

Life Sucks.

Side 1: PICKLES

PICKLES

Do you think love lasts forever?

SONIA

I'm sorry...?

PICKLES

Do you think love is real? A force. A real, actual, substantial thing in the world... like a rock... or selfishness... or do you think it's just an artificial man-made construct like religion... or football?

SONIA

Oh, man, really?

PICKLES

Yes, really.

SONIA

I think it's real. Like a rock. [Discovering this idea more fully as she goes...] Exactly like rock, actually. Solid... weighty... hard... and painful in a variety of awful and humiliating ways...

PICKLES

That's what I think!

SONIA

Well, okay then....

PICKLES

[Abruptly] Did you know that this play is called LIFE SUCKS?

SONIA

[This is getting awkward...] Ummm... yes.

PICKLES

Do you think that's right?

SONIA

Oh Pickles...

PICKLES

Do you think life sucks? Do you think that that's... accurate?

SONIA

Pickles we're not even at the end of Act 1

PICKLES

'Cause I don't. [Turning out to include us, too...] I don't think that title is right and I just want you to know that I didn't choose it... and furthermore, that I repudiate it.

SONIA

But---

PICKLES

That sounds funny. Repudiate. Repudiate. Repudiate. Repudiate. Repudiate. Is that a word?

SONIA

Yes.

PICKLES

Does it mean... to deny. To reverse. To... erase?

SONIA

I think so. [To us] Does it? [Hopefully the audience answers positively...]

PICKLES

Okay, good. Well, then, I repudiate that title. Sure, life is hard, life is tricky. And it can be really unfair and frustrating and, you know... deeply problematic sometimes. Right?

Right?

SONIA

Right.

PICKLES

But life does not suck. I just wanted to get that on the record. Not that there's a record or whatever, I know that, but I wanted to get that on the record anyway... [She starts to walk away...] Life does not suck.

Life does not suck. Life does not suck. [PICKLES is gone. SONIA is alone on stage...]

SONIA

End of Act I.

Side 2: THE PROFESSOR

THE PROFESSOR

You know what I hate worst about aging? About turning into an old man... ?

You get a little pain. A little... condition. Some insignificant nothing, but it hurts, so now you can't exercise, so you gain a little weight, and that's depressing, so you drink a little more scotch, or eat a little more ice cream or indulge whatever your particular predilection may be to stave off the encroaching depression, and the awful cycle has begun... more pain, more weight, more indulgence, more depression, pain, weight, indulgence, depression, and on and on and on and...

Same thing psychologically, right? One day you just feel kind of... old. Or wrinkled. So you get a little low, a little insecure. Which is less attractive. And you see it in her eyes—she sees you're insecure. So you get more insecure. So you retreat. So she retreats. Or attacks. So you attack! You overcompensate. And she fucking hates that.

And so on and so on till death... or divorce... or disdain... or the most common of all the awful D's... disengagement.

And then there you are. The rest of your life. And it sucks. All because of a gouty knee. Or grey nose hairs. Or any of the thousand and one tiny indignities of the irreparably aging human body. It isn't fair. And it isn't kind.

It is, however, sadly inevitable.

But the thing is... the key thing you have to understand about life is this:

[Beat. Beat...]

Oh, fuck it, I'm too tired. I'm gonna take some pills and see what dreams may come to visit this decaying mortal coil... Nighty-night.

Side 3: BABS

[BABS doesn't leave. She just turns to us and starts talking... before too long SONIA wanders on unseen by BABS and listens to most of this...]

BABS

So, yeah, well... my Zadie Oscar died in a plane crash when I was eleven.

(Don't worry, I have a point. Go with me a minute...)

He was born in Poltava, in the Ukraine, and came over here with his four younger brothers and actually managed to get rich. A hot dog cart, then a burger shack, then a steakhouse. Oscar's. Very fancy. The American Dream made good... He was a character, as they say. Quite a natty dresser, slicked back hair, pencil thin mustache. He was also, apparently, quite the gambler, drinker and womanizer, but I didn't know any of that then. To me he was "Zadie Oscar", the life of the party who would slip a five-dollar bill into your palm when Bobbe Sophie wasn't looking. It always seemed to me he knew some secret that no one else knew that made him awfully happy. I remember asking my mother about it all the way back then. She told me he was "a lifeeater", a particular type of person. That he ate life the way the rest of us ate latkes... could never get enough, could never have his fill...

And speaking of eating, here's my point. Here's my point: Before every family meal I can ever remember eating with him—which were mostly around various family Bar Mitzvahs and Bris' and weddings and such-- we did what he called, with grave seriousness, The Gratitudes. Everyone at the table—family, strangers, everyone, young and old—had to take a moment and say what they were grateful for at that moment.

Kind of like Grace, but without God. Or holding hands...

And sometimes it was just simple little things like a raise, or finding a dollar in the gutter, or a good knish... But sometimes someone would... go deep. And things would come out. Real things. About other people at the table... or those lost to us. I remember a lot of tears, but also lots of laughing.

But it was always real. Real gratitude. An odd kind of secular prayer or or or humble appreciation for the miracle of making it through another day, and having something good to eat at the end of it, and someone to eat it with.

I still say them. Mostly to myself, but I say them. Every meal. Every day.

Side 4: SONIA

SONIA

I have a friend...

ASTER

Oh?

SONIA

And she's... well, a little obsessed, I'm afraid, with a man maybe a bit like you. Successful... handsome, charming... slightly eccentric, maybe, but with many positive virtues. But older and still unsettled. And drinks, too, like you.

ASTER

[Joking-ish...] You're not just talking about me, are you?

SONIA

No! No, no, not at all. That would be creepy.

ASTER

Oh, okay. Sorry.

SONIA

But—anyway-- he doesn't seem to notice her... you know... as... a woman.

ASTER

Ah. And...?

SONIA

What should she do? I don't think she wants to love him, but I don't think she can help it. I don't want to overstate it, but it's kind of... you know...

ASTER

What?

SONIA

Ruining her life. It's kind of ruining her life.
So what would you advise her to do?

ASTER

Is she pretty?

SONIA

No.

ASTER

Oh. Not at all?

SONIA

Not so much. [Quick beat] Nice hair. Nice eyes...

ASTER

Too bad.

Drink more. Think less. And run away from him as fast as she can. He sounds like a fucking nightmare. If he's anything like me he's a perfect recipe for disaster. I'm... a trap. You know what my second ex-fiancée called me?

SONIA

No.

ASTER

"A perfect lover in everyway except all the most important ways."

SONIA

That sounds bad.

ASTER

'Bout as bad as it gets.

SONIA

So, my mother used to tell me that our house was full of Radiant Invisible Butterflies. And every so often she'd call a Hunt and a wild family excursion for Radiant Invisible Butterflies (or R.I.B.'s) would be on. I was really young, but I remember these episodes quite clearly. They were... high points.

But when I got older—I don't know, maybe 7 or 8, maybe 9, I finally asked her The Question. The Big One: Were they real? Were there really Radiant Invisible Butterflies fluttering around our house? Were there really?

ASTER

And what did she tell you?

SONIA

She told me that they were either real... or not real... she wasn't sure which... but she preferred the world where they were real, because the world of possibility and discovery is so much more... intriguing and so much more exciting... so... Why Not Just Go Ahead and Believe?

ASTER

Ummm... [Not mean, but...] I'm not sure I quite / understand your

SONIA

She told me the real question wasn't, why believe in them... but Why Not? Why Not? You see?

ASTER

Listen: Tell your friend... Run Away. Fast... Good night. [He leaves]

SONIA

Oh. My. God.

"I have a friend"?

And butterflies? "Invisible butterflies"?

Where did that even come from? Did it even make any sense?

Side 5: ELLA

VANYA

There must be. Some... avenue? Some... amazingly persuasive argument...

ELLA

Argument?

VANYA

Or story? Or or or... insight? A view into the previously locked room of my soul that will touch some new place in you, put my finger on your button...

ELLA

...Vanya...

VANYA

...I mean... A story or anecdote that will make what at this moment seems...you know... the usual... pathetic and repellent and whatnot... suddenly seem moving and endearing and so wonderfully, brokenly, human that your icy heart will / melt and and and

ELLA

[A tiny sarcastic toss away...] "Icy heart" is nice...

VANYA

you will see me as I am on the inside, and / begin to--

ELLA

And what is that?

VANYA

What?

ELLA

What is that? What are you like on the inside that is so different from what you are like on the outside?

VANYA

Uh...

ELLA

You've said / this over and

VANYA

It's not that—

ELLA

No wait, let me talk. You've said this over and over in all kinds of odd little ways. "The real me." "What I'm really like on the inside." "Who I really am." So fine, great, I'm ready, I'm all ears. And eyes. And... whatever: What are you? What is so fucking different about you on the inside...?

VANYA

Well, I can't just suddenly explain—

ELLA

Why not? Why the hell not?

I've listened to you talk and talk and whine and moan off and on for... a decade or so... and you know, I think I have a pretty good idea of who you are and how you operate and what you think and feel and want, and how you... present yourself in the world. Or would like to be thought of by others. I honestly think I could probably do a pretty good Vanya imitation by now. By all the standard, accepted measures, I Know You. I know you pretty darn well. Not intimately, maybe, but... pretty darn well.

So... I've rambled here. I've given you some time to gather your addled and surprised wits. So... enlighten me. What are you like inside?

What is going on in there that is SO different that you want me to know? [A fairly good sized pause...]

Side 6: ASTER

[ASTER and BABS are talking and she is quietly drinking very small glasses of vodka. Tiny glasses, but quite often. He is pacing or roaming. Restless...]

ASTER

You know what my problem is? Do you?

BABS

[She's thinking...] Ummm...

ASTER

You know what my fucking problem is?

BABS

Astound me.

ASTER

I work too hard.

BABS

Oh.

ASTER

I work way too fucking hard. (Sorry, Babs...)

BABS

(Oh, I don't care...)

ASTER

People are always, let's go here or let's do this or why don't you take a little break and I'm always, no no no, I can't, I can't, I've gotta work. That's what I say, constantly. "Gotta work." Like the world'll fucking end if I / don't work.

BABS

You swear too much.

ASTER

I know, I do.

BABS

You do.

ASTER

You drink too much.

BABS

I do, you're right, I do.

ASTER

We are none of us perfect.

BABS

You do work too much.

ASTER

I know!

BABS

But I / don't think--

ASTER

And to what end? I don't have a wife... or, you know... *children*. And even if I did, money screws kids up nine times out of eleven— [*to the audience...*] don't Google it, I made it up, but still... cool, sane rich kids are the total exception and we all know it.

BABS

Want another drink?

ASTER

No. I have to go. I gotta wo— Did you hear that? I just about said it. It's ridiculous! I can't stop myself. Like some absurd machine... "Gotta work. Gotta work. Gotta work. Gotta work." And do you think people in 100 years will care how hard we worked. I mean maybe a few great geniuses, an artist or two, maybe... But most of us? The normal people. Will anyone care?
Not a chance. But still...!

Side 7: VANYA

ELLA

Oh, God...

VANYA

Doesn't that sound wonderful? To be pre-abstract. Think about it!

ELLA

Is this another of your ridiculous-- because I have a pedicure a year from Thursday, so I might not have / time to fully...

VANYA

I'm just saying: The Apple is *Abstraction*.

ELLA

Which apple?

VANYA

THE Apple. Eve's apple. What other app--?

ELLA

Ah, Eve.

VANYA

I mean—knowledge of Good and Evil? Please, what does that even mean? But the dawn of the capacity for abstract thought...? Okay, imagine you've spent your entire existence living in the present—in the *moment*—in the perpetual, instinctual NOW of the animal kingdom...

ELLA

Okay.

VANYA

...and then suddenly, somehow, Boom! Abstract thought! Just like that! (Like when my father used to wake me up for a trip he would walk into my room, four AM, turn on the light, tear the comforter off the bed and yell "get up!")

ELLA

Jesus...

VANYA

Yeah, I know, but effective! Welcome to the fucking world! Good luck!) So I imagine the Dawn of Abstraction like that. There you are in your predawn REM sleep, dreaming of simple things like muffins and blow jobs and then... Shwannk!!!! Good Morning Death and Complexity! Somehow we woke up to Abstraction and there we were—hurled unwittingly into the impossible early morning light of existence by our own ridiculous brains! You see what I'm saying...?

ELLA

I understand the idea, but I don't / know what

VANYA

Because the truth is... I don't really want to know that I'm going to die! Why would I want that? Why would anyone??? I don't want to be able to to to to extrapolate possible futures or ruminate on the ridiculous choices of my past or or or be bound by man-made constructs like fidelity or morality or...

I fantasize about a life before I knew how to fantasize...

ELLA

[A positive, thoughtful response, finally...] That's...

VANYA

I wish to God (in whom I emphatically do not believe...) that I could just live my life blissfully in the present-- The Ridiculous Present-- of wanting to eat that delicious thing... or make love to that beautiful woman... or sleep in that shady spot and just... you know... be content. Just... *content*.

ELLA

[With real warmth for the first time] I must say... content does sound nice...

VANYA

Run away with me.

ELLA

Oh, Lord...

VANYA

Walk out the door with me and never look back.

ELLA

What are you doing?

VANYA

Living in the Ridiculous Present!

ELLA

You ruin everything, you know that? You're like Shiva...

VANYA

Isn't that a restaurant?

ELLA

It's the Hindu God of Destruction.

VANYA

I knew that.

ELLA

You're like a terrible little six-year-old on the playground. "I want that!" "Mine!" "Mine!" "Mine!" And if you can't have it—if some other little devil already has it-- you throw a tantrum.

VANYA

So I'm like a six-year-old God of Destruction, is that right? A Child Shiva? Is that the story you want to tell yourself to protect yourself from the truth?

ELLA

What truth?

VANYA

That I'm your beshert. I'm the other part of your soul. I could not feel what I feel for you if we were not connected somehow. If there weren't something important and... true... between us. You must feel that...