

# Metamodernists in Love



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HARVEY

And what you're talking about is different? You want hundreds of guys to father and raise your children while you go galavanting around the world? How is that out of love? And anyway, how would you choose the fathers?

EVA

Um... I will just go to each place and do some research. And do you think I'd do it without love, like some kind of science experiment?

PUNCH + CLUSTER

HARVEY

Haven't you ever fucked without love?

EVA

Yeah, but not when it comes to kids. He has to be The One! Each time.

PUNCH + CLUSTER

HARVEY

Good luck with that! Try to avoid contradicting yourself. In your case it's basically self-harm. You'll need to be on your best game to catch all those daddy fish.

EVA

Don't worry, I'll make it work!

HARVEY

What does Adam think of all this?

EVA

He'll understand, I'm sure.

HARVEY

You mean you haven't told your boyfriend yet?!

EVA

I just came up with the idea.

HARVEY

Right.

So again how will you choose The One...s? If you were in a Territory where they are, let's say, not generally on board with the matriarchy.

EVA

I guess I'd have to find the finest example of man available - based on the values of that territory. Otherwise my plan won't work: all the children should come out as different as possible. They can't all have the same perspectives.

HARVEY

Right.



EVA

But of course there are some small essential things the fathers will have in common. Like they must have a nice voice.

HARVEY

Yeah, how could you sleep with someone who has an annoying voice? What else?

EVA

They have to be clever and admire the whole concept. So, not a jealous type, I guess. They should be one of a kind...

HARVEY

Like Buddha or Freud?

EVA

I was thinking more like Paul Mescal or Timothee Chalamet.

'BACKSTAGE TALK' LIGHTING

HARVEY

So how meta do you want to go with this?

EVA

Oh it's pretty simple: I'm writing these plays and I'm also playing Eva, the protagonist.

HARVEY

That's a lot of frames for the narrative.

EVA

Don't overthink it.



MUSIC TRACK: LOVE

2. EXT. YARD - DAY

2 OLD LADIES are sitting on a porch next to the entrance of a block of flats. They are discussing everything they see while eating sunflower seeds. A woman with a stroller passes by.

OLD LADY 1

Look, it's her kid who is constantly screaming. I think she doesn't really care about him.

OLD LADY 2

Or maybe she doesn't feed him enough. Look at her clothes, I guess she's really desperate.

A couple passes by, holding hands.

OLD LADY 1

I bet he knocks her up and disappears.

OLD LADY 2

Exactly. You'll never guess what I saw on tele today. A story about a man who says marriage is an old-fashioned ritual which doesn't make sense. This new generation, they are heading straight to hell.

Eva is passing by.

OLD LADY 1

Ooh look who it is.

OLD LADY 2

Isn't she the one who called you 'madam'?



Eva enters the block of flats.

MUSIC TRACK: THE FOREIGNER CAME TO THE CITY

OLD LADY 1

"Good morning, madam". Who does she think she is? Where did she come from anyway?

OLD LADY 2

She's a foreigner.

OLD LADY 1

What brought her here?

OLD LADY 2

Apparently she's having an affair with that ragamuffin from the second floor. The rumour is she is going to sleep with every man in the city.

OLD LADY 1

You what? Is that legal?

OLD LADY 2

I know!

Eva's moans are heard through the open window of Adam's apartment.

ACCORDION: MOANING

OLD LADY 1

Have you ever... Had a really good one?

OLD LADY 2

What do you mean?

OLD LADY 1

Like, in bed.

OLD LADY 2

I beg your pardon?  
(beat) No, I haven't, have you?

MUSIC TRACK: SEXUAL DREAM OF AN OLD LADY.

OLD LADY 2 STANDS, REMOVES HER SCARF AND STEPS FORWARD AS EVA TO ADDRESS THE OLD LADIES. MUSIC FADES.

Eva leaves the flat.

EVA

(to the ladies)

By the way, it's not what you think. I will save you all. It's my mission.

3. EXT. BOAT - DAY

Eva is sailing a boat and making calculations.

EVA

How fast should I move? I can go up to 15 kilometres per hour, maybe covering around 100 kilometres in a day. But time is running out. In every place I'd need about 3 months for love, 9 months for pregnancy, and another year with the family. Then I'll have to leave again.

I don't have that much time to find true love. I need to get back to Adam.

PUNCH + CLUSTER (HARVEY)

So, instead of months, I'll just have to grow the babies in days, like in that fairytale with the Empress and her jealous sisters.

MUSIC TRACK: RHYTHM ACCOMPANIES THE TALE

"Stars gleam in the dark blue sky, Dark blue billows heave and sigh. Storm clouds o'er the blue sky creep, While the cask rides o'er the deep. Like a widowed bride distressed, Sobbed the queen and beat her breast, While the babe to manhood grew As the hours swiftly flew. Morning dawned, the queen still wailed But her son the billows hailed:

"O, you wanton waves so blue - Free to come and go are you, Dashing when and where you please, Wearing rocks away with ease - You, who flood the mountains high, You, who ships raise to the sky - Hear my prayer, o waves, and spare us - Safely onto dry land bear us."

MUSIC TRACK: INTRO (AGAIN)

4. EXT. SINKING ISLAND - NIGHT

NARRATOR

The girl arrived at a sinking island with a small indigenous community and houses on stilts. On a terrace there was a gathering: people had brought their catches and laid them out together. Who caught the biggest fish?



THE ISLE MAN

Come here, look at the wonderful fish I've caught.

EVA

I've never seen such a big and beautiful fish. Can I take a photo?

THE ISLE MAN

Sure, hold it by the mouth like me. I'll take a picture for you.

NARRATOR

While passing the fish, they accidentally cut their skin on its teeth. There follows a short but significant moment of connection: a ritual of unintentionally exchanging blood.

EVA

I'm sorry!

THE ISLE MAN

You know, on this land nothing happens by accident. Everything has meaning. That's what the shamans say.



EVA

Are there shamans?

THE ISLE MAN

Of course! Somebody has to deal with the kids' fevers and bad dreams.

MUSIC TRACK: SHAMAN WISDOM

THE ISLE MAN

Take Rick, for example. He is a shaman, but also a truck driver. There is only one road to the mainland, which is mostly submerged underwater. But sometimes it appears above the water and that's when Rick goes to the city. He sells our fish and buys some beer and cigarettes.

EVA

Why don't you just leave the island if it's sinking?

THE ISLE MAN

The territory leaders have suggested we evacuate to different villages. But we want to be together.

EVA

I've always wanted a family like this.

He grins.

THE ISLE MAN

Look: here's the main reason to stay - it's been like this since we started sinking. And it's only getting better...

FISHING SCENE WITH PROJECTIONS.

THE ISLE MAN shows the ease of fishing and teaches Eva. The audience is encouraged to throw their paper fish into the net. Ad libs where helpful.

5. INT. ADAM'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

NARRATOR

One year earlier:  
before the kids-creating  
tour. Adam and Eva are in bed.

ADAM

Do you want to have a child someday?

EVA

I'm not sure. One part of me thinks that if I don't have a child I'll be sad because it would mean that I'm not good enough. And I am good enough, at least I have a lot of love locked inside. Another part of me doesn't want to perpetuate a cycle of suffering.

ADAM

Are you suffering? I thought we were happy!

EVA

Oh, I am happy with you. I'm doing my best to try to be.

ADAM

Do you really have to leave me?

EVA

Yes, Adam, I told you, I have to save the world. Or explore it, or make my peace with it. At least, I have to like it.

ADAM

I will wait for you.



6. FLASHBACK: INT. CHILDHOOD HOME - EVENING

Many years earlier.

MUSIC TRACK: BOSANOVA (UNDERScores THE NARRATION)

EVA RUNS TAPE FROM  
UPSTAGE TO THE AUDIENCE,  
DIVIDING THE SPACE.

NARRATOR

As a child, Eva lived in a 2-bedroom flat with her brother, divorced parents and grandmother, who looked after them.

Like the world around them, their flat too, was divided into independent territories: the former hall was occupied by her father, where

the piano was placed due to its size; and another territory, the matriarchy, where the kids resided. Eva had to cross the border in order to practise the piano.

MUSIC: SCALE

Eva is playing the piano. Her DAD is sitting at the computer desk next to her, drinking vodka and writing a novel.

DAD  
How are you?

EVA  
(stops playing)  
I'm ok. And you?

DAD  
I'm good. Working on a novel!

EVA  
That's great! I miss you. Maybe we could...

The GRANDMOTHER interrupts.

GRANDMOTHER (V.O.)  
Don't get distracted, keep playing.

MUSIC TRACK: DESTRUCTIVE SCALE

Eva continues playing.

7. INT. BAR - NIGHT

HARVEY  
Do you absolutely need this childhood scene?

EVA  
Yeah, why?

HARVEY  
The idea of searching for the root of problems in your childhood is so cliché that I wouldn't even use it as a therapist, let alone as a writer.

EVA  
But there is a meeting with the father in the next scene, which takes place in the present. So I kind of need the previous scene to depict the circle of life.

HARVEY  
Don't you think a sex scene would help to show the circle of life? The play's synopsis gave the impression that there would be a lot of sex, and now you're changing it. The audience might feel deceived.

EVA  
Don't worry, there will be a dance representing sex later on.

HARVEY

Oh, good. Sorry for the interruption, then.

EVA REMOVES THE TAPE  
THEN SITS DOWNSTAGE OF DAD

8. EXT. A MIDDLE TERRITORY - DAY

NARRATOR

Many years passed before Eva and her father reunited. She had refused to return to her native Territory, because it was attached to ideas she didn't like.

MUSIC TRACK - INTRO

EVA

I know we keep coming back to this conversation, over and over again. But I still don't understand. Why did we stay in separate hostile territories? Why didn't you just move out?

DAD

I really wanted to have a united territory. I didn't want anything to change.

EVA

But everything had already changed: we were no longer a family.

DAD

I just didn't know how I would live without you.



MUSIC TRACK - INTRO

DAD

Do you want to have a child someday?

EVA

I'm not sure. One part of me thinks that if I don't have a child I'll be sad. Another part of me doesn't want to perpetuate a cycle of suffering.

DAD

Oh, Eva. I had a far worse family than you. I'm happy.

MUSIC CONTINUING

9. EXT. SINKING ISLAND - NIGHT

EVA JOINS THE AUDIENCE

NARRATOR

Back on the sinking island, the inhabitants are dressed up in their best clothes, adorning their heads with flowers. They are getting ready for a dance which is called the Jean Charleston.

THE ISLE MAN

So here are the classic instructions on how to dance the Jean Charleston: you need to imagine that your hands are legs for the first move, then you need to stroke someone's nose for the second move, and for the third move, you hit something with your hip. Easy.

(to EVA)

Do you want to stay for a ritual dance?

EVA

What is it for?

THE ISLE MAN

It's basically a "Thanks, life, I like you" kind of dance. Some interpret it as a yearly conception dance, a celebration of the circle of life. But don't worry, it's just for fun.

THEY DANCE.

The people of the island dance with wavy hip movements, circling around the table with the huge fish.

MUSIC TRACK: RITUAL DANCE

NARRATOR

After the ritual EVA returned home to Adam. She was pregnant.

EVA

And that will do.

MUSIC TRACK: LOVE AGAIN

10. EXT. YARD - DAY

2 Old ladies are sitting on a porch eating sunflower seeds.

OLD LADY 1

So, what's new?



OLD LADY 2

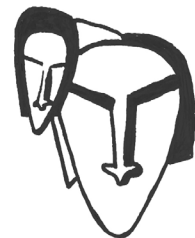
Have you heard about that girl? Adam's girlfriend.

OLD LADY 1

What about her?

OLD LADY 2

I don't know if it's true but people say she managed to sleep with men from all over the world, like she planned. She must have like a hundred kids.



OLD LADY 1

Now what?

OLD LADY 2

I don't know, I guess now we are all saved.

MUSICAL INTERLUDE

EXPERIMENT 2. TRIAL

INT. HOME - MORNING

A room with a large window covered by curtains.

EVA and HARVEY are surrounded by mounds of flour. Occasionally, they play with the flour, pouring in some water and shaping figures out of the dough.

HARVEY

So, you're into him?

EVA

Yeah, totally. It's all so new. He's so intense. All our interactions tire me out. Like, three days in a row is exhausting... but in a good way. And you know how much energy I usually have for this kind of stuff.

HARVEY

So, you think it could lead somewhere?

EVA

I was starting to. But then I recently got a letter from a stranger. A girl... about him.

HARVEY

That doesn't sound good.

EVA

Yeah, she tried to warn me.

HARVEY

What did she say? Is it bad? Is he, like, a serial killer?

EVA

No. Well I have mixed feelings. I don't even know how to describe it.

HARVEY

Can you show me the letter?

EVA

I burned it.

She kneads the dough.

HARVEY

Oh no.

EVA

But I read it so many times trying to make up my mind that I've learned it by heart. So it goes like this:

Eva continues to knead the dough while reciting the letter.

EVA

"Dear Eva,  
You don't know me, but I'm also a baker like you. I saw you with this guy I used to date briefly, and I felt it was my duty to warn you about him - in a feminist way. He always chooses a young, beautiful, and sophisticated baker and makes her the centre of his world. He makes all his art, his whole life, about her. He shoots movies about her, finds cures for her diseases, predicts her wildest wishes, and finds a way to make them come true.



HARVEY

Finds cures for her diseases – what a prick!

EVA

(continuing)

And once he's done with her, he goes from hot to cold in a truly bipolar way, leaving girls psychologically destroyed. We received several testimonies at the Daughters of Fire Collective, so I'm speaking on their behalf." That's pretty much it.

HARVEY

Wow. It doesn't sound like the full story. Did she say anything else?  
Did you write back?

EVA

Of course I did. But I only learned that she personally didn't suffer. On the contrary, she feels grateful to him – apparently, he helped her a lot. Which just makes the letter more confusing.

HARVEY

That's fucked up. And how do you feel?

EVA

Genuinely, it feels like I already knew all of that: being with him is pleasurable, breaking up with him would be painful. Have we learned anything new?

(She drops the dough onto the table for Harvey to take.)

Besides, I love him for that – for living his creative life so intensely, inspired and full of romance. It would be mad to assume he just discovered this with me, especially at his age. That would just make him a fool.

HARVEY

And yet...

EVA

And yet I still feel shaken.  
I wish he had only gone for men or carpenters before. Did it have to always be bakers? And I wish he hadn't made films about them too.

HARVEY

If a girl feels the need to warn you, doesn't that mean you're in danger?  
Should we go for virgins next time? Why do we always have to find something brand new in a new relationship? You don't go from making films to building cabinets just like that.

EVA

Do you know what bothers me the most about all this?

She opens the curtain a little. We see a huge eye looking through the window at her.

HARVEY

What is it, Eva?

EVA

The fact that I can't tell my mum. Whenever I feel that way, I know I've done something wrong.

HARVEY

I know the feeling. But in this case – can you possibly come up with an interpretation of the events where YOU did something wrong?

EVA

I'm part of it – I could have chosen not to be.

HARVEY

Do you think of yourself as some sort of god who decides everything that happens to her?

EVA

Maybe I just pick the wrong guys. Anyway, get ready! It's almost time.

HARVEY

Time for what?

EVA

There is a trial.  
The Daughters of Fire, in collaboration with the Fair Love Collective, the Relationship Mistakes Archive and the Human Voices Enterprise, are taking him to court.

HARVEY

Break a leg.

DIMMED LIGHTS

MUSIC TRACK: ANXIOUS PIAZZOLLA

INT. COURT - DAY

JUDGE by the bar (if there are 2 actors, the voice of the judge is provided via voice-over).

Three VICTIMS - girls, puppets - are sitting on the bench.

SPOTLIGHT ON EACH CHARACTER

INTRODUCED BY THE JUDGE

JUDGE

We are here today to address the case of three women (BEAT) who were psychologically destroyed by the end of their relationships with this man (BEAT). Eva (BEAT) will speak as a witness for the defense. I now invite Victim Number One to share her story.

The first girl on the bench doesn't move.

The second girl (a puppet animated by Eva) pokes her. No reaction. a puppet.

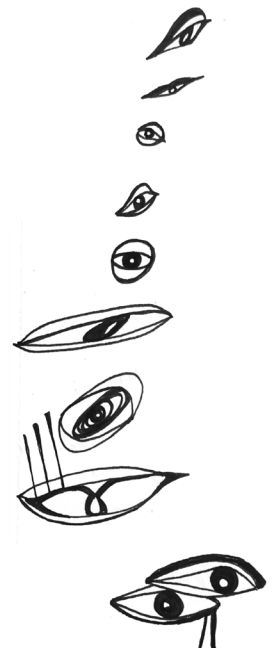
VICTIM 2  
(whispers)

I guess this is the one who was seriously damaged.

JUDGE

Do you think I'm going to spend the whole day here? I have 124 more trials, and I need to be home before lunch – otherwise, I'll get hungry and everyone's going to jail.

Victim Number Two, to the bar!



VICTIM 2

Thank you, Your Honour. I'll try to keep it short. This man made a painting of me, printed one hundred copies, and stuck them up in public places all over the city.

He also slew the Nemean Lion and the Lernaean Hydra, captured the Ceryneian Hind and the Erymanthian Boar, and even cleaned the Augean Stables in a single day. I'd never met a man before who would clean anything. They're mostly domestically challenged.

JUDGE

Well, men are supposed to go through all sorts of trials...

VICTIM 2

He even got back my dog when I lost him on the underground.

Did he do the same for you, girls?

VICTIM 3

(from the bench)

No, we were in a different mythological universe. I'm more excited by Scandinavians. Odin knows how to party. No offense – I like gyros too.

VICTIM 2

(trying to seem special)

He also hung out the laundry!

JUDGE

(calming her down)

Of course he did, darling. So... he managed to do all the things that matter?

VICTIM 2

Well, he never managed any golden apples.

VICTIM 3

(from the bench)

Wait, are these all like euphemisms for kinky sex? Because he wouldn't say no to anything with me.

JUDGE

We are not speaking about that particular expression of love – we are talking about the bigger picture.

(to Victim 2)

Did you want him to do all those things in the first place?

VICTIM 2

What am I, crazy?

At the beginning – no, not at all. But then I got a taste for it and wondered how far he'd go.

And he told me he felt something new for me – something he'd never experienced before!

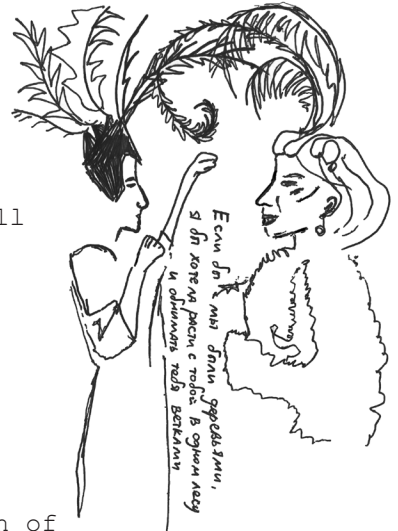
The other girls perk up and echo her words.

CHAOTIC CHORUS

Something new! Never before!

JUDGE

So what happened next?



VICTIM 2

He left me – without any explanation.  
Just after we decided to move in together. Just after I  
introduced him to my kid – which I NEVER did with any other  
man before, because it means something to me.  
Before I made up my mind, he kept reassuring me that it was  
going to be fine.  
And then he broke up with me the very next day!  
What am I supposed to tell my son? And when I wanted some  
explanation, he humiliated me, started avoiding me and never  
spoke to me again.

DEFENDANT

Both of us already knew we were wrong for each other.  
May I?

JUDGE

By all means.

VICTIM 2

(indicating VICTIM 3)

Wait, hold on, she hasn't given her testimony yet!

JUDGE

Don't interrupt.

Victim 2 returns to the bench. The Judge invites the Defendant to the bar.

DEFENDANT

(in a stage whisper, presenting a flower)

For Noreen. How are the kids?

JUDGE

Very well. Still on for dinner on Thursday?

DEFENDANT

Looking forward. (to the room)

Your Honour, it had long been unbearable for both of us. We  
had even separated before and got back together.  
She herself admitted that she sabotaged our relationship,  
trying to undermine my trust – and I have it in writing, in  
our letters.

The Defendant hands a pile of colourful envelopes to the Judge.

JUDGE

So what exactly was wrong?

DEFENDANT

She wanted to cook a pizza for me – like a real, authentic  
one, a masterpiece – because she knew I'm a fan. And she's  
a baker, so... it felt like we were meant to be together, to  
fulfil this destiny.  
But she wouldn't even try – not without a special furnace.  
So I found a furnace builder in Rome and had him come build  
one at my place.  
It couldn't have been more authentic.

JUDGE

So, what went wrong? Was the pizza disappointing?

DEFENDANT

She never made one! There was always something more important  
to do.

VICTIM 2

(from the bench)

Sure, because we would spend all our free time in bed.



JUDGE  
(to the Defendant)  
Were there any other reasons to break up?

DEFENDANT  
She kept reminding me to wash my hands. That was the last drop of the unbearable.

JUDGE  
I can imagine. Chicks with kids often do that – it might be hard to switch between roles.

DEFENDANT  
But I really like Eva.  
I can't see any way to stop.

JUDGE  
Makes sense.  
So why the long face, Eva?

EVA  
I feel like I'm sitting on a ticking bomb, waiting for some ugly and unpredictable end to our love. It makes me so anxious that I want to quit right now – just to be in control.  
Sometimes I ask him to wash his hands – just, you know, to see what happens.



The physical theatre/contemporary dance bit: all the court characters slide to the side of the stage. They also move the window, and the huge statue of Mum's Head is revealed.

MUSIC TRACK: VANISHING DANCE

INT. MUM'S HEAD - DAY

The actress speaks for her mum, in a way reminiscent of how Bess talks to herself from God's perspective in *Breaking the Waves*.

MUM'S HEAD  
Thinking about quitting again? That's the easy way out.  
Is that the kind of person you want to be? Couldn't you try to actually build a relationship this time?

EVA  
Mum, I think in this case, it might be for the best. I have to save myself, before I become him – the way you saved yourself from my father.  
Did you have a choice?

MUM'S HEAD  
No. It was either divorce, or I would've stopped existing.  
But now... a relationship is always a sacrifice. And anyway, you need some meaning in life...since you don't even believe in God...  
Most people, at this point, would have an imaginary conversation with God, Eva – not with their mother.  
Could be quite liberating. Think about it.

The phone rings. It's Eva's REAL MUM (VO).

EVA  
Hi, Mum. You always call at the right time.

REAL MUM  
Aww that's nice. How are you?

EVA  
I'm alright.

REAL MUM  
What did you have for dinner?

EVA  
I think I have a pumpkin – should probably do something with it.

REAL MUM  
Wonderful – make a soup! It'll only take 20 minutes and be delicious!  
Do you have cream? Butter would do anyway.  
So: chop the pumpkin and an onion into large chunks, boil them for 15 minutes, blend, add butter – voilà!  
Add some spices too – could be turmeric or ginger.

Eva hides her tears.

EVA  
Thanks, Mum.

REAL MUM  
Send me a photo once it's done!

EVA  
I will.

REAL MUM  
Love you.

EVA  
Bye.

BACK TO THE COURT

The court characters slide back into place. They also move the window back, hiding Mum's Head.

EVA  
I'm so sorry – it was my mum on the phone.

JUDGE  
Turn your phone off before your father calls – that one won't be as short.  
(to the Defendant)  
You have been accused of multiple counts of loving too much, too soon, then turning from hot to cold. How do you plead?

DEFENDANT  
Your Honour, I admit that it happened before – with Janette, Ivonna and Juliette.  
But how warm exactly is one expected to remain toward an ex-partner?  
Should I go from hot to cold gradually – like a cup of tea? And with Eva, it's all new. And different.

JUDGE  
Eva, since your greatest fear is the sudden end of love, I sentence you both to be together forever.  
Take your place in the Castle of Love.

Eva and the Defendant enter the cage (could be the fishing net from Contemporary Myth) that has been slid onto the stage.



DEFENDANT

Are you comfortable like this, or would you like me to move my legs?

EVA

I'm good, thank you.

DEFENDANT

Would you like to make love?

EVA

Maybe not just yet.

DEFENDANT

You used to be more enthusiastic.

EVA

Everything's changed. Until now, it wasn't forever. We were sitting on a ticking bomb, remember? I need some time to get used to the fact that I've finally found my ultimate love.

DEFENDANT

So the ticking bomb excited you?

EVA

Well, I didn't have time to doubt or be half-hearted. Now I feel... I actually feel like I have some work to do by myself.

She examines the cage walls, searching for a way out as he delivers his monologue.

DEFENDANT

What do you want me to say?

He looks at her attempts to escape.

DEFENDANT

You and I value freedom above all else. Of all things, we wouldn't want a partner who represents society - with its misguided certainties about how we're supposed to live. We wouldn't want to blend in just to make someone else happy. On the contrary, we should nurture our peculiarities and develop them, that is how we can ultimately be free. I'm like that - you know me - I like to give a girl the whole world, to exchange her world with mine, until she's full of nothing but me. And I don't need to be reminded to wash my hands. You have your own flaws too. What did you ex-boyfriends call you? Honey, cupcake, birdie? Well I know you. You're an anxious honey, a worried cupcake, a depressed birdie - someone who panics at the slightest instability and moves in with anyone brave enough to ask, just to feel secure. You tried that. How did it go for you? But you don't have to be alone to be free anymore.



The Defendant shapes a person out of dough and hands it to Eva.

EVA

Can you hear me at all? Or am I just an echo, helping you listen to your own voice?

DEFENDANT

Handwritten notes in the right margin, including the number '18' at the top and a vertical list of numbers from 1 to 18.

I see you. I'm here, watching you. As sentenced, I'll gladly do it until the end.

EVA

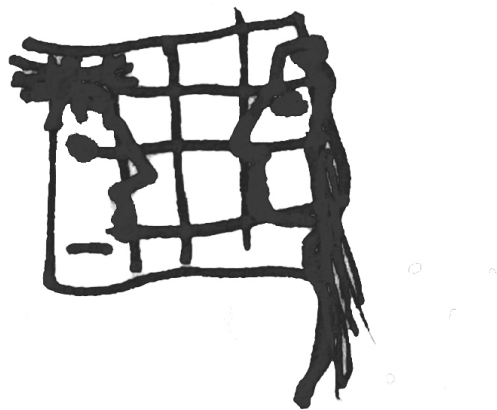
The end?

BLACK OUT

PAUSE.

MUSIC TRACK: F-MINOR

INTERVAL



EXPERIMENT 3. BALANCE

MUSIC TRACK: FINAL

SCENE 0. ACTORS' ATTUNEMENT

HARVEY and EVA improvise, warming up, stretching etc. as the audience enters.

HARVEY  
How are you?

EVA  
I'm ok, why?

HARVEY  
I wanted to check something: how do you feel about me?

EVA  
I don't know yet; we've only met a couple of times for rehearsals.

HARVEY  
Right, but in general - do you like me?

EVA looks around for support.

HARVEY  
Because if you did, it would help a lot with our process. You know, all these lines, blah blah blah... What we really need for this piece to make sense, is to share the right energy.

(beat)

EVA  
I love you.

MUSICIAN  
I love you too.

MUSIC: THE RIGHT ENERGY

SCENE 1. THE INTRODUCTION ABOUT DEATH. INT.

Eva and JEFFREY are at a housecooling party.

JEFFREY  
So, EVA, what's the topic of this play you're writing? You're holding lots of interviews? What's your research about exactly?

EVA  
It's about love.

JEFFREY  
Really? So boring. What can one possibly say about love?

EVA  
I was surprised, but a lot of people actually wanted to answer uncomfortable questions about their love lives, and they initiated these conversations.

JEFFREY  
Did you learn anything new?



EVA

I don't know, I'm still working it all out. I feel like an alien who doesn't get how love works here and what exactly 'love' even means, so I'm curious. What about you, have you ever experienced anything special?

JEFFREY

I don't think so. Let me ask my girlfriend.

He gets out his phone and sends a quick message.

(Beat)

JEFFREY

No.

You know, I'm a doctor. And I often see people die. Sometimes they die alone and sometimes their loved ones hold their hands.

EVA

Wow, that's really powerful. (makes a note) I'll use that for sure. Tell me more. How do you think they feel, those people who die alone?

JEFFREY

I'd say they don't quite realise what's happening; it's a natural coping mechanism.

EVA

Right. So would you say you and your girlfriend are together just to have someone to hold your hand when you die?



'BACKSTAGE TALK' LIGHTING

HARVEY

Bit harsh. Did you really ask that?

EVA

Look, as a writer, I'm quiet and give others space to speak; as a person, I'm nice and toothless, but as a character, I'm bold.

HARVEY

Right. Got it.

RETURN TO PREVIOUS LIGHTING  
STATE

EVA

So would you say you and your girlfriend are together just to have someone to hold your hand when you die?

JEFFREY

And what's wrong with that? Though I suppose nobody can give you a 100% guarantee.

EVA

Why not?

JEFFREY

What if she falls in love?

MUSIC: ANXIETY, ANTICIPATION OF LOVE

SCENE 2. EXPERIMENT: THE BALANCE

EVA

We all know love can be tempestuous, but we try to find the right balance to make it domestic, to survive.

The rules of The Balance Experiment are simple: here is my love chart. With your help, we're going to place each case from the people I interviewed, based on the type of love they describe.

Eva reveals a board with the diagram.

EVA

Up is 'too much', down is 'too little', left is 'over the top', right is 'not special enough'. All, obviously, in terms of the search for true love.

EVA

(continued)

So let's begin with CASE A - 'The Letter'

BEN

So I wrote her a letter.

Ben opens an envelope and takes a flower from it.

EVA

Looks more like you wrote her a novel! Can I take a look?

BEN

Sure.

MUSIC: SUPPORTING THE RHYTHM OF THE LETTER

EVA

(plucking petals from the flower as if reading sections of the letter)

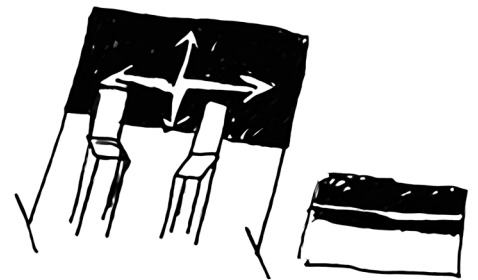
"Dear Elly, there's nothing I want more than to be with you. When you agreed to go on a date with me, I felt blessed. "This is it," I thought. After searching for so long, I found someone who makes me feel complete. It's you! A few days later, you wrote to me, and I appreciated your honesty, telling me that you were getting back with your ex. This made me very sad - I wished things could be different.

Eva moves to the final part of the letter.

EVA

Let me skip ahead a bit..."I want to share with you my beliefs in advance, to not find myself alone in the world of ideas I live in, later. People are obviously not the only intelligent beings...blah blah blah ...instructions on how to deal with me... blah blah... I would really like to spend as much time as possible being intimate with you."

So what did she say? Did she say yes?



BEN

She said no. But she introduced me to her friend, who turned out to be the One. It was all so easy in the end, I didn't need any more letters.

EVA

(to the audience)

Ok, so where do we place this story on the chart?

INTERACTION.

EVA

(continued)

Raise your hand if you've ever written a love letter in your life. How did it go?

HARVEY

CASE B - 'Minus 28 Degrees'

EVA

I ask everyone the same first questions: are you in love? What's the state of your heart?

ALEX

I'm not in love, and it's a disaster. It all started with the war. Before that, I lived with Natasha, we even had a dog together, but it turned out to be a false love. All my girlfriends were Natashas, by the way. Ah, no, there was also Lyuda. I even have a tattoo with her name. Look!

He lifts up his shirt and shows the tattoo.

EVA

Nice! Was that true love? Tell me about it.

MUSIC: PATTERN - ROMANTIC

ALEX

I got married at 18 and she was 17. I was still in the army, going back and forth. We met in December and for New Year's we had a disco party at a village club. We danced two slow dances, and then, of course, I walked her home to her village. The snow was up to our knees, and it was minus 20 degrees. We walked for half an hour. When we arrived at her door, I unbuttoned her coat, held her waist and knew that she was my woman. I understood then that I was going to marry her.

By the 23rd of February, her parents had already figured out everything about us and they left their house on purpose. It was a country house with a stove, so you needed to heat it with wood. It was minus 28 degrees outside! When I got to hers, she said, "My parents won't come today. Let's light the stove and go to bed". There was no blood, and no orgasm most likely, but everyone was happy.


EVA

Beautiful. But you said you're not in love. What happened?

ALEX

We grew apart.





EVA  
(to the audience)  
Let's place it.

INTERACTION

EVA  
(continued)  
CASE C - 'Before Love'

DAVID  
In the 90s my state collapsed, and we found ourselves in a new country with new kinds of TV shows. It was through this that my parents suddenly realised gay people exist. Determined to raise me straight, they filled the house with porn magazines - featuring women, of course - from my early childhood. And it worked!

EVA  
Are you in a happy relationship now?

DAVID  
I've become a sex therapist.

EVA  
(to the audience)  
Where should this go?

INTERACTION

HARVEY  
CASE D - 'The Paradox of Desire'

MUSIC: SURREALISTIC

CAMILLE  
I'd prefer to meet with the person I'm in love with once a month, or maybe twice a year. Or never, never is ideal. I don't even need them to be single. The paradox of desire is that if you want something you, by definition, don't have it. Thinking that I already have what I want distances me from it (since I cannot truly 'have' or possess the things I say I want; I can only feel that I am getting closer and closer, only feel that I am approaching it). By 'things', I include beauty, meaning, and all those elements that really matter - beauty in objects, in people, in sounds, and so on. 'Getting closer' is not a position in space, it is a degree of desire, an act: wanting, desiring.

HARVEY  
(to the audience)  
Where would you put this?

INTERACTION

EVA  
CASE E - 'That Certain Something'

LEO  
For me, love is how I feel when I hear her voice and how she treats my penis. It's important. It's important. Yeah. Because it makes a huge difference. And if she gives me that certain something that I need, then this sensation goes up into my soul and into my chest and to my head where, you know, I start consciously thinking about it.

EVA and HARVEY join the MUSICIAN for a short improvised song/scat.

EVA

(to the audience)

Where do we put this concept?  
Does anyone have an example of perfectly balanced love,  
to put something in the centre?

HARVEY

THE DREAM

EVA

I experience the most intense and real feelings in  
my dreams. All-consuming love that matters more than  
anything else. That's why I don't like to wake up. These  
dreams involve a person who, in reality, is not so close  
to me. And it turns out that he has them too. Here's one  
I had recently:

MUSIC: UNDERSCORING WITH THE POEM

I live in a hotel  
In Moscow's suburbs most likely  
Like it's the pandemic and I need to isolate  
And the days at that hotel come to an end  
I need to live somewhere  
And I'm going to You  
By a new underground line  
Where each station has a very long name, and it's a name of some person,  
for example  
"Wonderful engineer, who by the way also has a huge family, Vasily Petrov,  
who created an electric car"  
I'm waiting for the train and right before its arrival  
Several people get on the rails  
I go to the train, the driver makes a short announcement  
"It was unfortunate"  
And the train departs

EVA

CASE F - 'An Open Relationship'

TIM

My wife and I opened our relationship when our daughters  
were 5 and 9. I was the first to fall in love with  
someone else; she was beautiful, like a wild animal.  
She began to take up so much space in my life that she  
became a part of our family, and my wife ended up having  
a relationship with her too. We lived together, and  
she would even stay with the kids. But then she became  
paranoid and jealous, had mental episodes, and once  
even tried to attack me with a knife. She also started  
telling my older daughter that she was fat. That was  
crossing the line.



HARVEY

CASE G - 'May I touch your shoulder?'

MUSIC: ARGENTINIAN ZAMBA

VERA

I dance Argentinian folklore. For those who don't know,  
it is usually performed with minimal physical contact,  
but there is constant eye contact with your partner,  
and if done right, it can make you fall in love. But

nowadays, if they need to touch your shoulder, like this,

(shows the touch)

they first ask: "May I touch your shoulder?"

SCENE 4. PUSH MY BOUNDARIES: THE GAME

HARVEY

I'm interested in boundaries. Let's explore them together for our research. Turn to the person next to you - ideally a stranger. With their consent, find out where the line is for them. What kind of questions are they happy to answer? What kind of touch is permissible?

EVA

We'll demonstrate:

(to EVA) What's your shoe size?

EVA

What's your bra size?

HARVEY

No.

EVA

Ok!

Can I stroke your cheek?

HARVEY

Yes.

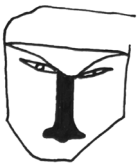
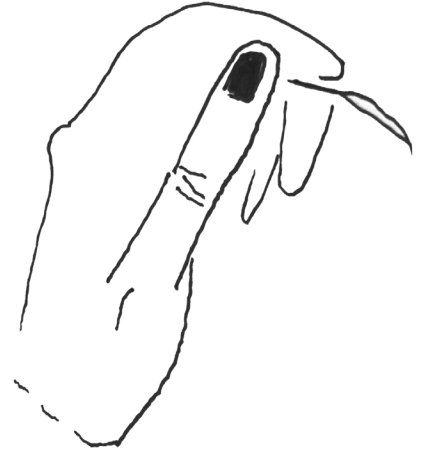
Can I smell your hair?

EVA

No. But you can bite it.

HARVEY

We'll play for 2 minutes! Have fun and remember that you will need to keep sitting next to them for the rest of the play, so tread sensitively - unless they don't need you to!



MUSIC: FOR DANCE/RESEARCH OF BOUNDARIES

search of boundaries and feedback.

'The Doll'

JACK

At my grandma's place, there's this old cabinet full of souvenirs my grandpa collected from all over the world. He used to travel a lot because he was a scientist. He was also a pretty terrible dad. Anyway, his cabinet was full with souvenirs that you could look at but not touch. There was this one gorgeous doll that caught everyone's eye. It was kept in a box. When my sister turned 13, Grandma decided it was finally time for her to play with the doll. She said, "You're old enough now, so today you can play with it!" She gets the box and hands it to my sister. But as my sister's about to open it, Grandma says, "No, you can't take it out of the box!" And that's the kind of woman I like - out of reach, just like that doll.

EVA

Where should the last 3 cases go?  
(Brief reminder and chat if they're keen).

HARVEY

CASE I - 'Love to Travel'

EVA

What is the most absurd thing you've done when in love?

CHARLIE

Once I flew back home to see a girl who had given me back an engagement ring. And I really shouldn't have gone, I'm on a list of 'dangerous members of opposition'. I wish! So they started to question me at the border.

EVA

(becoming a border control officer)  
What's the purpose of your visit?

CHARLIE

I came to see a girl.

EVA

What is her name?

CHARLIE

I'd rather not say.

EVA

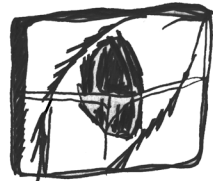
Her address?

CHARLIE

I'm not sure.

EVA

You came to see a girl whose address you don't know?



...the rest of the interrogation scene is improvised, with increasingly violent threats from the border officer.

CHARLIE (continued)

Anyway, in general I've done a lot of absurd things! Like going to Paris for a girl after we'd had one dance, just to make sure if that special feeling we shared was real.

EVA

Was it?

CHARLIE

It was not.

HARVEY

CASE J - 'Full of Beans'

LIZA

I went to the other side of the world for him. A year later, we had something like a civil partnership and friends came to celebrate with us. They asked what kind of a present we'd like to get, and since I'm a coffee addict, we asked for a coffee machine. When we broke up

two years later, he didn't let me take anything, not even the coffee machine, even though he barely used it himself. He said that it was mostly his friends who gave it to us, so it belongs to him. Then, on my 33d birthday, he said it was a very special date and therefore he was going to make a generous gesture: he gave me that coffee machine as a present.

HARVEY  
CASE K - 'The Perfect Date'

AYS  
We have been texting for 6 years after we met at a film festival and recently he came to my city. We had this perfect date: I cooked an amazing meal, we had salmon, and then I put on a record of Duke Ellington, "Do nothing till you hear from me", and I took his hand and started to dance. Then I stroked his head and whispered in his ear a line from the song. It was perfect. I want to make it into a short film. Camera follows EVA, we see her cooking. And then drinking wine, then putting on the record, and then... And him - we don't see him at all, only from behind. I've already found the perfect actress. Check out her IMDB!

Harvey invites feedback on cases I, J and K.

INTERACTION

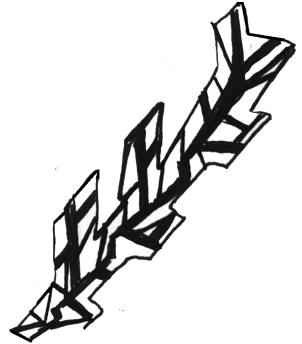
EVA  
So tell me, what's the state of your heart?

Texts are read in parallel by two actors, ending up as a unified noise. An accordion joins in.

- I'm totally in love! Not with anybody in particular. With the world, with this city, with myself!
- I live with my girlfriend, we are poly, I don't want to have sex with her anymore, but it's not all that matters. We share an apartment, each of us has their own bedroom, and we also have a shared living room.
- After 2 marriages I've found the One. She is all I need. Open relationships? Nope, we both tried it before: that's how she found me in the first place! But together we still experiment in bed.
- I don't date anymore. I've had so many girlfriends and 2 wives and you know what I think? In the end, they mirror you, and it's all the same. If you yourself don't change significantly, then nothing will change.

EVA  
Are you in love?

HARVEY  
I have a problem. It seems like whenever I name something, it vanishes at that very moment. Yes, it vanishes, and then I have to come up with something else. It just starts to slip away into another state on its own, because it's like, okay, I'm in love, it's this and that. But then it's no longer true. Right at the moment you say it.



EVA  
Let's just stop using this word.

SCENE 7. Actors' Attunement

HARVEY  
So how are you?

EVA  
I'm ok, why?

HARVEY  
I wanted to check: how do you feel about me?

EVA  
I don't know yet; we've hardly spoken to each other!  
This play is a big pile of lonely monologues.

HARVEY  
Right, but in general, how do you feel about me? Because  
I look into your eyes as if they were a mirror; I need  
to know how to feel about myself.

EVA  
I'm not gonna say it, we just agreed not to use this  
word!

MUSIC: FINAL

