

Turntable:

A story of love, art and gentrification.

Opera in three acts

CHARACTERS:

HE – a tenor or a baritone*

HIS FRIEND – a countertenor, a leggero tenor or a mezzo-soprano

HIS EX-GIRLFRIEND – a light soprano

SHE – a soprano

CAT LADY – a mezzo-soprano or contralto

NURSE – a contralto

LANDLORD – a bass or a baritone

FIRE INSPECTOR – a tenor

POLICE OFFICER – a baritone

*(*that's just how I hear them all in my head and sometimes I head them differently depending on the circumstances. – E.D.)*

HER MOTHER AND FATHER – a pair of ballet dancers

The coffee shop customers, tenants, opera fans online, the firefighters, voices in the characters' heads, the cats, etc.

The action takes place in one of the big cities in the West.

I

1st scene

Artisanal coffee shop on the ground floor of the towering, charmingly decrepit building. Signs of gentrification are abound in and around it.

He wakes up on inflatable mattress. He is an artist/barista. His girlfriend kicked him out for good the night before. He finds his phone and starts typing.

HE:

Got dumped.

My stuff's spread between

Her trunk, her flat, this floor...

I don't love her anyway anymore!

Have I ever?

Anyway! And more -

I woke up alone,

With no one else my choices to mourn.

Am I woke? Or am I just broke?

Poke fun at me -

I woke up alone...

So, she, my ex...

Wanted me to atone
For the uselessness sin
And more... And I?
Don't love her anyway anymore,
Don't wanna be a whore.
For art's useless
When less than free...
Unless it's free, art simply isn't
Worth a try, but why?
Well, on the truth alone...
I spent the night with just my phone,
Only my phone for company,
My phone full of porn!
I yearn for litany
Of truth and dare...
But I am scared, I'm also scared...

Knock on the door is heard. He jumps with a start.

HIS FRIEND:

It's me!
Hey!

HE:

Hey, yourself!

Comes into the shop.

Just me... and you?
How are you?
I heard, oh, I heard...
Are you hurt? Are you hurt?
Are you not hurt?

HE:

You want me to be hurt?

Makes his friend a cup of coffee.

Just another day on this Earth!
I will bet you this cloth –
I don't have it nearly as bad as it gets
For the people in pain
Who suffer in vain...
Whose shoulders gain weight
Of the world full of hate
For those who's in pain...
And again... the lucky star's choice –
I don't have it much worse

Cappuccino, moccaccino, frappucino crowd!
Can be very loud!
Can be very proud!
Pride in ourselves' nothing's to hide
We'll ride you out of town,
If our coffee's lukewarm.
We have been told to mold our dreams
On promises of old.
Knew nothing, nothing's new
We'll go to work with
Cappuccino, moccaccino, frappucino,
Cappuccino, moccaccino, frappucino!
Bear with us:
Lay bare!
And scared? Do not be scared!
Be very scared!

Coffee shop almost empties as suddenly as it got crowded.

HIS FRIEND:

Weird people – weirder world!

Both laughs. A woman comes into the shop back first carrying a box. It's his ex-girlfriend.

HIS EX:

I brought your stuff!
Oh, already here, you – leech!

HIS FRIEND:

Forget it, stupid b....

HIS EX:

You're here! You're here!
Of course, you're already here!
And ready to sink your teeth in!
I twitch each time
I even think'bout two of you!

HIS FRIEND:

Oh, you think?
Since then you even think?

HIS EX:

I wanted normal life!
To start a family, one day...
Maybe, love art
Together from afar,
To watch the stars,
Long walks around

Outside of town
Safe neighborhood!
Now I've to start again!
The cycle anew!
With someone else,
Some dude or bro.
That's all your fault, you leech!

HIS FRIEND:

Go to hell, you stupid b...!

HIS EX:

Two kids – a dozen hobbies each!
Neurosis, scoliosis, adderall...
Haze of true love and all:
Unconditional!
Support system!
All fictional!

He tries to come between his friend and ex-girlfriend.

HE:

Breathe in!
Breathe out!
Shouting won't help!

A couple of wandering customers come into the shop.

HE:

You two, be quiet!
Trying to earn some living here!
So, silence, please.

More customers come into the shop. He's clearly anxious. His friend and ex-girlfriend keep whispering at each other.

HIS FRIEND:

You're such a stupid b...

HIS EX:

It's all your fault!
You – leech!
Support all fictional...

HE (continues):

Please, silence!
No violence, I beg you!
That's enough!

HIS EX:

It is!

And you disgust me,
Both of you!

(to **HIS FRIEND**):

You reek with means!

(to **HIM**):

And you reek with fear!
You'll sell YOU
Not to work for real!

Storms out of the coffee shop.

HIS EX:

I thought you were the one!
You're nothing!
Unreliable and wrong!
Not strong.
I want to live for someone
And something to live for.
Not alone.
Common goals,
Not on my own –
I'm not enough.
We're vessels of what's possible,
And you're an empty one.
Some might say...
Full of regret I am...
Are you? Are you?!
Even half full?
You are a fool!
You're fool! You're fool! You're fool!
Why can't the same guy be good
And worth a try?
Why, oh, why?
On Earth...
As well could've been the Moon...
You'd sooner find a way
To go to space
Than a good man.
How can one brace
Herself and go for it
When there is nothing?
Nothing's guaranteed...

PEOPLE IN THE STREET (VOICES IN HER HEAD):

Indeed?

Teenage girls' fantasies aside
What've you expected?
To happen? To achieve?
Real bliss?
Happiness?
Lasting peace?

HIS EX:

Peace with self, at least...

POLICE OFFICER:

(writing and putting a citation on the EX's car's windshield next to a 15 minutes parking sign and noticing a fresh graffiti on a nearby wall)

Those spraying little shits!

THE CROWD: *(gathering around)*

Bits and pieces!

Pieces of it!

Is it art?

It's art!

For sure!

What's art?

That vandalism?

This piece of trash?!

Contemporary?

Contrary to appeal?

We still don't know!

Nothing at all we know still...

POLICE OFFICER:

It'll be painted over

Anyway.

Illegal! Art or not.

The EX takes her citation from the officer and leaves.

2nd scene

Back in the shop HIS FRIEND has left and he notices something under one of the tables. He lifts it. It's an old folder full of sheets of music with some notations on them and some hand-written comments on the margins.

HE:

What have we here? *(chuckles)*

Clavier? Is it clavier?

Is it all clever here?

He takes out one sheet and starts drawing on it with a black pen.

HE:

My portfolio – folio of failures...
Of allure of dreams,
Of crashing debt and no tomorrow.
No tomorrow that's worth...
Worth living,
Worth struggling, longing for...
Longing for
Truth and meaning
Meaning...
And something else besides
Aside from turning oneself
Into dust,
What's really...
Is there really... the just cause
For all that prose?

A girl comes into the shop quietly. She stands in the corner and looks at him seemingly unable to move or leave or look away.

HE (continues):

Who do you belong to?
What kind of music are you anyway?

SHE:

You've found it –
That's kind of you!
(tries to take a music sheet from his hand, sees that it has been drawn all over and now has an image of a grove of birch trees on it)

HE:

I've ruined it, I'm afraid!

SHE:

Oh, don't be... and you didn't!
I'll get a new page...
And you know what the funny thing is?

HE:

No, what?

SHE:

They are among the trees here...
Supposed to be at least...
I've seen it done differently many times though...
The trees were urinals or people dead, souls unseen...

HE:

What do you mean?

SHE:

Nothing, nothing much...
Just rambling.
Clinging to what I know...

HE:

Well, I don't... know nothing...

SHE:

(pointing at the box of stuff his EX left)
You've nowhere to live?

HE:

Yeah, kind of homeless...

SHE:

Oh...

HE:

Oh, that's okay,
Hey, really!
It's not the first time.
I think, I've been
That way more than...

SHE:

More than with a home?

HE:

Well, that's being an adult these days..?

SHE:

You say solid roof over one's head's unreal?

HE:

Oh, it's real.
Just not for me.

SHE:

What's wrong with you?

HE:

Nothing's wrong!
(To himself:
And nothing's right!)

SHE:

I can help you, I suppose...

I let rooms, I mean.

HE:

Where?

SHE:

Here, upstairs!

Come and look, when you've a break.

HE:

Why not?

I'll come!

Nothing's for me at stake.

She nods, takes her folder and leaves.

II

3rd scene

Upstairs. The stairwell is very spacious with a lot of huge art nouveau windows, basically a large terrace overlooking the city. He stands panting slightly in front of her door.

HE:

I've never felt so stupid in my life.

All right, all right? All right...

SHE: *(on the other side the door)*

Are you there?

I want you to be there...

Please, come and stay.

I can't bear you not...

HE:

I'd lie if said I saw you before –

I didn't.

Through those trees

You came into my view...

SHE:

Please, come and stay,

Let me touch your fate

At least this way.

Come here and stay...

I want you inside...

HE:

Never felt so dumb!

Rule of the thumb

Is that I can't help it...
I can't help anything, anyone
Even myself...

SHE:

Anyone else – I don't want!
Do I even wish to be wanted?
Haunted by my own desires
I admire from afar...

HE:

Misery, oh, misery!

SHE:

Misery, anxiety...

HE:

With no real reason, misery...
All around, abound.

SHE:

Chased by the expectations' hell-hounds,
Miserable we are all.

He hesitates for a moment, notices the doorbell is broken and then knocks on the door.

HE:

Hi!

SHE:

(points to the mouth of the staircase behind him)
Lift doesn't go that high
Hi!

HE:

But why?

SHE:

We're trespassing on heaven
And the best city's view!
Blew it! Blew it all!
That's the sentiment, really...

HE: *(looks around)*

How did you make it up here?

SHE:

Was born.
Life doesn't go higher.

We're transgressing on heaven
Seven days of the week,
The world might be bleak
But not here – in the belly of the sky!

HE:

It's a gift, I guess, to call sky your home,
To call the sky yours...
By the right of birth, by the fate,
To have the sky for your own slate.

They enter the apartment.

4th scene

The same staircase. Two men are ascending panting heavily. We hear them before we can actually see them. One's the landlord and the other is a fire inspector sent to check the building's wiring.

LANDLORD:

Almost! Almost!
And finally!
We've reached the finale of these stairs!

INSPECTOR:

Oh, finally!

LANDLORD:

Upstairs!

INSPECTOR:

Those endless layers!
Something's to be done about...
In and out...

LANDLORD:

You think?
In case you wondered...

INSPECTOR: *(entering the stairwell)*

What a space!

LANDLORD:

Yeah, just two here – *(aims at two apartment doors)*
One small, no kitchen – rent-control, big one – owned!

INSPECTOR:

What a shame for you!
I guess...

LANDLORD:

You guess?
Shame of shames!
Charming converted attic!
Half the building's worth!
The old hag's (*aims at a small apartment's door*) staying
Till the Siberia in hell!
The young fool (*aims at the other door*) wouldn't sell as well!
But look at wires, lights and dark...

INSPECTOR:

Decrepit, but...

LANDLORD:

But what?

INSPECTOR:

Technically, all up to you...

LANDLORD:

To me?
Up to me...
I'll be up!
Up to...

The door of the smaller flat opens and an old woman comes out. She either can't see two men or pretends not to.

CAT LADY (*making rustling sounds with a bag of cat food*):

Calico, tuxedo, tabby, gray and black –
Running all around,
Up and down the flat.
(When not asleep, of course.)
I keep the tabs,
Of course!
On everyone.
Nothing's coarse about them
From head to tail to toe.
And soft and squashy,
On the sofa, on the shelf and on the floor,
Or sharp and pointy
If you love them a moment more
Than they desire
You will collect their ire!
Life with a cat is rife
With honesty and still
Is worth it!
Every hiss and every bite –

They never lie, they never praise,
Erased all misery is
By calicos and tabbies and the tuxedo one –
My fluffy gentleman is done
With all the noise
And snuggling next to me with poise
Which only a feline can have
While black and gray are nowhere to be found
They might as well come underground
To stay...

LANDLORD: *(whispering to the other man)*

Used to have half the building
Filled with these artistic types!

Inspector nods with understanding. The Cat Lady notices them.

CAT LADY:

Good day to you!
I'm still not leaving!

LANDLORD:

Good day!
(Is it, though?)

CAT LADY:

Till the hell freezes all over!
(You can go to hell!)

LANLORD:

(Already right there!)
This gentleman has to inspect your wires and lights!
(So dim that devil himself wouldn't find his own tail
Inside your stinky, filthy lair!)

Cat Lady opens her door and invites the inspector inside.

LANDLORD: *(caressing the wood of the big flat's door longingly)*

Real wood!
My blood and sweat
Cover these sweet, wicked walls.
Sweet dreams of an ideal world.
My intentions're pure
You go figure!
Come here and figure out -
No doubt they neglect
Pure bliss
Of real wood and stone,
Untainted glass

And murals painted.
They could've been paid
But they prefer to stay.
I cannot sway their pride
No matter what I try!
Oh, how I try!
Obstacles of people!
We're in stalemate,
What a state,
Oh, what a state!
I hate their foolishness!
That stupid girl,
That batty hag!
Dragging me through mud!
Her head's in the clouds (*points at one door*)
Her head's a litter box! (*turns to the Cat Lady's door*)
Ashes and filth
On real wood and stone!
But her alone I could've get
At least...
But the girl? (*turns halfway back to the other door*)
She's everything
That's with the world is wrong!
I cannot win,
But can I?
Will I?
Will I win?
I will!
I swear, I will!
I swear it on my will.
In times of old
The might was right
And it still is.
Caprice of theirs is done!
I'll be the one to turn the tide!
Out of hiding come I!
In this world –
Money rule and bully!
Who are you?!
Who you are...
You're nothing!
All your talents, dreams,
Ideas, *mia culpas* –
The only cult is cash
Transactional!
The clash is over!
Reactional.
Has been for long.
I'll take this tower even if I'm wrong.

I'll have the life I wish –
Beautiful wife
To remind these two
That women're nothing
When not liked!
You think you can survive alone
Surrounded by real wood and stone?
With nobody to pay
Because you wouldn't sell?
To hell with you!
And welcome to hell!

Inspector comes running out of the Cat Lady's flat.

INSPECTOR:

Get off me!
Mean-spirited fur ball!

LANDLORD:

What is it there?

INSPECTOR:

Her cats are mad!
And so is she!

The Cat Lady is cackling softly unseen.

LANDLORD

I told you so!

INSPECTOR

You have to deal with this
Each and every day?!

LANDLORD

(Not quite each)
Oh, yeah!
Impossible!
Implausible!
But true!
Did they hurt?
Have they offended you?

INSPECTOR

Complaint! Formal complaint!
I'll sue!

LANDLORD

Not me, I hope?

INSPECTOR (*clutching his racing heart*)

Oh, god, no!
You're a victim too!
Of these witches!
Creatures of the dark!
They're here to make life hell!

LANDLORD

Oh, hail to that!
All hail to hell...

Inspector writes something frantically on his clipboard and hands the resulting paper to the Landlord. Then both leave. After a moment of silence Landlord comes back, takes out a lighter and sets the piece of paper the Inspector gave him on fire.

5th scene

Big kitchen which seems to be an extension of the stairwell, there are several doors, people are coming and going. The Cat Lady sits, lights a joint and opens a huge photo album.

CAT LADY:

Oh, my heavenly creatures!
Kitty, kitty, kitty!
Fluffy, cutie, naughty boy!
Cat lady's loneliness
Is something else!
It's nothing new.
I knew it from the start.
I felt it and I fell apart
Eventually
And, oh, so many times!
In the parallel universe of my dreams
I have always been queen,
Carried love in my heart.
That love was immense,
Didn't really make sense
In my small, tiny life...
Now I'm whining!
Please, forgive me,
Forgive that in me...
Through the lens of private opinions
I'm seen...
They know they'll win.
They always win...
With their diaries and diapers,
With their squares and stripes...
Of all
I prefer stripes of old!

When it used to make sense,
When love was immense!
Love was immense...
Once...
Oh, no sob story!
The glory days've passed!
I shed my tears in private.
The fear of death expired...
It disappeared... It disappears...

There's some commotion outside and then a knock on the door. Cat Lady stands up and goes to open. It's the landlord.

And THAT instead appears...

LANDLORD:

Some people are complaining!

CAT LADY:

What've we done this time?!

LANDLORD:

Don't want hear you explaining!

He thrusts an official looking envelop into her hand and storms off. Cat Lady opens it.

CAT LADY:

Oh, crap! Another fine!

She leaves the contents of the envelop on the table, lights another cigarette then goes back to her album and turns another page.

THE BABYBOOMERS' CHOIR:

Ghost of the city –
City of the ghosts.
We moved out and
And now our children can't return (go back).
We sold our souls
Now they've to sell theirs cheaper
To the market creeps.
We used to fly high as a kite,
Be free and fight for freedom of expression!
Time compressed,
And we progressed.
Now some of us oppress,
Some are oppressed.
But we digress!
Our generation was the best!
Has been the best!

We're proudest of has-beens –
Our grasp on power's firm!
Stern looks we give to midgets of today.
And the future,
The future, hey!
We'll freeze the future,
Squeeze it dry!
History will stop.
Already done!
Stop arguing, stop stirring, moving,
Flying high!
You've no idea how to fly!
Stop fighting us.
And maybe,
Oh, just maybe,
We will give you crumbs!

SHE: *(coming into the kitchen)*
Who are you looking at?

CAT LADY:
My friends, your parents' friends...
That's how it all ends –
With a pictures' stack!
Heck!
You won't even achieve that
With all your phones and apps!

SHE:
Oh, come on!

(Laughs exasperatedly and points at the pieces of paper in front of the Cat Lady)

What did the landlord want again?

CAT LADY: *(giving her the contents of the envelop)*
Another fine an' inspection notice!
All the same!
Same old, same old.
Since that day you brought your hunk to our hold!

Points toward one of the doors. She shushes her. The Nurse comes out of her room and a couple of other people come into the apartment from the stairwell. They have instruments' cases in their hands.

NURSE:
All right? Is everything all right?
Is anything?

MUSICIANS/TENANTS:

All tight...
The noose around our necks –
He sold the building – every flat!
We're next!
We're on our way out
Of the past!
Some techie yuppies
Want to turn it
Into their castle of steel and glass...
Steel and glass castles're here
To rule and conquer us...
And all the fuss about culture... notice –
Is obscure –
There's no cure in art!
Where's the cure?!
The hope?
The chance, the change?!
The fringe is getting bigger still...
The fringe beyond the walls of
Castles of tears, glass and steel!

CAT LADY:

Calm down, you all!

He comes into the kitchen sometime during the commotion.

CAT LADY: (to the Nurse)

How was your shift?

The Nurse takes a joint from her hand and puffs some smoke.

NURSE:

Same hell!
Homeless drug addicts – check!
With victims of stabbing neck to neck!

CAT LADY:

Check! Mate!

NURSE:

Domestic ones - the worst!

CAT LADY:

Another reason
I've never even really tried!

NURSE:

And pet bites!

Don't forget pet bites!

CAT LADY:

Oh, all right...

HE:

Trolling each other, yeah?!

CAT LADY:

My reputation boasts too many stains for that!

NURSE:

And I'm dead... tired...

HE:

Still...

What's with the landlord?

CAT LADY:

All the same – same fuss,
His lordship wants more cocaine-snorters
Instead of us!

Takes the joint from the Nurse's hand and puffs with gusto. She crumbles papers with her fingers, takes one of the photo albums and goes back to her room. He looks after her distracted then shakes his head.

HE: *(points at the photo album in front of the Cat Lady)*

Her parents?

CAT LADY:

Yeah...

They were...

NURSE:

What' appened?

She seems to worship them...

CAT LADY:

Oh, doesn't she?

At times...

HE:

Well?

CAT LADY:

Well, I was here...

There... If memory serves.

It's all a blur... Really...

Oh, silly me...
Not sure I believe myself
Myself...

NURSE:

And yet?
Domestic? Cancer? Car crash?

CAT LADY:

Domestic cancerous car crash...
I believe what happened was...
I believe in what happened.
I was here and I wasn't
I was there or I wasn't.
They fought
Or not.
She cowered in fear as ever...
But this image I've in my head,
Image proceeding death:
It stuck, it stayed, it fought other memories,
And conquered, and overcame.
All the same,
All the sane ones
They were whatever they were.
He didn't deserve her and knew it,
She was in love and lust.
Then it all fell into dust,
He drank them both to death.
She crashed'em and they burned.
I hope, for their girl's sake
They've earned their place in heaven.
Cause with her loneliness,
She'll be alone even there...
... where nobody should be alone.

NURSE AND HIM (together):

And you?

CAT LADY:

Oh, I'm not going to heaven!
I'll haunt this place until the world's no more!
Settle the score!

NURSE AND HIM:

And then? What's then?

CAT LADY:

Then wait for the next Big Bang!

6th scene

He stands behind the door indecisive, listening to the muffled classical music sounds from her room. Finally he knocks.

SHE:

Yeah...

He enters. She takes the needle of the LP in the old turntable.

HE:

Are you all right?

Quite a collection you have here! *(pointing at the stack of old LPs)*

SHE: *(laughs sadly)*

Yeah... quite!

I've got some really Holy Grail ones...

And I'm right...

Maybe not all...

HE:

But as a whole? *(looks through the stack of LPs)*

SHE:

I'm fine!

It's just a fine.

Another fine... *(points at the pile on her rather cluttered desk)*

HE:

And you're doing...?

SHE: *(visibly embarrassed)*

Fine...

Just reading some stupid stuff...

HE:

You and 'stupid' don't go together really!

SHE:

Really?!

HE:

Really!

Is the stupid personal?

(gestures for her to give him her phone)

SHE: *(mocking him a little bit)*

Not really!

Public, I'm a part of, stuff!
That is my life!
This music is my life...

Gives him the phone. He scrolls amused.

OPERA FANS' CHOIR:

Oh, that note,
That tone was wrong!
He sings as if it is a pop song!
Pop song!
A flop, a flop, a flop!
She is all bad!
Her top
Is compromised!
We raise our voice,
Collective choice.
The wisdom of the crowd
Sage and wise.
We raise our voices
And in comment ranks we rise!
We earn respect and fear
Of our shallow pool.
We pull each others' hair,
We cherish fight
Against the tide of time.
The prime is over –
The best times not coming back.
The speck of dust
Thrust into our collective eye (ear)
By the rare thriving
Exceptions to the rule...
And we will rule those out!
Decadence condensed
And loves past tenses.
Oh, how great, how unbelievable,
The peak was
In the dusty past!
Unachievable repeat of greatness,
So, we retreat
To the recesses inner of the net
To scold the present
And lament the future's doom.
He'll lose his voice for sure!
Oh, why we must endure
This travesty rendition?
Underscore the great
Who's rolling in their grave.
Forgotten dreams...

Forgotten dreams...
Abyss is quiet.
Quieter still is death
Of everlasting love –
There's no cure where there's no love!
But us?
Isn't our love enough?
Today's the revelation!
Put the famous or unknown here.
What a rapture of applause!
And to hell with those
Who grossly over, underestimate!
We will forgive, but not forget!
We will retaliate!
Articulate!
And love and hate!
We live for love and hate...

HE:

Oh, wow!
Why are you even reading this?

SHE:

Distraction's bliss!
Don't really wanna think about these... (*points at the pile of papers again*)
Don't feel I've strength to fight...
Inspections, filings, judgements, fines...
Mere thought of not being here
Gives me profound, all round grief

HE:

Don't you ever want, don't know... to be free?
Does it all ever feel a cage?

SHE:

No, you don't... know...
I breathe, I breathe this air!
I've breathed it...
Acted on this stage...
And my mum and dad...
Dead...

HE:

Dead.
Lived here?
Died here?

SHE:

She was a prompter, same as I...

He – a stagehand.
One day they were here,
The next they weren't.
My childhood ended
And it never did.
It happened...
I stood on my own feet.
I stood still...
I stayed strong, they say...
They said a lot (*points at the photo album lying open on her bed*)
Both at the funeral and later,
In mourning...
They praised me all
And waited greedily for me to fail,
To fall...
Feeling my grief,
Feeding on my grief –
Soulless, whorish thieves
They are...

HE:

What, all of them?

SHE:

Maybe not all... but some!
Some apples're always rotten –
That's life!
You're right, of course, you're right...
But forgiveness is labour.
And I'm lazy as hell,
When it comes to...

HE:

Forgiveness is silence –
Only it gives you real calm.
Forgive some, forget some.
Forget some, forgive some!

SHE:

And be content?
It's not enough!
I wish for happiness.

HE:

My ex... She wanted this...
Happiness...

SHE:

I heard you arguing, remember?

All in the coffee shop...
And it's not happiness she wants –
She wants to be content.

HE:

What does it even mean?

SHE:

It is smooth sailing,
Smooth and safe
Through life,
Through all of strife.
It's a deal – (with universe):
I'll do it right -
You give me piece, not misery
Contentment bloated...
It's paying forward to the fate
With boredom and contempt,
It's being too tired in time for love
Or hate...

HE:

I've felt all of the above
But've never been content...

SHE:

It's an illusion also
As something always happens
It's never there... It's always
Someone else's feed and images
And magic truth...
Your child gets sick, or you can't have one.
You get kicked out of a job,
Or you just feel you're done.
Or none of the above
But misery inside
Which you can't breathe through,
You can only hide.
Ride to the sunset of your days!
Hey, what else's here?
What else is there...
But slow sunset of ones days?
Pay the bills, stifle your feels...
Pay the bills, stifle your feels...

HE:

And happiness, your happiness,
What is it then?

SHE: (*shrugs*)

Recipes for disasters –
That's what I'm good at...
That's my whole life!

(*Looks around her*)

Which I'm about to lose...
I'm'bout to lose...

She smiles but then there's an awkward silence between them. He almost wants to leave but then finds courage. He kisses her lips. The kiss is profound and long. Then the wires emit a cracking sound, lights flickers a couple of times and go off. It's dark, they do not even notice.

(...)

Morning. She's fast asleep. He sits on the bed reluctant to leave.

HE:

I won't allow it!
Allow you to lose
Your paradise, your heaven,
Your place!
Your paradise's safe!
If up to me... it is...
For you, not me!
For you, for us, not me...
For your true self,
My self, my soul,
All of me, I am...
I'm something, someone else
When next to you...
I wish, I want, I dream!
To really earn a place, a spot
In your sweet, over the streets paradise,
Your heaven, seventh sky.
I'll try for you, for all of us I'll try!

He kisses her on the head softly and leaves without waking her.

III

7th scene

The stairwell. The garbage chute is covered with the 'OUT OF ORDER' sign. There are several garbage bags underneath it. The space is empty at first then his friend comes into view rather reluctantly. He has his phone in his hand and probably has just finished talking.

HIS FRIEND:

It's better for everyone
In a long run.
Disappointment abound
In this world as is.
There isn't anything
To be done about
Bouts of love, bouts of lust,
Of life and thriving,
Striving to better be –
Something, someone else...
We're all under the lens
Of cruel, mindless fate.
Nothing's real,
Everything's fake!
It'll be better for everyone...
I know... We all know deep in our hearts,
It'll be better for everyone...
Better for everyone
For you two to part...

Stares at his phone and takes the call.

CALLER:

Hello, what's up? Hi!

HIS FRIEND:

Hello, what's up, hi...

CALLER:

It's about your friend here –
The one you're trying to steer.
He's reached out...

HIS FRIEND:

Oh, yeah? And what's the deal?

CALLER:

He's starting to come round?
To our side?

HIS FRIEND:

Out of his cave?
For crying out loud!
Creative industries do not make slaves
Out of employees!
But that's what he sees.

CALLER:

You can sure be at ease with us

Here with us...
As long as services of yours are needed
That is...
And his...

HIS FRIEND:

Well, he has edge.
He's always had.
But it is hard for him to please!
So, agree at your peril!
Don't get me wrong,
He's friend of mine
But selfish he is and free!
He'll flee at the first sign of wrong!

CALLER:

And what's wrong for him?

HIS FRIEND:

For him... With him...
Who knows?
He blows it so often
So often he is wrong!
Unstable, unable to bend
Even a little bit...
Just enough to make things happen...
So, agree and take him if you must...
It might sound unjust
But I'm just being honest!

CALLER:

Thank you!
Oh, thank you for that!
We weren't hiring anyway! But...

HIS FRIEND:

Oh, it's okay!
Keeping'em on their toes!

CALLER:

Yeah. Bye! Take care!

HIS FRIEND:

Goodbye!
I'll try to... (*hangs up*)

Be careful
Of what I take and give...
Sprinkled with...

Scarcity leaves scars...
And bars from...
I wish him the world!
The world at his...
At our feet!
Or am I simply being
A vile jealous little shit?
He'll change his mind,
He'll bail!
He always does!
She'll fail, it'll fail...
It must!

He hears someone's coming but stays in the shadows apparently deep in thought.

SHE: *(comes out of her flat wearing HIS T-shirt, knocks on Cat Lady's door)*

I've found the cat!
I've found the cat!
He's hiding!
Hiding under wraps!

CAT LADY: *(from inside her flat)*

Oh, is he now?
I've been worried sick!
I'll come and get'im in a bit.
My sweet, little kitty boy!

SHE nods even though Cat Lady can't see her and goes back into her flat leaving the door open. Cat Lady comes out with a litter box, empties it in one of the garbage bags under the chute and goes back into her flat. Landlord climbs the stairs, panting.

LANDLORD: *(looks at the door left open disapprovingly)*

They think it's common space!
Up here, this place!
It's not!
For better or for worse it's not!
Their hoard of cats!
Their trash!
The smell, the look, the noise! *(sees HIS FRIEND)*

You're here to see the flats?

HIS FRIEND:

What if I am?

LANDLORD:

Then I'll be glad to show you some! *(points back at the stairs)*

HIS FRIEND:

And if I'm after...? (*points at HER door*)

LANDLORD:

Not yet...

HIS FRIEND:

Then later.

LANDLORD:

Later then.

Bows out.

His friend is about to ring the door when his EX comes into view. She has a lumpy parcel in her hands.

HIS FRIEND (to himself):

Will I go in today at all?

HIS EX:

Still here? Here still...

You've won...

Not coming back he

To me...

He won't.

You won...

HIS FRIEND:

Oh, come on!

What's going on with you,

Anyway?

HIS EX:

Oh, truly?

You could hardly stand me all this time,

And now?

The hatchet's buried?

HIS FRIEND:

Buried, forgotten, forgiven!

(Given that you aspire –

Desperate enough to do as I would say?)

HIS EX:

Does he remember me at all?

HIS FRIEND:

Maybe?

HIS EX:

Or has he moved on?

HIS FRIEND:

Maybe!

And, hey,

What've you brought? (*points at the parcel*)

HIS EX: (*unwraps a male hoodie*)

It's his...

He loves it, loved it...

HIS FRIEND:

I get it.

I'll get it!

I'll be your ally!

I'll try to help, talk to him!

It's madness here -

What he thinks he has here.

Pure madness -

Regress to the hippies...

Or something.

HIS EX:

Hippies?

Are they still a thing?

HIS FRIEND:

Apparently they are!

HIS EX:

I'll go now...

HIS FRIEND:

Go now!

(his EX gives him the hoodie and leaves)

Allow me to ride you into sunset!

Maybe.

Don't be upset!

Maybe.

What I decide -

Is better for everyone!

For sure...

Examines the broken doorbell with disdain and knocks. She opens the door still wearing HIS T-shirt.

SHE: *(in the kitchen)*

Hello. He's not here now.

HIS FRIEND: *(looking around)*

Now... is it all really yours?

SHE:

Yeah, and you?

(What's yours?)

HIS FRIEND:

(Friendship)

I'm his friend.

SHE:

Oh, his friend.

Don't be offended!

I just couldn't tell...

HIS FRIEND:

(The hell's wrong with you?!)

SHE:

(The hell with you is wrong.)

HIS FRIEND:

What do you mean?

SHE:

Nothing really much.

As such, I mean, his friend...

HE:

Do you pretend to care,

Or really do?

SHE:

I do.

HE:

(And I do too...)

SHE:

How nice, how cute, how...

HIS FRIEND:

(Just spit it out already, will you?)

SHE:

I look at you,
Listen to you
And I can't tell:
You want to be him?
Or to be with him?

HIS FRIEND:

(Doesn't matter!)
Does it matter?
What matters is
He'll never sacrifice –
No matter what he says!
Not even if he tries.
He takes sacrifices,
Takes sacrifices...
Collects them...
And you don't seem a sacrifice-giving 'wifey' type.
You have your own thing going on.
He'll only take!
He always does.

SHE:

So, you say 'buzz off', get lost?

HIS FRIEND:

I'm saying - be prepared to lose.
He'll never sacrifice.
All parts of him intact.
He'll always stay himself.
Mutual giving's no option –
His only motion is to take.
He'll only take!
So, wake up!
Wake the hell up!

Leaves her alone and goes into his friend's room.

SHE:

The hell awaits...
You say – don't even try,
Don't even hope.
Oh, I have not!
He's piece of candy,
Sweet candy – nothing more
For me...
I'm a stepping stone.
I can't have him!
Any of him!
All I can have is any of me, it seems...

All of me's all I have...
All I have...
Do you ever have this feeling
Like someone's just shouting inside your head?
Your inner ears are ringing,
Brain's boiling dead...
And it seems impossible
To even shed a tear?
Tear reality! Tear!
It's rare to not have this feeling...
The short fling of existence
Here on this Earth
Takes you by the scruff
And doesn't let go.
Oh...

He comes through the front door holding several coffees, smiles at her.

HE:

This morning city's quiet!
Somehow
Riot's in my heart only!
Lonely no more!
Or am I?

SHE (*not looking at HIM*):

Are you?
Aren't we nothing...?
More than... (*shrugs*)

HE:

Than?
More than what?
We're nothing? How?
Say that again!
When does it happen?
What's been going on?
Don't make me guess!
I beg you...

SHE:

Don't...
Do not beg!
(It's bad enough...
But maybe you are true – he's wrong?
But who am I
To make such a change in anyone?)

HE:

I'll let you think.
You'll know better...

HE leaves.

SHE:
I know worse...
It seems I always know worse...

*In his room. His friend is looking around at **HIS** drawings. **SHE's** on a lot of those mostly among the trees.*

HE (coming into the room):
I don't understand...

HIS FRIEND (turning around and smiling apologetically):
What? World, women, wisdom?

HE:
Both, all!
All three...

Both laugh. It sounds a bit fake.

HIS FRIEND:
I agree!

HE:
With what?

HIS FRIEND:
All three ungettable!

HE:
They are.

HIS FRIEND (giving **HIM** the hoodie):
It's yours?

HE (chuckles):
Yeah!
Thought I lost it!
Nice!

Hears the door slammed and the muffled sound of classical music. His face falls.

HIS FRIEND (looking at **HIM** closely):
It's a day off!
For both of us...

Let's go eat, joke, drink,
Let's carry ourselves from this brink!
(Ink on my soul is dry...
Let's bring yours to the fold...)

Takes two concert tickets out of his pocket.

Then let's have fun!
I hope, you're done
With all of...

Or you like that music now too?

HE:

Oh, no I don't!
(...think I do.)

HIS FRIEND opens the door and they both leave. Music from another room gets louder and then stops.

(...)

After a moment of silence **HE** comes back into his room, slowly unfolds the hoodie – it's covered in paint stains – and puts it on. Starts taking his drawings off the walls.

HE:

Love, happiness, meaning -
Strange empty words.
Now boredom scores...
Only boredom scores.
Anxious thoughts, anxious thoughts...
Self-help plots
In your head,
In your heart, in my heart...
How's emptiness for a start?
How's that for a start?
Love art, live art!
Live art, love art...
As long as love...
As long as life.
Shallow, empty nods
Towards, all towards –
Reduction, obstruction, destruction...

HE stands in the middle of the room seemingly lost in his thoughts, smoke starts coming from under his closed door.

8th scene

Downstairs. Commotion of spectators, tenants covered in soot, firefighters. The Nurse is trying to help everyone.

SPECTATORS' CHOIR

The stage is set!
The fire's raging.
Flames aflame,
Flames consume.
Flames consumate
The fumes engulf.
Suck up the air.
We stand transfixed,
Can't look away.
Disaster's eating our eyeballs,
Eyelids melting,
Corroding, eating our souls.
With idle motion
Of emotions,
Substance and meaning lacking notions,
Inkling to be part of...
Tomorrow's boredom'll
Rip it all apart.
Compassion's short lived,
Birthed by primal fears.
Fierce flames, licking the stairs,
The stars, the clouds, the sky.
We shy away restrained...
We shy away thoroughly entertained...

The Cat Lady's sitting surrounded by the cat carriers, breathing oxygen through the mask from the tank given to her by the EMTs.

SHE (comes and looks inside the carriers counting the cats):

All here! All saved! All safe!

CAT LADY (taking the mask off her face):

Yeah!

EVERYBODY:

All lost.
Not all are lost!
Cats are okay! People are fine!

SHE:

And he left...
He wasn't here.
I'm grateful to his friend
For taking him...
I'm grateful actually...

NURSE (*sitting down next to her*):

For what?

SHE:

Him not being here...

For all this hell.

Don't know how we'll tell him...

All his art...

NURSE:

What do you mean?

SHE:

Some of it's online

But still...

NURSE:

What do you mean?

He wasn't here?

SHE:

He left.

His friend took'im.

NURSE:

No, he did not!

He went back just before...

Hey, oh, hey! (*shouts to firefighters*)

We have one person unaccounted for!

One guy is lost!

FIREFIGHTERS/EVERYONE:

Find him! Find him! Find him!

Let's find him!

One's unaccounted,

Go in!

Oh, no!

We can't!

They can't!

The structure's unstable!

We/They're unable to come in

And look for him!

SHE (*panicking*):

But you must!

You have to find...

You have to save!

You have to look for him!

Tries to run towards the entrance to the building. The Nurse and a firefighter catch her.

SHE:

I've said some awful stuff!
Some awful stuff I've thought!
I've said we're nothing!
I didn't mean it...
Any of it I didn't mean...
Why, why was I so mean?
Why was I so mean?
Consumed by doubt
All about...
It's all about love!
I hate this place!
If he is dying there, above!
Heaven won't have him yet!
Sacrifice's stupid, sacrifice!
Forgive me all the lies.
I lie so expertly to myself,
Drag others into this...
Successfully...
Not fully understanding
What the deal is.
What's the deal with us?
How am I to know now?
How am I to breathe?
If... if... if...

HIS FRIEND (*coming into view with his Ex in toe*):

For crying out loud!
What has been going on?

SPECTATORS' CHOIR:

Some guy's got stuck inside!

*His friend looks around at **HER**, the Nurse, who is hugging her, the Cat Lady and others and freezes completely just as **SHE** makes another desperate attempt to run inside the burning building and is stopped yet again. His Ex starts weeping. Then there's a commotion.*

SPECTATORS' CHOIR:

What is it? Oh, boy!
Are they dragging the body outside?
Let's step aside!
Look closer!
Will we see it all?
The whole thing:
Heartbreak and death, and the death toll?

HE comes through the silent crowd alive. **HE**'s limping carrying a box and one arm and a makeshift bundle in his other hand. **HE** puts both at **HER** feet. The box is **HER** old turntable and the bundle made out of **HIS** hoodie contains the stack of her LPs. **HE** collapses.

His friend tries to run to **HIM** but trips on the Cat Lady's oxygen tank. The Landlord is being arrested by the police. Paramedics are running towards **HIM**.

HE:

I couldn't save everything...

SHE:

Don't speak...

Doesn't matter,

Nothing matters but you...

HE:

But us...

Nothing matters but us.

SHE:

The world matters, *(looks around)*

Whole world we're part of!

Whole world around us.

Kisses him.

THE END