

SWEET DISASTER

a theatre/film extravaganza in various "talking cure" situations

(working production draft)

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PERFORMERS:

A, must be played by a man, early 30's

B, should normally be played by a woman, mid 40's

C, should normally be played by a man, late 50's

D, must be played by a woman, mid 20's

E, a changeling

The performers seek transformations and familiarity of personas, masks, and embodied emotional states from scene to scene.

FACILITATOR, slightly batty, but so confident

RECEPTIONIST, type A, on the verge of a nervous breakdown

NEWS ANCHOR, condescendingly sweet, like Ann Curry on the Today Show

HEAD PHYSICIAN, cool, and sometimes not

MOM, the voice of borderline senility and lifelong worry

PRIEST, just doing his job

TEACHER, so sensitive, so ruthless

SALESMAN, a very good, if compromised, man

Played, variously, by A. B. C. D. E. and sometimes him/herself

Note on casting: racial/ethnic diversity essential.

VOICES OVERHEAD:

CLIENT, a young person

GURU, a woman, older but not too old

MECHANIC, a man

HIM, a man in love with her

HER, a woman in love with him

Could be played by same actors as above, or others.

TIME:

Now. Just after (and before) a variety of catastrophic events.

PLACES:

All semi-abstract locales with the least amount of furniture and props possible.

Real places are alluded to, but not meant to be taken literally.

1. A group therapy session
2. The waiting room of a life insurance company
3. A suburban home
4. A hospital
5. A studio apartment
6. A church
7. The beach
8. A real estate licensing class
9. A car dealership
10. The sky, and two locations far apart.

painful clichés – talking.

(Enter **A**, **C**, **D**, and **B** one by one.)

A

I don't know who I should have been.

C

Or who I could have been.

D

Or who I might have been.

E

(a voiceover, always)

Or who I was.

A

I don't know who I should have been.

C

Or who I could have been.

D

Or who I might have been.

E

Or who I was.

B

What I need to do are the following things:

D

Somehow my brain fell into pieces.

B

Face how much money I actually have and spend only that.

C

I want to understand you.

B

Stop buying clothes to make myself look thinner.

C

I don't understand you.

B

Lose weight so I can look good in the clothes I have.

C

I'm trying so hard to understand you.
If only you would. . .

A

Clean out my drawers and all the bags of papers and clothes all over the house.

C

If only you. . .

E

Deal with what is, not what I wish were.

C

If only. . .
If I. . .

A

If only I. . .

B

Yes. That's it. Just those things. And those things only.

C

I want — (fumes from this point on)

A

(interrupting)
I also need to rest.

D

Interruption —

FACILITATOR
(only talks to HER, ever)

And when you share, you feel better.

E

And then I said to myself,
Where is my mother?
I can't feel my shoulder.

A

Yes. Do you have any tea?
Tea makes me feel better.

B

I feel.
I feel better.
I'm a feeler.

FACILITATOR

We don't provide beverages.

E

Maybe some change is in order.

D

I like beautiful things.
That's what helps me. Paintings.
Well, art prints for the most part. I can't afford original art.
Also rugs. Indian. Persian are too pretentious.

B

(hopeful, to **D**)
Oh. You see that too?

D

Yes, they're so "I am cultured. See my books."

(They smile at each other.)

A

You think life is going along in a rather matter-of-fact way and it's not. Strange things are happening all the time, without our even seeing them. Imperceptible changes that get larger as time passes and some cataclysmic event seems to happen out of the blue.

B (with E)

I have to be in love.
I have to be inspired.

FACILITATOR

Who told you that was so?

B

(looking around, pointing)
She told me.
He told me.
HE told me.

(No response.)

No, you told me.

(They all shake their heads no, one at a time.)

I'm confused.

E

We tell the stories of ourselves.
I am the story of myself.

FACILITATOR

That's interesting. What about the big stories?

C

Nothing grand. Just a lot of puddles. Maybe the clean sweep was the better solution. The world is mediocre now. Written on the back of an envelope. Lazy bunch of frauds we are.

D

Wait a minute. I have suffered.

E

You were taken out of your comfort momentarily.

D

(to **B**)
How do you cope?

B

I tell myself I'm an heiress.

D

You do?
So do I.

B

Do you ever face it?

D

What?

B

You know. The income. The outgo.

D

Oh no. Never. Best not to.

A

Look at my hand, for example. It didn't look like this ten years ago, or even five. But I woke up one morning and saw it, older and veiny, for the first time. The point is that I simply hadn't been looking and that, even if I had, I wouldn't have noticed. Because it was all going on somewhere else.

FACILITATOR

Who here knows how to get sap from a tree?

ALL

What?

FACILITATOR

Survival. We're talking about HOW TO SURVIVE, people.

B

I can pick mangoes.

C

I can slaughter a chicken.

A

I can grow mushrooms.

D

I can buy tuna.

FACILITATOR

(pointing to them, one at a time)

You are addicted to cocaine.

You are addicted to sex.

You are addicted to violence.

You are addicted to credit cards.

A

I don't want to be a drug addict.

D

Maybe I've taken years off my life behaving this way.

E

I had the only thing I ever wanted.

B

First of all, one needs art.

C

I need to have a sensible conversation.

Is there anyone here capable of carrying on a sensible conversation?

FACILITATOR

Watch it. You're losing control.

C

Look, this is not the company you think you're in.

D

Hey. Someone's shoveling outside.

FACILITATOR

Can we stay on topic?

My head goes round and round.

A

When you clean out the drawers, you think you'll have a clean mind.

You won't.

You'll have clean drawers.

FACILITATOR

(reading from notes)

Change is good.

Change is necessary.

Change is the only thing that's stable.

A

But I'm talking about the fact that we can't —

C

(interrupting)

I am a convicted felon.

B

How did he get in the group?

D

You did no screening?

FACILITATOR

That's not the kind of screening we do here.

This is recovery. We're all in a process of recovering.

B

(to D)

I took my medicine. Did you?

D

Yes.

(friendly, to **C**)

Have you ever hallucinated?

C

I don't play harmless games.

A

Not even a red cent did my parents leave me. Not one red cent.

A, B, C, D

Woe is

Woe is

No one knows the extent of my pain.

(Suddenly, a conversation overhead.)

CLIENT (A)

I am unworthy of love.

GURU

Now, do the turn-around.

CLIENT (A)

You are unworthy of love.

GURU

No. No. No. That's a negative reversal.

What's the turn-around?

CLIENT (A)

I am worthy of love?

GURU

Yes. Now how do you feel?

CLIENT (A)

That I'm worthy of love?

GURU

That's right.
Now, what makes you so worthy of love?

CLIENT

I'm nice?

GURU

Is that absolutely true?

CLIENT (A)

I think so.

GURU

What makes you especially nice?

CLIENT (A)

I like to be helpful.

GURU

O.K. Good. Do you do that because you're nice or because you want attention?

(**CLIENT** breaks down crying.)

CLIENT (A)

I want attention.
I am unworthy of love.

GURU

Now, do the turn-around.

CLIENT (A)

I don't want attention.

GURU

Right. Good work.

CLIENT (A)

But, am I worthy of love?

GURU

Of course you are. We all are.
Even Hitler was worthy of love.

FACILITATOR

How does that make you feel?

(No response.)

C

Me?

FACILITATOR

Yes.

C

Here's the thing.
That kind of conversation makes me want to take a nap.

B

But then the moon
The spring, the falling spring
The unraveling
Ing ing ing

C

Look, I'm out of my element here.
I think I'll leave.
(to **B**)
Everything is NOT beautiful.

B

Well, fuck fucking you.

C

Again with the odd phrasing
Do you think we can't see through it?

B

I'm a killer, OK?

(Lights dim, leaving a pool of light at HER's feet. A film appears in the pool.)

loss – the waiting room of a life insurance company.

RECEPTIONIST

The benefits provided for each insured are \$400,000 (\$1 million for Eagle Points Card Members) and the funds are payable for accidental loss of life, two hands or two feet, sight of both eyes, one hand or one foot and sight of one eye, speech and hearing or any combination thereof.

B

Are you saying –

D

(interrupting)

Pillows invite me to them.

RECEPTIONIST

(slowly, annoyed)

I'm **saying** that one half of the Benefit Amount is payable for accidental loss of: one hand, one foot, sight of one eye, speech or hearing. One quarter of the Benefit Amount is payable for the accidental loss of the thumb and index finger of the same hand.

D

One needs a lot of pillows, I think.

RECEPTIONIST

Hold on.

(makes a phone call)

Who's answering?

This is day surgery?

(beat)

Sorry, I pressed the wrong number.

A

I sanded my bureau better.

I threw all those clothes away.

(beat)

A cont'd.

Yes, two days before.

I couldn't take it any longer.

Then, a week after he died, I painted the bureau green.

RECEPTIONIST

O.K. ARE YOU LISTENING?

(reading)

"Loss" means, with respect to a hand, complete severance through or above the metacarpophalangeal knuckle joints of at least four fingers on the same hand, with respect to thumb and index finger, complete severance through or above the metacarpophalangeal knuckle joints of both fingers on the same hand, with respect to a foot, complete severance through or above the ankle joint. The Company will consider it a loss of hand or foot or thumb and index finger of the same hand even if they are later reattached.

E

Such is the need of the small child to touch.

D

My dog died six months ago.

C

My wife died ten weeks ago.

B

My daughter died a year ago today.

A

My husband died last Wednesday.

B

Tuesday.

A, C, D

Touch and be touched.

To feel the touch of others.

B

It's Tuesday and I'm falling.

I'm falling into

Into the —

(Suddenly, a conversation overhead.)

GURU

Of course you are. We all are.

CLIENT (D)

I have to be able to say things in my own words, you know. And the last person, well —

GURU

Yes, you felt you couldn't speak your mind. Tell me what IS on your mind today?

CLIENT (D)

I seem not to be able to read a book. Used to be I could do that. And it relaxed me, but now. . .

GURU

Now you want to say your own words. To "say yourself" is what we sometimes call it.

How do you want to "say yourself"?

CLIENT (D)

That's just it. I don't know. My lines have been written for me for so long that —

GURU

You're having trouble starting, right? Here. WHO are you?

CLIENT (D)

Who am I? Hmmmm. . .

I'm a (beat) thirty —

GURU

(interrupting)

No. Who are you?

CLIENT (D)

(clears throat)

This is hard. I'm an —

GURU

(interrupting)
Who ARE you?

CLIENT (D)

Shit. You're not even giving me a chance.

GURU

Who are YOU?

CLIENT (D)

I'm lost. OK? I'm fucking lost.

A

(interrupting)
I was always trying to make him promise to live to 90, at least. Because I knew he wouldn't, long before, but thought if he would promise me, maybe — maybe — we could change the outcome.

And I know:

Tragedy is so much larger than the premature death of one man due to illness.

(beat)

But there's a rotting kitchenette in my backyard and I don't care.

C

My daughter keeps asking:
What is the matter with my fish?

How should I answer?

(greatly strained)
Can you give me some practical advice?

A

We met on the first day of spring.

(beat)

What a beautiful funeral it was.
Everyone said so.

E with FACILITATOR

When did he die?