there in the doorway? Come on in. Behind my back everybody calls me an old maid. But I've had.. I've had an inkling that I'm married. Mother, my husband's here.

HE

You live with your mother?

SHE

Mother died long ago. I live alone.

HE

But you just talked to your mother.

SHE

I do that all the time. Pay it no mind. I always talk to her. She died, but I feel her constant presence.

HE

Turn on the lights. I'd like to get a good look at you, see what your face looks like. Ye-ah -

SHE

Take off your hat, would you, please?

HE

(Removes his hat.)

What beautiful, transparent eyes you have!

SHE

A marvelous Socratic forehead.

HE

You're quite cute. I'm pleased. I wouldn't want a beauty anyway. All beautiful women have the same facial features and few of them are memorable. There's nothing more tedious than a pretty face with everything in place. How old are you, by the way?

SHE

You should be ashamed to ask me that.

HE

You and I are intimates. The usual conventions don't apply. What do we care about propriety and impropriety after all we have been through in ten long years together?

SHE

What have we been through?

HE

When I had that intestine ailment you carried my specimens to the hospital for tests in your purse.

While I was writhing spasmodically in pain on the floor. You were with me the whole time, from the first enema to my final return to health.

SHE

I was 37 on the third. [*Or whatever suits the actress.*]

HE

Now turn around for me... and back again. Hair up, lift it up. You have a long neck. It's beautiful. Show me a little leg. You have such dainty feet!

SHE

Did we have a church wedding?

HE

Yes.

SHE

And a civil service?

HE

Yes.

SHE

Was it a big one?

HE

Not all that big, but it was an awful lot of fun.

SHE

Did I marry you for money or for love?

HE

For love. When we married I was a struggling musician.

SHE

You're a musician?

HE

Yes.

SHE

How charming! May I hug you?

HE

Of course.

SHE

What do you play?

HE

The trumpet.

SHE

And when I married you, you had no other source of income?

HE

No.

SHE

The rent's due today. Do you have any money?

(HE is silent.)

You have no money at all?

HE

Not an ounce.

SHE

You mean, no - no money at all?

HE

As on the first day of Creation. Nobody had money in those days. Last summer I lay belly-up on the beach staring at the blue-blue sky and I made a discovery. There's no money on the sun either.

SHE

How in the hell did I marry you?

HE

That I can't say.

SHE

I must have been head-over-heels in love. I guess I must really, really love you. I must love you so much I don't care how much money you don't have. Speak up. Say something.

HE

Don't give it a second's doubt. You absolutely wor-ship me.

SHE

Isn't that wonderful?! And I'm sitting here like a fool all evening long pitying myself for being so lonely and so wretched. But it seems I'm not lonely or wretched at all. It seems I'm married and I have a husband, such a wonderful man. Tell me, please. Only don't fudge. Tell me the truth. Have we been happy all these years?

HE

Depends on how you look at it. Sometimes yes, sometimes not so.

SHE

I can't believe I would marry a poor musician, what with all my needs and love for a luxurious life. With my parents, who spoiled me as a child because I was their one and only beloved daughter. And don't argue with me. We were very happy. I love you more than life. Embrace me. We are the happiest people in the world.

HE

I won't argue that. If it weren't for my love for you I would have died of alcohol poisoning long ago, curled

up somewhere under a fence in a ditch. Choked to death on my own vomit like a mangy dog.

SHE

What gives you such gruesome thoughts?

HE

Because I am an incurable and irremediable drunk.

SHE

How can I be happy with you if you're a drunk?

HE

In the breaks between my binges happiness is quite within reach.

SHE

I ab-so-lut-ely ab-hore alcoholics. How can anyone possibly live under one roof with a drunk and with no money?

HE

When things got really bad you go out and earn a bit.

SHE

Aren't you full of nasty stories. I work? Horrors! Are you trying to drive me to tears?

HE

Oh, nonsense. You aren't scrubbing floors in the local hospital. You collect newspaper clippings on various topics. They deliver newspapers to you at home, you read them all and then you cut out clippings with scissors. I see nothing tragic in that at all. The money isn't very good, but it's steady.

SHE

Scissors?

HE

Scissors.

SHE

We don't happen to have a child, do we?

HE

Of course we do.

SHE

How can I have a child and know nothing about it? I have felt like crying all day long today and I have had no idea why I feel like crying and I have a baby. Is it a boy or a girl?

HE

A boy.

SHE

How wonderful! And here I am sitting by the telephone with no one to call and no one calls me and I am so depressed and so lonely because I keep thinking about my life and how I'm over thirty and I have never known the joys of motherhood. But I have a boy. How wonderful! Where is he?

HE

Playing outside with the kids.

SHE

I'm married. I have a son. I remember nothing about being pregnant, I don't remember carrying him in my womb, I don't remember giving birth, or breast feeding him. But it turns out I'm already a mother. What do you say let's have another child?

HE

You have another.

SHE
I do? Another one?

HE
Yes.

SHE
I don't believe it.

HE
I'm telling you we have another child.

SHE
A boy or a girl?

HE
A boy.

SHE
Another boy. Then where is he?

HE
He took his ball and left.

SHE
Will he be back soon?

HE
He will when he gets hungry. What choice will he have?
He'll tire himself out and will come running to get
something to eat.

SHE
How charming. I'm a mother. I have two sons. And I'm
sitting here all alone sticking pins in my heart. I'm
so miserable and depressed. What do you say let's have
a girl. Please? Just one little girl?

HE
You have a girl.

SHE

We have a girl? Then where is she?

HE

She's very independent. Goes out quietly without saying anything. I don't know where she is.

SHE

How old is she?

HE

Nine.

SHE

Let's have another girl. Then we'll have two boys and two girls.

HE

We have another girl.

SHE

A second daughter?

HE

Her older sister took her out.

SHE

You mean I have four children?

HE

Yes, four.

SHE

And here I thought I had wasted my life stupidly, on pointless affairs and other nonsense. Now I find I have a husband, a boy, a girl, a girl and another boy. I'm the happiest person in the world.

HE

Finally. Every day for the last 10 years I've been explaining to you that you are the happiest woman in the world, but you don't believe me. Sometimes I think you just pretend not to believe it in order to spite me. Your complaints about life and your stubbornness simply drive me mad.

SHE

How could I not have understood that before? It's so obvious, like two-plus-two.

HE

But you couldn't. You're always bitching and moaning. There's no money. Our apartment's too small. The kids are screaming. I'm playing the trumpet. And then the oldest girl brought home a stray dog. The dog barks. The kids howl. I play the trumpet. None of us let you live your life.

SHE

I'm sitting here at home in the most horrible, repulsive silence. It's like a coffin. And now it turns out it's not silent at all. On the contrary. Kids are howling, dogs are barking, my husband's playing on the trumpet. That's a whole other story. I'm very happy.

HE

You're happy?

SHE

Yes, I'm happy.

HE

Thank God.

SHE

So do I not have any diamonds? Not even a little one?

HE

Are you kidding? How? You have two dresses. One for every day and another for going out.

SHE

Why don't my parents help us out with a little money?

HE

They've both been dead for ages.

SHE

I keep forgetting. I think they're alive. I can't get used to the idea that they're dead.

HE

Tie a string on your finger in their memory.

SHE

My children will come to me now, my own children.

HE

Of course they will. They've got no place else to go.

SHE

I'm worried. I'm very worried. I've got to spruce myself up. I'll go and change and put on my best dress. What time is it?

HE

Seven fifteen.

SHE

So late and they're not home yet. I am dying of tenderness. I feel such love for them. I want to hold them and kiss them. What should I say to them? I have to say something special to them today, something they will remember their whole lives. What should I say to them?

HE

I don't know.

SHE

What do I usually say to them? What... what do I usually say to them when they come home?

HE

You say: You little bastards, where have you been running around, God damn you? Do you want me to go out of my mind? Where in the hell have you been, you little degenerates?

SHE

That's impossible. I couldn't say that to my children.

HE

But that's what you say. Word for word. You don't only yell at them, you whip them.

SHE

I whip my own children?

HE

Do you ever. The boys really get it.

SHE

I don't believe it. That I would hit a child.

HE

You beat your husband, too.

SHE

I beat the man I love? You're lying, sir. That's what I'll say to you. You're a downright, dirty, rotten liar. How dare you? Who do you think I am? I don't have habits like that, of proving right with might. My father was a famous diplomat. I had two governesses. I know four European languages. I believe in the power of

the word. I abhor violence. Violence never accomplishes anything good, only patience, affection and love.

HE

You beat your kids and you beat your husband.

SHE

It's a lie.

HE

It's the truth.

SHE

It's not true.

HE

And I'm telling you, you do.

SHE

(Grabs a coat and hits him with it as she chants)
You lie. I hit no one. I don't hit my husband. I love him. I don't hit children. I don't hit my husband. I don't hit anyone. I don't yell at children. I'm good. I'm kind. I love you all. I don't hit my husband.

HE

Oh, come now, sweetheart.

SHE

Do you really love me?

HE

I love you.

SHE

Tell me that you have always loved me and that you will always love only me.

HE

Every day you beg me for declarations of love as if it were a hand-out. Yes, I love you. But why do we have to talk about it so much?

SHE

If we are not bound by love, what am I suffering for? You've never been unfaithful, have you?

HE

Never.

SHE

Swear it.

(Pause during which much is revealed.)

If you cheat on me, if you're only saying you love me but you really don't, then my life is absolutely pointless. Then I don't want to live. And I won't.

HE

That's not true. It's not pointless even if I don't love you. Because you have your children.

SHE

Ah, yes. I forgot. I have children.

HE

Don't ever forget that. You must remember that above all things.

SHE

I was so happy to see you. But now I realize - what a catastrophe!

HE

(Removes trumpet from its case.)

Would you like me to play you something?

SHE

Yes. When I listen to music I forget everything in the world.

HE

I'll raise your spirits. I'll play a polka by Strauss.

(From his case he removes sheet music and a trumpet. Puts the mouthpiece on the instrument. Sits. Runs his fingers over the valves. Exercises his lips. Looks at the music. Mutters something to himself. Touches his lips to the mouthpiece, closes his eyes, balloons out his cheeks, plays a note. However, in place of music, the trumpet gives out a thundering, cacophonous blat. He makes several attempts to make music, but all his attempts end in vain.)

Strange. What is wrong with me today?

SHE

You can't even play a single note.

HE

You're right.

SHE

And you're not a drunkard, either. Look at your well-groomed face.

HE

What of it?

SHE

You aren't my husband. That's what.

HE

You're right. I'm mistaken. I've confused myself for someone else.

SHE

Would you please leave now.

HE

Wait a minute. Then who am I?

SHE

As if you didn't know yourself.

HE

I swear to God I don't.

SHE

Get out of my house.

HE

Please! Don't chase me out!

SHE

Go.

HE

It's fine for you, in your own home. You're a mother. You know what you have to do. You wait for your children to come home. You feed them and put them to bed. I don't know who I am - who am I? I don't know where to go or what to do. And every person must always go somewhere and do something. But it's like I have amnesia. Who am I, really?

SHE

You really don't know?

HE

I don't even remember my name. Where did this miserable me come from?

SHE

Try to remember something. Anything.

HE

If only I had some papers of some kind. (*Pulls a comb, a wallet and keys out of his pocket.*) That's not it. That's not it. (*Pulls a huge wad of hundred-dollar bills out of his wallet.*) Where did I get all this money?

SHE

You're asking me?

HE

What if it happens - oh, God! - what if I'm an inveterate thug?

SHE

Could well be. I knew one person who considered himself quite proper but it turned out he was a lowdown ass and heel. This was quite a discovery for his family, and for us, his friends. But it was a huge surprise for him too. He'd lived a marvelous life and then, one evening, in his waning years, he seduced a little girl. That evening he threw himself out a window.

HE

I can't be left alone. I'm afraid I'm like your friend and that I know nothing about myself. And that when I learn the truth about me I'll do something horrible to myself. But I don't even know as much as your friend. It must be much better to be a lowdown snake than to not know you're a lowdown snake.

SHE

Quit complaining. Get hold of yourself and try to remember something. Any little thing.

HE

I had a father. He had a great big automobile that was always breaking down and one day he let me steer. I was so happy! What more could a snotty kid hope for?

SHE

Go on, go on. Exercise those memory muscles.

HE

A-a-a-a-a, I remember how my sister washed laundry in the river and, when it was all white and clean, it fell in and started floating downstream. I chased after it on the bank until it went under.

SHE

What else?

HE

I know. (*Revelation.*) I got a really bad cut when I was a kid, and none of the grown-ups could stop the bleeding. I can tell I'm losing consciousness. And I think, Am I really going to die? Is this really happening to me? Am I really, am I really dying? Same thing happened when I was a teenager, the first time I was with a girl. She was kneeling down with her back to me and I'm thinking, Am I really a real man now? Is this really happening to me?

SHE

Well, and what happened? Did you become a real man or did that only happen to other people?

HE

I used to think I did. But now I don't know. I don't know anything anymore. What if it wasn't me who was happy and it wasn't me who became a real man? And all

of that happened to someone else? What if I just read about it somewhere?

SHE

Where could you have read about it?

HE

In a novel.

SHE

What novel?

HE

Oh, God, I read a ton when I was a kid. My head spins from all that indiscriminate reading.

SHE

So you're not a real man yet?

HE

Maybe not.

SHE

Makes sense.

HE

It makes no sense at all. What makes sense? Absolutely nothing makes sense.

SHE

Like you, I also have every reason to experience concern and alarm. I don't know who you are, either. Moreover, I don't know what you're doing here. My children will soon be home and I have a strange man in my house.

HE

I want to make sense of this a hundred times more than you. After all, this concerns me and my life, which, at

the moment, is a total enigma to me. Who do I look like? What do you think? (*Steps away from her.*)

SHE

I'm not a good judge of people. You don't look like a virgin. You look a little like a waiter. And a hairdresser. You stink of sweet eau de cologne. You're either a hairdresser or a waiter. Or a pimp. Or an architect. Or maybe a dentist.

HE

I feel like an utter orphan. I have no one in the world but you.

SHE

Don't worry about it. It happened to me once. My girlfriend and I went to the seashore. I wake up in the morning absolutely convinced that I'm in my apartment back home in the city. I get up and start looking for the closet but I can't find it. Then I started looking for mother but I couldn't find her either. And then I started looking for dad. Didn't find him either. I fell down on my pillow and burst into tears. That's when I remembered I wasn't home. That I was on vacation at the seashore. God, how I laughed then! How I laughed!

HE

I don't think that's funny.

SHE

God, how I laughed!

HE

I don't know who I am, what my purpose is, or what I'm doing - but I know one thing. That I love you. Maybe I don't remember a damn thing, but I can feel what I feel.

SHE

I would ask you never to talk to me like that again.

HE

I love you.

SHE

Maybe you don't and you just think you do.

HE

Feelings can't be imagined.

SHE

Yes they can.

HE

That's horrible. The only thing I can get my two hands on is what I feel, see, hear and sense right now. You think that can be imagined?

SHE

You mean nothing like this ever happened to you?

HE

Yes. It did. I fell in love with a girl once but I loved her from afar. I was afraid to approach her and talk to her. I was going out of my mind. But when I finally met her, when I went up to her and talked to her, I realized I didn't love her at all. I had invented all of her qualities and charms. I fell under the spell of charms that didn't exist.

SHE

There, you see?

HE

But with you it's all different. I am filled with love for you.

SHE

You're filled with love, but it just might happen that the love you're filled with isn't for me.

HE

Impossible.

SHE

When I was a girl I was in love with one guy, but when another man ended up next to me I began loving him with the love I felt for the first guy.

HE

Incredible.

SHE

Then one time I called the second guy that I was deceiving myself about loving by using the name of the first guy, whom I really loved. Blew the lid off that one.

HE

But I'm not deceiving myself. It's really you I love.

SHE

What a strange face you have. You know, I really have seen you somewhere before.

HE

Think. Where and when could it have been?

SHE

I was sitting like this on a chair. Next to a table, like this. And I was holding a pair of scissors.

HE

And?

SHE

I was cutting clippings out of newspapers and suddenly your face flashed before me. I saw your face - in the newspaper.

HE
A newspaper?

SHE
Yes.

HE
What newspaper?

SHE
I don't remember. Let's look. Here they are on the table.

HE
What if I'm famous?

SHE
It might well be. (*Picks up a newspaper.*)

HE
If only someone would write about me in a newspaper and print my photograph next to the article, I wouldn't suffer so much about who I am and what I'm doing. Everything would snap into place. What do you think? Look like me? (*Points at a famous person.*)

SHE
Nope. No resemblance.

HE
Too bad. What about this one?

SHE
Not that one either.

HE
Look.

SHE
Similar. But it's not you.

HE

How fine to be famous. Then I'd understand right away who I am and why I'm living in this big wide world.

SHE

Look, I found you. I found you. There you are. That's you.

HE

That's me.

SHE

That's you.

HE

Me. It is. What's that written here under the photo?

SHE

Wait a second. It's written here that you are a thug and a murderer. That you killed your friend, a prominent banker, who was also a thief, by the way... He absconded with the depositors' money. That you shot him in the head three times and then ran from the scene of the crime with a large satchel of money and that you are wearing a black coat and a hat.

HE

My God. I had the feeling I was a lowdown, dirty scoundrel. I've suspected it ever since I was a kid. What else?

SHE

That you were the head security man at the bank and that when the bank director absconded with the depositors' money, you disappeared with him. And here's your name. You want me to tell you what your name is? Your name is -

HE

No. I don't want to know. I don't care what my name is any more. I won't need it any longer.

SHE

What have you done? You killed a man.

HE

I didn't kill anybody.

SHE

But it says right here in black and white that you did.

HE

Trust me - I didn't kill anyone. He was the one who opened the safe in my presence, and I, I saw money, tons of it. Mountains of it. And something weird happened. I pulled out my pistol and shot three times. I didn't want to. It was like it happened on its own, beyond my will. He was my best friend. He lay on the floor bleeding. I looked at him and thought, Did I really do this?

SHE

What have you done?

HE

Hasn't anything like that ever happened to you?

SHE

Well, yes. Five years ago almost the exact same thing happened to me. My best friend started teasing me and she made me so mad that I up and slapped her. We've never seen each other since. To this day I can't believe that I hit her. And I went and lost my best friend.

HE

And I lost the only one I had.

(Pause.)

SHE

You poor thing. What are you going to do now?

HE

Run.

SHE

Where?

HE

Europe. I know a place on the Baltic Sea where, when it's thundering cold and rainy, you can take a rubber raft to Switzerland. From Switzerland I'll go to Denmark. I've got friends there who can get me a new passport. I'll be fine with all this money. Pour me some wine.

SHE

That's the last thing you need.

HE

Why?

SHE

I got so drunk last Friday I trashed my own apartment. I started out smashing plates and then ripped up my clothes. I just got sick of everything. These goddam dirty kids and that drunk husband of mine. Then I sat down in a chair and went to sleep. When I woke up I thought, who's the asshole who tore my apartment to shreds?

HE

You're right. I'd better not drink.

SHE

Now you know who you are and what to do and where to go. Get going.

HE

I'm not going anywhere alone.

SHE

Go.

HE

You go with me. I'll get you out of this damn hole. We'll buy an apartment in Paris and a house in America. We'll become someone else entirely in other countries.

SHE

What do you need with me? You can find a girlfriend who's younger and prettier than me. Look what my life has done to me, look at my hands - they're all wrinkly.

HE

I'll have you swimming in luxury. After a couple of months of happy, carefree living you won't recognize yourself. One fine day you'll go up to the mirror and you'll say, "My God. Look how I've changed. Look how pretty I am. I can't believe my own eyes. Is this really me?"

SHE

You're absolutely right.

HE

Of course I'm right.

SHE

But I don't know you at all. We just met a half hour ago.

HE

I myself don't know who I am. How are you supposed to know? I've lived my whole life with the sensation that I am blessed with true and bounteous talent. I can sense in myself a profusion of positive and creative

powers. But I still haven't figured out what my talent is and what it's good for. I think I could be a real artist. I draw pretty good. Who knows, maybe I'm a Pissaro or a Manet? I'll paint from morning to night every day, I'll paint like mad.

SHE

You a Pissaro? Maybe. But I can't go with you. I have four children.

HE

My Lord, but you have already given them the gift of life. Do you really think they won't be grateful enough to free you from what binds you? If they love you, they'll understand. You'll see. We'll leave them some money.

SHE

They love me. But I don't love you.

HE

How do you know if you love me or not?

SHE

I feel what I feel. I don't love you.

HE

A woman I know married an aristocrat and lived with him for 25 years without loving him. But when he died she went up to the casket and kissed his forehead and right then she realized that this was the only man she had loved in her life. Love has a reverse effect. Twenty-five years will pass and it may turn out that you never loved anyone like you love me at this very moment. You just don't know that.

SHE

I don't know.

HE

You don't know.

SHE

I hate my life. I have long suspected that I'm living someone else's life.

HE

Well that's marvelous.

SHE

You're right. I'll go with you.

HE

Get dressed. Time's wasting.

SHE

Mama, sweetheart.

HE

(Stands at mirror.)

There's not a drop of remorse in my eyes. What have you done? You scum. He's laughing at me. What arrogance. And he looks like a pleasant person. Appearances can be so deceptive.

SHE

(Stands at mirror.)

It's an old coat, but it'll do.

HE

Button up my top button. I can't reach it. Then I'll do yours.

SHE

What if the raft turns over? I can't swim.

HE

You don't have to. If the raft turns over we die from the cold. But don't worry. I promise you a pleasant

journey with no surprises. We'll cast off from shore quietly under the cover of night using oars. We'll turn the motor on later.

SHE

I'm afraid. I feel creepy. For some reason this all isn't very fun.

HE

I also sense an unusual surge of spiritual adrenalin.

SHE

Mama, sweetheart, is this all really happening to me? I can't believe it. Mommykins -

HE

Let's go. You'll have plenty of time yet to talk to your mother.

SHE

Just a second.

HE

What are you looking for?

SHE

It's freezing cold outside. I can't find my gloves.

HE

Think. Where did you leave them last?

SHE

Look on the table.

HE

They're not on the table.

SHE

Look under the mirror.

HE

Don't see anything.

SHE

Where could I have put them?

HE

You're wearing them.

SHE

I'm wearing them... And I'm looking all over for them..
Shall we sit before our journey?

HE

Silently.

(They sit on chairs. HE takes her hand in his. Each of them look deeply into themselves.)

SHE

Don't be angry. But I'm not going with you.

HE

But why?

SHE

How can I say this? You see... I don't beat my children.

HE

What did you just say?

SHE

I'm a good person. I'm kind. I don't beat my children. I don't whip my kids. On the contrary. I love them madly. I feed them and I go for walks in the park with them. I bathe them in the evening. I put them to bed at night and I kiss each one of them. I always tell a story to the youngest.

HE
I wish you well.

SHE
Wait! Where are you going?

HE
I'm leaving.

SHE
I won't let you go.

HE
On what grounds?

SHE
I love you.

HE
But you just said that you don't love me.

SHE
Me?

HE
You.

SHE
I did not. That's not true. How could I have said that when I do love you?

HE
What's to love about me when I'm an irredeemable scoundrel?

SHE
You're not a scoundrel.

HE
Then who am I?

SHE

You're not a drunk and you're not a murderer. You're my husband. You're a decent and honest man. Please get that into your head. Or tie a string on your finger.

HE

Are you sure about that?

SHE

Absolutely.

HE

Swear.

SHE

I swear.

HE

Here I thought I was an irredeemable scoundrel but I'm actually a decent man. What do you say about that? Doesn't that make me a jerk?

SHE

Don't you dare. Don't dare talk about yourself like that. You're smart. You are a man of uncommon intellect and broad interests. These aren't my words. That's what everybody says. Everybody knows that. You just don't know what a fine man you are.

HE

Tell me.

SHE

You're happy and kind. You're always ready to help. You are industrious. You have earned all of this with your honest labor. You adore your children and your children worship you. Every evening they wait for you to come home and they leap into your arms.

HE

Amazing. Today I'm walking down the street and I am haunted by horrible thoughts. I wanted to hang myself. I'm going along and I'm thinking, What a beast you are. I'm a beast. I don't love anyone, no one loves me. But in actual fact I love everybody and everybody loves me. I'm smart and it seems that I have children who love to leap into my arms. But that's not the main thing. The main thing is that my wife loves me. What a discovery!

SHE

I love you.

HE

What have I done to deserve such an honor?

SHE

You're such a remarkable husband. You're so attentive, so tender, so loyal and so faithful.

HE

I'm faithful?

SHE

Yes, you are.

HE

I was just walking across the bridge trying to remember what the slut looked like that I met last night at the station. I couldn't remember and it had only been a half hour since I left her. And I was thinking, how many women like that have there been in my life whose faces I'll never remember? Two-hundred, I'll bet. Give or take a few. But in fact here's the deal - I've never had anyone but you.

SHE

Never happened.

HE
You don't think so?

SHE
Cross my heart.

HE
Don't lie to me.

SHE
I'm not lying.

HE
All right, let me look you in the eyes.

SHE
You do that. In these ten years you never once cheated on me.

HE
Swear on it.

SHE
I swear that you never have cheated on me.

HE
Swear by what?

SHE
By everything.

HE
By what everything?

SHE
By everything there is.

HE
How many years have we been together?

SHE

Ten.

HE

And I never cheated on you once?

SHE

Never.

HE

Why did I never once cheat on you? What do you think?

SHE

Because you love me very much.

HE

I love you?

SHE

You love me madly, passionately, tenderly.

HE

All right, let's say I'm your husband. It's entirely possible that I'm a decent and honest man and that I'm not a lowdown drunk and assassin. But the notion that I never once cheated on my wife... You can kill me if you want, but I'll never believe that. I don't care if I love you more than life, if you're a drop-dead beauty a thousand times over.

SHE

But, why, sweetheart? Why?

HE

I don't know.

SHE

That's no answer.

HE

Because otherwise I come out this absolutely ideal person and there is no such thing.

SHE

Not ideal. Common and normal.

HE

Normal? What do you mean normal? I don't drink. My wife loves me. My kids leap into my arms. On top of that I'm as smart as a rocket scientist. There's something unnatural about all this.

SHE

No there isn't.

HE

Then tell me, please, do I at least have some flaws? Just one little flaw?

SHE

No.

HE

I'm sorry, but you're confusing me with someone else. It doesn't happen like that.

SHE

No, I'm not. You're my husband. The instant I saw you, I said to myself - "There he is. My husband."

HE

But I'm flesh and blood. I might have some weaknesses.

SHE

Maybe you do. But I won't say what they are for anything in the world.

HE

Say it.

No. SHE

Why? HE

You don't want to know. SHE

But I want to know. HE

I'm not saying. SHE

Then goodbye. I'm leaving. HE

If that's the way you want it, then you do have one little blemish. SHE

Cocaine? HE

No. SHE

Gambling? HE

No. SHE

Boys? HE

You should be ashamed! SHE

HE

I catch pigeons and rip off their heads. With my bare hands.

SHE

No.

HE

I collect pornographic postcards.

SHE

Oh, horrors.

HE

Horse races.

SHE

Never.

HE

I love to eat excessively.

(SHE is confused.)

Well, come on -

SHE

I don't know. I'll have to think about that one.

HE

Please, have pity on me!

SHE

Postage stamps. That's your weakness. You collect postage stamps.

HE

And that's all?

SHE

It's enough for you to see an uncanceled stamp and your hands start shaking. Your eyes start rolling. You completely lose contact with reality. Saliva starts dripping out of your mouth as you race off to the cash register.

HE

That's all so slick and easy. Kids all fed, dressed and happy. You're a beauty and you even have dainty feet. I'm just a dream, kind and decent. We love each other more every day. That's pathetic, I'm telling you. Pathetic.

SHE

What's so pathetic about it?

HE

Look at how people live. That's not life they're living, that's delirium tremens. Times are tough. Life is hard. Families fall apart. Morals are subverted. Children grow up as street urchins. But everything with you and me is hunky dory. How can we look people in the eye? What will people say about us? Everybody lives badly. We're rollin' in clover.

SHE

I don't care what they say.

HE

I can't believe we don't have any problems. It doesn't happen like that.

SHE

Of course we do.

HE

Your parents hate me?

SHE

They have great respect for you.

HE

You're dying to find a red-hot lover. You want to fall in love and be swept off your feet. Don't deny it.

SHE

No.

HE

You're sick of wiping your kids' snotty noses and picking up after your husband.

SHE

You're so silly.

HE

Quit tormenting me. 'Fess up.

SHE

Okay, if you insist. You promise not to tell anyone?

HE

I'll take your secret to my grave.

SHE

Look at my right hand. You see that?

HE

What?

SHE

All my fingers are straight. My little pinkie sticks out to the side. I sprained it when I was six. And it stayed that way my whole life.

HE

That's all?

SHE

That's not enough for you?

HE

Then everything really is all right. I never killed anyone?

SHE

No.

HE

But I do look like that guy in the newspaper.

SHE

Not even close.

HE

And I don't have to escape abroad in the thundering cold and rain?

SHE

No.

HE

I am your husband, aren't I?

SHE

Yes. You are my husband. You're very smart and charming.

HE

Say, and do I really love you?

SHE

You do.

HE

Turn on the light, please. I want to get a good look at your face.

SHE

My pleasure.

HE

You know, it's really quite possible that I do love you very much. Turn around, back to me, another half turn. Lift your hair up off your back. You have a marvelous neck. You are absolutely splendid! So. I'm your husband, am I?

SHE

You are.

HE

Wait a second. Are you absolutely sure?

SHE

Absolutely.

HE

Did we have a church wedding?

SHE

Yes.

HE

And a civil service?

SHE

Yes.

HE

Was it a big one?

SHE

Not all that big, but it was an awful lot of fun.

HE

My Lord, how happy can you be? And I'm walking down the street, staggering from side to side, depressed out of

my mind. There's filth everywhere. Everything stinks and it's freezing cold. There's people coming at me and I look at their faces and their eyes are filled with despair. Very unhappy people. It's like a cat is scratching inside my brain and I think, Who in the hell needs a life like this? I might as well go hang myself. But in actual fact everything is fine, everything is great. My family is waiting for me at home. They love me. And now I can hear birds twittering happily in my head. Because someone loves me. That's why. And they can't wait for me to come home. Is that right?

SHE

Yes, sweetheart.

HE

I refuse to believe that. Is this really happening to me? (*Kisses her.*)

SHE

Wait a minute.

HE

I don't want to wait.

SHE

They'll be here any minute.

HE

Who?

SHE

Our children. What time is it?

HE

Seven-thirty.

SHE

They'll be here any minute. Quick. (*Panic.*) Look at yourself! What a mess. Go wash up and comb your hair

and shave. I'll get changed. What are we going to say when they come in?

HE

Have to think about that.

SHE

I'll tell them to go wash their hands right away.

HE

Good.

SHE

That's just what I'll say.

HE

And what should I say?

SHE

You tell them, uh, uh...

HE

What?

SHE

I don't know.

HE

Exactly.

SHE

You don't say anything. You just sit there and be silent.

HE

And then what?

SHE

We'll play it by ear.

HE

I'll pretend that I'm reading a book? Okay?

SHE

Excellent. You sit right here under the lamp and read. They'll come in and you'll be reading a book. I'll be standing by the window looking out at the street because it's late and it's dark and I'm worried that they're not home yet.

HE

(Sits under the lamp.)

Like this?

SHE

Yeah. You ready?

HE

Yes.

SHE

Don't you wonder what they're like?

HE

Who?

SHE

Our children.

HE

I don't know.

SHE

Me either.

HE

Look! It's snowing!

SHE

I'm dying of curiosity. Where are they?

HE

Be patient.

SHE

They're probably all real cute, don't you think?

HE

You bet they are. Cute as a button.

SHE

I see them. There they are. All four of them. They're all so cute. The girl, the littlest one, looks just like you. Spitting image. Here they come, here they come -

HE

But, you know, I had something I wanted to say. I forget what. What did I want to say to you?

SHE

Later. Later. We'll feed them supper and then put them to bed and then after we can talk. All right?

(They wait. She looks out the window at the snow. Outside and inside it grows darker. We hear the voices and laughter of little children. They grow louder and come closer.)

CURTAIN