

Oxygen by Ivan Vyrpaev

'This is an ACT which must be undertaken here and now.'

Track no. 1 'The dance'

1st Song:

HIM. Ye have heard how it was said unto them of the old time: Thou shalt not kill. For whosoever killeth shall be in danger of judgement. But I knew a man with very bad hearing. He didn't hear when they said thou shalt not kill, perhaps because he had his headphones on. He didn't hear thou shalt not kill, he took his spade, went down to his garden and killed. And then he went back home, turned his music on loud and danced. And the music was so strange, so strange that his dance in time to the music was strange, too. And his shoulders looked strange and his legs and the hair on his head and his eyes. The dance led him, it led him and it led him away into some new country. In this country there was only movement, only the dance, and the dance. And the dance led him, it led him, and it led him on so bad that he decided to stay in the country forever, and he decided he wouldn't spend another moment without dancing, he would dance and dance.

REFRAIN: And in each person there are two dancers: the right-hand and the left-hand dancer. One dancer is on the right hand, the other on the left hand. The dancer's two lungs, the two lungs. The right-hand lung and the left-hand lung. In each person there are two dancers – their right-hand and their left-hand lung. The lungs dance and the oxygen comes. If you took a spade and hit a person on the chest, just where the lungs are, then the dance would cease. The lungs would not dance, the flow of oxygen would cease.

2nd Song:

And this man with his dance, everything was going good for him, but his hearing was bad. He danced and his friends arrived in their cars, all of them crooks like him. But because of the dance he couldn't hear them coming in, and because of the dance he couldn't hear when one started shouting, 'Hey Sanyok have you gone out your fucking mind what you gone and done now you cunt you've battered your wife almost to pieces what's wrong with you Sanyok aren't you listening what have you done are you mad what's got into you' But Sanyok couldn't hear what his friend was saying to him, because of the stereo. So then his friend hit him four times in the face, twice in the stomach and once in the chest. The dancers in the chest stopped and Sanyok fell and lay on the floor searching out oxygen with his mouth.

REFRAIN: And in each person there are two dancers: the right-hand and the left-hand dancer. One dancer is on the right hand, the other on the left hand. The dancer's two lungs, the two lungs. The right-hand lung and the left-hand lung. In each person there are two dancers – their right-hand and their left-hand lung. The lungs dance and the oxygen comes. If you took a spade and hit a person on the chest, just where the lungs are, then the dance would cease. The lungs would not dance, the flow of oxygen would cease.

3rd Song:

And this Sanyok was lying on the ground and searching out oxygen with his lips, and suddenly he felt the dancers in his chest stir again. So then he said to his friends, all crooks like him, what do you want? and his friend, the one who beat him, repeated the question about his wife, battered to death with a spade in the garden. And when Sanyok understood the question, understood what they were asking about, what they meant, he answered like this: He said that he had beaten his wife to death with a spade in the garden, because he had fallen in love with another. Because his wife had black hair and this other woman had red hair. Because there wasn't and could never be oxygen in the one with black hair and plump little fingers and there was oxygen in the one with red hair, thin fingers and a man's name: Sasha. And when he realised that his wife wasn't oxygen and Sasha was and when he realised that you can't live without oxygen he took a spade and beat the legs off the dancers dancing in his wife's breast.

REFRAIN: And in each person there are two dancers: the right-hand and the left-hand dancer. One dancer is on the right hand, the other on the left hand. The dancer's two lungs, the two lungs. The right-hand lung and the left-hand lung. In each person there are two dancers – their right-hand and their left-hand lung. The lungs dance and the oxygen comes. If you took a spade and hit a person on the chest, just where the lungs are, then the dance would cease. The lungs would not dance, the flow of oxygen would cease.

Finale:

And in every woman there are two dancers and every woman breathes in oxygen, but not every woman is oxygen herself. And if man is told thou shalt not kill and yet there is no oxygen, then you will always find some Sanyok from a small town who, in order to breathe, in order for his lungs to dance in his chest, will take an oxygen-spade and kill an oxygenless wife. And then he will breathe with all his lungs. Because when they said 'thou shalt not kill' he had his headphones on and the dancers in his chest were leading him off to another country, to a country where there is only dancing and oxygen. Whosoever sayeth unto his brother Raca – you're dead meat, shall be in danger of a council. But whosoever sayeth thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.

Track No. 2 'Sasha loves Sasha'

1st Song:

HIM. Ye have heard how it was said to them of the old time: Thou shalt not commit adultery, and: whosoever looketh on a wife, lusting after her, hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. Just imagine what an enormous heart a man must have to fit in all the wives he has looked at lustfully? Not even a heart – more like a large double bed under sheets stained with cum. So anyway this man I knew Sanyok from a small town committed adultery in his heart with Sasha from the city after he saw her by a statue of a writer when she was smoking grass with her friends.

REFRAIN. So ye have heard how it was said, do not look at a wife with lust. That means do not commit adultery in one's heart. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust has his heart padlocked shut. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust does not want to fill her, but only to empty himself.

2nd Song:

And when my friend, this very same Sanyok with the oxygen dancers in his chest saw Sasha with the red hair, he desired her so strongly in his heart that his heart was like this same white bed, the only difference being that the sheets on it were absolutely white. And when he saw Sasha walking by the statue in her bare feet he was sick with oxygen because those who have been oxygen starved can become sick with oxygen.

REFRAIN. So ye have heard how it was said, do not look at a wife with lust. That means do not commit adultery in one's heart. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust has his heart padlocked shut. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust does not want to fill her, but only to empty himself.

3rd Song:

And those who have been breathing oxygen-poor air for many years are oxygen starved: the ones who breathe in women smelling of sweat or cheap scent instead of plain soap – because if you don't have the money to buy expensive scent you can always find enough for plain soap or nettle shampoo. And if you don't have an expensive dress you can always sew a shift of flowers. And if you follow fashion magazines but you don't realise that fashion is what reflects the world inside you, then neither the soap, nor the scent, nor the shift of flowers will fill the air with oxygen and any man beside you will be oxygen starved. But Sasha was all oxygen. She had a linen dress and a bag with glass stitched all over it, string sandals, and her eyes were green. But most importantly Sasha had beautiful expensive glasses and red hair. And when you see a girl like that you know that this is oxygen. And when you stand close to a girl like that you smell the plain soap, expensive scent and nettle shampoo.

REFRAIN. So ye have heard how it was said, do not look at a wife with lust. That means do not commit adultery in one's heart. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust has his heart padlocked shut. And whosoever looks at a woman with lust does not want to fill her, but only to empty himself.

Finale:

Wherefore if thy right eye offend thee, pluck him out, and cast him from thee. Better it is for thee that one of thy members perish, than that all of thy body should be cast into hell. Also if thy right hand offend thee, cut him off and cast him from thee. For the same reason. For exactly the same reason Sanyok from a small town when he realised that he no longer looked at his wife with desire and only with lust took a spade, hit her firstly across the chest, so her lungs' dancing ceased and then, with the corner of the spade, cut her eye out and then cut off her hand, because it is better that her limbs suffer than all of her, in fact not very beautiful, body, be subjected to fiery hell.

Track No. 3 'Yeah and Nay'.

1st Song:

HER. Have you heard what was also said: 'Swear not at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's seat; nor yet by the earth, for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of that Great King.' Well I don't know who is the King of Jerusalem today, and it seems like there's no one there at all who could put everything to rights. But I do know that I wouldn't swear by a town in which people exploded like watermelons in buses and on the squares, under the scorching sun. Still for all that, one of my friends, a girl with the man's name Sasha, in the whole of her short life has already sworn twice by heaven and once by the earth. She swore the first time when some man kissed her right on the street, not on the cheek, not on the lips, not on the forehead, not on the ear, not on the neck, nor on the breast, the stomach or the back, not on the hips or the buttocks, nor any of these places listed here at all, but he kissed her, and right on the street in broad daylight. She swore by heaven then that even the dope didn't have such a magical effect on her body as this offensive kiss. The second time she swore by heaven when her husband, an extremely attractive brunet, asked her, 'is it true you're cheating on me with some small town git?' and she said, 'I swear by heaven it isn't true.' And then she swore by the earth when she was sick after the vodka and meatballs which were fed to her by the friends of this man with whom she was cheating on her husband. For the first time, because before that she had never eaten anything like it. And then she swore by the earth, upon which she had just vomited, that she would never again eat those life threatening Russian foodstuffs, in which there is not one particle of oxygen, only nausea and imperial sentimentality.

REFRAIN: Better to smoke dope, eat apples and drink juice than roll about drunk on the ground in front of the television and swear by heaven, earth and Jerusalem that you were seduced by adverts which infiltrated via the television screen, telling you which foodstuffs to buy in order to have the right to live on this earth.

And in order to have the right to live on this earth you have to learn to breathe air and to have the money to buy this air and on no account to become addicted to oxygen, because if you fill yourself totally with oxygen, neither money nor medicine, nor even death can limit the thirst for beauty and freedom you will gain.

2nd Song:

But my friend Sasha from the city had only sworn twice by heaven and once by the earth. However she had sworn love more than once, because she had a very big heart, like a double bed with coloured European sheets, soaked in the juices of different fruits. And every time she spent the night with a man she felt love, apart from her husband, of course, because she got married quite by chance, and all her other liaisons with men were not chance. And every time she found herself on her own with a man, listening to his words of love similar words took shape in her head, only Sasha from the city never said them out aloud, but expressed all her feelings with either a smile or a turn of the head, or a clever narrowing of the eyes. Because my friend Sasha always acted like an actress in an arty film about love. Because there is oxygen only in such relationships between a man and a woman. And if you swear love but don't feel any love, then there's no oxygen-film, just dogshit, and if you love, but you don't swear love, then that's just German porn, and if you meet up with different men and love just one, then that's like a Russian filmmaker with his birches and his plains.

REFRAIN: And in order to have the right to live on this earth you have to learn to breathe air and to have the money to buy this air and on no account to become addicted to oxygen, because if you fill yourself totally with oxygen, neither money nor medicine, nor even death can limit the thirst for beauty and freedom which you will gain.

Finale: Better to smoke dope, eat apples and drink juice than roll about drunk on the ground in front of the television and swear by heaven, earth and Jerusalem that your heart belongs to one person, because if your heart belongs to one person and your body to another then what will you swear by? Neither God's seat, nor his footstool, and definitely not Jerusalem where people are going mad with stupidity, but only your own love. But your communication shall be, yea, yea: nay, nay. For whatsoever is more than that cometh of evil.

Track No. 4 'Moscow Rum'

1st Song:

HER. Ye have heard how it is said, resist not wrong. But whosoever give thee a blow on thy right cheek, turn him the other. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloak also. This girl I was talking about, she took off all her clothes without the law if a man who pleased her offered her Moscow Rum and coke and a wide bed with a carved oak headboard. But once one of these men dealt her a blow on her right cheek and she categorically refused to turn her left cheek as well. Instead she went into the kitchen, took a kitchen knife, went back into the bedroom where the blow was struck and tried to stab the man with this knife right in the face. But the man grabbed her hand with the knife, lifted his hand and hit this girl I was talking about on the left cheek. And he hit her so hard on the other cheek that blood started trickling from her nose, like a stream in spring. A full stream in spring, only it was red and it was wintertime.

HIM. And it was winter, too, when they got into the train to Serpukhov. The train left and the cries of traders selling pens, batteries and newspapers sounded in the carriage. And they went to Serpukhov, the town of Sasha's birth, where people fall drunk onto the streets in broad daylight and in the flats and corners young people stick needles into the transparent veins in their legs. And they went there to dance in the room where this man had danced after he battered his wife to death with a spade in the garden. And they went there to make a snowman out of the snow covering the earth where his wife was buried. For his friends did not tell the police what their mate had done. And no one knew about it, especially not the girl by the name of Sasha for whom the deed had actually been committed. And his wife, the woman with the black hair, slept two metres deep in the ground of a Serpukhov garden and a thing like oxygen was simply no use to her at all.

REFRAIN:

HER. Whosoever give thee a blow on thy right cheek, do not turn to him the left cheek, but make him hit you on your left cheek, too.

HIM. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, make them give you eighteen years and send round the bailiff.

HER. And if you want to know what Moscow Rum is go into any shop which sells spirits and look on the shelf with the cognacs.

HIM. And any bottle which has the word Moskovsky on the label - that's the local rum which people mix with coke.

HER. In order to get hit on the left cheek

HIM. And to get eighteen years and the bailiffs round.

2nd Song.

HER. And when this girl Sasha alighted onto the platform at Serpukhov she immediately realised what sort of town she had arrived in. And after that she just pretended she liked making snowmen in the garden and listening to the group 'Lyubei' on the stereo.

HIM. And when this bloke Sasha from Serpukhov arrived in the capital Moscow and saw all the snobby expressions and heard all the Moscow accents, he realised straight off that there weren't enough spades and you couldn't dig enough holes for all this mass of people, stifled by the lack of oxygen underneath an ozone-aerosol hole.

HER. And no pair of glasses, not for three hundred, or five hundred or even a thousand dollars could have made out a self-respecting woman in a drunk girl in white socks and black shoes. Or men with at least some goals in life in the group of boys, squatting in front of a shop.

HIM. And when she walked about in her linen dress from Amsterdam in this town where even now they shoot films about the revolution without needing any set, even the dogs were ashamed of their provincial coats. Because if you take two dogs from the rubbish heaps in Moscow and Serpukhov, then you'll find that the fleas on the Moscow dog descend back to the fleas which bit Gilyarovsky's dog and the fleas on the Serpukhov mongrel are direct descendents of the fleas which ate the pedigree-less bitch owned by Uncle Sergei, who in his time, ate the fleas as he flayed the dog in order to eat it too, after he was told that this was the only cure for TB.

HER. But if the question is asked, if you start trying to work out who has it good in Russia, then we should definitely bring up the fact that the Germans were stopped right outside Moscow...

HIM. By the Siberian division in 1941...

HER. ...And if the question is asked, if you start trying to work it all out, who's better, them or us? we should start by settling the question of the world's capital, Jerusalem, and then go on to the details – in which country is life more right, in Moscow or in Russia?

HIM. Because if a Jew takes a tank and drives it across the river where the Baptist baptised, anyone, even someone who doesn't believe in bad omens, could well expect an explosion in a populated place in any European town and that's just as true as the fact that swifts fly low above the ground before a rainstorm.

HER. And it's also just as true that the main indicator of a person's provincial spirit is their inferiority that even the fleas in Moscow have one-up on the local ones and that some invisible hand forces them to tuck their jumpers in their trousers.

HIM. You know what, you can tell your Sasha from me, to fuck off.

HER. You know what, you can pass it back to your Sasha to fuck off.

REFRAIN:

HER. Whosoever give thee a blow on thy right cheek, do not turn to him the left cheek, but make him hit you on your left cheek, too.

HIM. And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, make them give you eighteen years and send round the bailiffs.

HER. And if you want to know what Moscow Rum is go into any shop which sells spirits and look on the shelf with the cognacs.

HIM. And any bottle which has the first word Moskovsky on the label - that's the local rum which people mix with coke.

HER. In order to get hit on the left cheek

HIM. And to get eighteen years and the bailiffs round.

Finale:

HER. And when she was walking by the Griboyedov statue in bare feet and in her linen dress and saw a man with his jumper tucked into his trousers, she thought, there's a huge gulf between us. And then her suspicion was confirmed because the gulf was as large as the difference between a skyscraper and an aeroplane piercing it through.

HIM. And when he saw her, smoking marijuana from a piece of foil, he thought, although their lives were different, their goal was the same. Just as the goal of a pilot, directing his plane at the World Trade Centre is the same as the goal of a fireman, suffocating in the smoke from the enormous explosion. Because both of them are searching with their lungs for oxygen, one, in order not to suffocate in the smoke, the other in order not to suffocate in the injustice ruling the world.

HER. That ye may be the children of your father that is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to arise on the evil, and on the good.

HIM. And sendeth his rain on the just and the unjust. For if ye love them, which love you: what reward shall ye have?

HER. Well that's just it. Nothing.

HIM. You'll be left without a reward and that's that.

Track No. 5 'The Arab World'

HIM. This next track was written in the following way. I was once in the Arab Emirates with my friend and we took heroin. I took heroin and ripped up my passport. I ripped up my passport and went off to the Arab market. But because I didn't know Arabic I realised that there was no way back for me. Track No. 5 'The Arab World'

1st Song:

HER. Ye have heard how it is said 'Take heed to your alms, that ye give it not in the sight of men, to the intent that ye would be seen of them', and 'Whosoever therefore thou givest thine alms, thou shalt not make a trumpet to be blown before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, for to be praised of men.'

HIM. And when Sasha from the capital gave her alms for her Sasha from the town of Serpukhov she did so not in the street, and certainly not in a synagogue, but under a duvet, in a room with the lights turned off and the doors locked.

HER. And when, in his turn, Sasha from Serpukhov, gave alms for Sasha from Moscow, then those were the best moments of her life, because when her husband, a passionate brunet with a theatre training, performed such kind deeds for her, he did them with an expression on his face as if it wasn't all happening beneath a coloured blanket in their bed, but in the street or in the synagogue during Passover.

HIM. And when Alexander gave alms for Alexandra for the first time, he understood from her eyes that it was only because of such kindnesses that she had agreed to visit his house, because the receiving of such kind deeds from men had long since become her favourite occupation.

HER. Not true! Giving alms like that is the favourite occupation of all people on the earth and even in the synagogue the Jewish boy glances at the Jewish girl, and we don't even need to mention exchanged glances on the streets.

HIM. We do. Because you can't compare everyone with yourself. And what's more you can't count in with everyone else Sasha from a small provincial town, who, as we know, chopped his wife into two bits because of his mad love.

HER. Not true! No one would batter someone with a spade over the head because of love. If someone beats someone else then it's only because they hate them with the fiercest hatred, and an emotion like love has no place in that.

HIM. Maybe if we're talking about ordinary love, but we're talking about insane love, and it's not just spades, but chainsaws that get used in order to prove the strength of the emotion of a person who is insanely in love for the object of their insane love.

HER. Not true! 'Love' and 'insanity' are as different as the religious consciousness of an Iraqi Muslim and an American Jew. And the sight of a fat woman in trousers stuffing her face with hotdogs is as unpleasant to a Muslim as it was for David Hoferman to find women's hair on his windowsill on 11 September, after the owner of these hairs, a blond fat woman in trousers was dispatched to a Muslim hell because she had undigested pieces of pork inside her.

HIM. And if we follow this logic, if we compare 'insanity' with pork and 'love' with Jihad, then it follows that the spade which cut open the head of an unattractive woman was no less than the sword of Allah, punishing the infidels for their consumption of pork chops, and not at all a piece of garden equipment, used for digging potatoes and ridding oneself of hateful wives. Although in fact everything in the world stems from two things: insane love, that is a love of such strength, it makes a person insane; and from a thirst for air, for, if a man was to find himself at a depth of a hundred metres in the Baring Straits and was told that in order to breathe and survive he had to batter his wife to death in the garden with a spade, then that is what he would do. And who would judge him for such an act – only the person who has never loved, or never suffocated. Although in fact love and suffocation are one and the same thing and if you don't know that then don't say words like 'Islam' and 'New York', because only 'insane love' can justify 'insane hate' and vice versa.

HER. I see. So how do you justify the seduction of little girls by Priests in the Catholic Church? Surely not by calling it 'insanity' or by claiming that it happened not in America, but at the bottom of the Baring Straits?

HIM. Depends what you call seduction. If it's deception, then that's up to the courts and none of your bloody business, and if it was mutual then I would shower the government in shit which forbade me to love a thirteen year old girl who desired my love.

HER. Not true! She doesn't know what she wants – she does it because she wants to seem older than she really is.

HIM. Not true! When Nina Chavchavadze married Griboyedov, whose statue is where kids of her age sit waiting for love, she was thirteen and if you're going to tell me now that this generation is different from the nineteenth century gentry then I'll stop all conversation with you because when I hear crap like that I reckon that those sorts of

opinions are only held by someone who masturbates at night over a photo of Anna Kournikova, or fucks a famous TV presenter in the arse by night and passes anti-porno laws by day.

HER. I can't go on, because you deliberately didn't write me this text. Because although you keep talking about universal goodness and justice, you put the text in this bit together so your thoughts would dominate and all other thoughts would seem banal in contrast with your pseudo-rational thinking.

HIM. Not true! You think in exactly the same way and although you're a Moscow resident you still think the police are bastards for checking passports on the street and beating up innocent people, whilst some people from the Caucasus, but with Moscow residency, can go and 'watch' any musical they please. And if you're now going to tell me that you think differently then I won't give you the time of day because I'm sick of all this shit which people call democracy and I'm convinced that millions of people living on this planet think the same, but when the time comes to express an opinion one lot have got their mouth full of pork and another lot are having Sabbath and on that day even God rested from his work, from which it follows that you've got to stuff yourself with Matzo, turn on the TV and watch a news report about floods in Siberia, muttering to yourself 'Wouldn't mind having their problems' Imagine what would happen if God heard those words and as well as the bombs in the markets and squares of Jerusalem, the inhabitants of Jerusalem walked around waist-deep in water.

HER. In order to answer that, to say something, something that would really get through to you I'll tell you the truth. See the problem isn't that the poor Arabs are stuck in a no-way-out situation and the Jewish kids aren't to blame for this. And it isn't that you can get five years in prison in Russia for a handful of grass, even when it grows in the garden, but for vodka, which has sent the whole country wild and makes men punch their pregnant wives in the stomach, the most you'll get is a night in a cell and you'll be set free a hero. The problem is this. The real problem is you're incapable of feeling anything for other people. That you'd tell a thirteen year old girl that it's good to get rid of her virginity as quickly as possible, and justify it to yourself that they want to grow up as soon as possible, when she hasn't even managed to work out what's going on. The lie in all this is that you've never even spoken to any Sashas from Serpukhov, and you don't give a shit how they live there, who they kill, but with tears in your eyes you'll tell the story of this life, so distant from yours. You'll suffer over this problem which doesn't even exist for you. Because after this, after these shows, you'll go to the bar downstairs and Sasha, whose story you've been telling, can get lost, go fuck himself. That's the problem. And that is your real problem. And creative people can only ever talk about their problems and I'd hardly believe you if you told me you can't sleep at night for thinking about the homeless in Moscow. Liar! Or that you took heroin wandering about in an Arab market. What a lie! You've never even been to the country and you'd never take heroin, because everyone who knows you knows how rational you are. All you can do is lie in your bed with the light off listening to Sting for the hundredth time and

fiddling with yourself and imagining yourself wandering around the Arab world in a white kaftan.

(Possibly Rap – HE performs)

My girl's been behaving herself all week,
Oh she's been doing some serious stuff
And here's her reward: mushrooms from Leningrad.
Are you pleased, love? Mushrooms from Leningrad.

And Sunday morning early the train will be in,
My mate's on the train, but he's not bringing booze –
Oh no he doesn't drink or smoke, he's a computer freak
And he'll bring some mushrooms and we'll find out who you are.

You didn't come to see that good film on Tuesday,
Although the film was bad, the film was shit,
But I saw parallel worlds in that film,
And I remembered again how good mushrooms are.

2nd Song:

HER. And you don't care less about all the kids in the world because you haven't got any yourself. And you don't care less about the Siberians whose homes were washed away when the rivers burst their banks, and you don't care less about any fucking addicts breathing their last in some godforsaken shithole. And you couldn't give a fuck about Serpukhov. You don't even care less about yourself, as long as you've got enough money for dope and brandy for your coke. And you couldn't care less about me – you don't even understand the meaning of the words you say each night.

HIM. What the hell do you want from me, eh? How the fuck d'you live yourself? You ask yourself, go on! That one single question. Everyone should ask themselves that one little question – 'How am I living? How the fuck am I spending my life?'

Finale:

HER. So when you decide to preach at other people you think first whether you have the same talent as that Russian writer who could describe other people's woes so well that the fee he received for this description covered his roulette and his debts at cards.

HIM. And when it didn't cover his debts at cards then he could always take the last piece of jewellery off his wife or as a last resort invent something about an old woman who was chopped up by an axe.

Track No. 6 'How Insensitive'

HIM. Have you heard how it was said 'Thou shalt not worship false idols'. Have you heard that?

HER. Of course. Yeah. I've heard that. Why? Have you got false idols or something?

HIM. Well, I've never really thought about it properly, but yes, I know I've got one, for sure.

HER. Just the one?

HIM. Well no, I've probably got more than that, only I've never given it much thought. But I know I've definitely got this one.

HER. So who is it then, if it's not a secret?

HIM. No. It's definitely not a secret. Only it's not 'who', it's 'what' - sex.

HER. Sex?

HIM. Well yeah.

HER. Do you want to talk about it?

HIM. If you don't mind?

HER. I don't mind.

HIM. Then I'll start. The thing is, you see, I've got this problem. I find it really hard to get it up with someone I don't like.

HER. Someone you don't like?

HIM. Yeah – only someone I don't like. Takes me no time at all with someone I do like.

HER. So why bother?

HIM. Why? Well... It's a bit hard to have sex without getting it up first...

HER. I mean why bother having sex with someone you don't like?

HIM. Hang on, hang on – this is a digression from the main problem.

HER. Quite the contrary – we’ve just got to the problem.

HIM. Explain that.

HER. It’s very simple. The problem is that you sleep with women you don’t love. That’s the main problem, believe me.

HIM. Hang on – but don’t all men do that, even the really faithful ones, they all sleep with women they don’t love, if they haven’t got anything wrong with them. Believe me! But my problem is that I can’t get it up with women I don’t like.

HER. And the others get it up?

HIM. Yeah. My friend, for instance. He’s always sleeping around and he can always get it up.

HER. Do you know for sure?

HIM. It’s stupid to even talk about it.

HER. So it can be only one thing: either all men, including your friend are very loving people, capable of loving even women they don’t like, or you’ve got a health problem.

HIM. But I haven’t got a health problem when I sleep with the one I love.

HER. So it must be your conscience working. You have a conscience. Congratulations.

HIM. Well that’s the thing. I haven’t got a conscience. You know that.

HER. No, I know. I mean, I don’t know now. It appears that you have. Because for me, for example, it’s all very different.

HIM. How is it for you? I’m interested.

HER. I sleep with different men and feel some degree of love for each of them.

HIM. So, all things considered, that means you don’t sleep with people you don’t love, unlike me.

HER. Well, I suppose so. So you tell me, you say you sleep with people you don’t like. How do you do that?

HIM. First I try to get it up. Then I shut my eyes and go to sleep.

HER. What? You fall asleep? You just sleep?

HIM. I just sleep.

HER. And her?

HIM. What about her? She probably falls asleep, too.

HER. No she doesn't fall asleep. She lies there in the darkness thinking that you're impotent.

HIM. What a nightmare!

HER. Shock horror! Lying there thinking something about someone which isn't true!

HIM. See what I mean!

HER. Yeah. I do see. Lying there in the darkness thinking, he's impotent.

HIM. Although it's actually not true.

HER. No actually, he just doesn't love you. But you know, for a woman, it's better to think that a man's impotent, than to think that he doesn't love you.

HIM. Really?

HER. I'm telling you as a woman.

HIM. And does it happen to you very often?

HER. Does what happen?

HIM. Well, that you're lying there with a man in the darkness, thinking that he's impotent?

HER. I've had many men and everything's been fine with them and in fact you're the only one who has talked to me about love like the rest, but the sex didn't happen.

HIM. Do you know why?

HER. Why?

HIM. Because I'm impotent.

HER. That's what I thought.

Track No. 7 'Amnesia'

1st Song.

HIM. It was said 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' It was said 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' and this was said as a justification for memory loss. In other words, if someone shoots a loved one with a hunting rifle, then there's only one way not to condemn the murderer – by forgetting the murder. There is only one thing for it. Forget about the murder. Forget the presence of guns, murderers and loved ones forever. But don't pretend to forget – forget for real, give your brain over to clinical amnesia. And when the Mother of Alexander's wife from Serpukhov finally found out that her son-in-law had battered her own daughter to death in the garden with a spade, the day after the court case against him she forgot his existence, and as a result stopped condemning the murder of her daughter and did not put him on trial in the much harsher maternal court.

HER. 'Judge not, that ye be not judged' or in other words, forget about your own trial as Alexandra from Moscow forgot about hers when she was sentenced to two years for concealing a crime. And if you ask her now what she did and where she was between this and that date, she will say, without batting an eyelid, 'I don't remember.'

HIM. Because in some ancient language 'judge not' means 'forget', although in which language exactly I can't remember.

HER. And 'judge not' also means 'look not' – although in what translation and from what language I can't remember.

HIM. And if I'm asked, 'what were you going on about for so long, what were you trying to say?' I'll answer, 'I don't know, because I have amnesia'

HER. And if I'm asked, 'what was the meaning of your speeches, what were you trying to say?' I'll answer, 'I don't understand what you're asking'

HIM. Or if they say to me, 'Who is that girl with the red hair and the thin fingers? Was it her you said was 'oxygen'? I will answer, 'I don't know who she is or what she wants. The girl I was talking about died two years ago, riding on the smallest Big Wheel in the world. And if you're interested in my opinion about Sasha from Moscow then I will answer in the words of one of the Gods 'Let the dead bury their dead.'

HER. And if they say to me, 'Tell us who that bloke was who chopped up his wife in the garden, and where he is now?' I won't answer at all, because I'm not in the least bit interested and the one I was talking about died two years ago at the beginning of August, because August is the most lethal month on earth.

REFRAIN:

HIM. And if you go to the ballet and wait for them to start singing then you'll be wasting your time, for these men and women in their white tights have no voice.

HER. And if you go to the opera and wait for those fat, singing mannequins to start speaking in human voices, then you'll be wasting your time, because they are not taught to express their feelings simply.

HIM. And if you think that everything said here has at least some logical meaning, then you'd be better off at the ballet. Because there are several ballets in the world where the ones in the white tights sing.

HER. And if you reckon that real suffering lies behind the profession go and look for this suffering at the opera where fat women act princesses and old men act young lovers.

2nd Song:

HIM. When I asked my friend, 'Where do you think the largest big wheel in the world is?', she said, 'I don't know' and I said it was in London, and that's as true as the fact that I've been in it with some friends.

HER. When I asked my friend where the Valley of Death was in Russia he said he didn't know and I told him that it was in Kamchatka and that's as true as the fact that I've flown there myself on a helicopter.

HIM. And when my friend in turn asked me where the smallest big wheel in the world was, I answered that I didn't know and she said that she had it in her hand and she showed me a little white tablet on her palm and then swallowed it.

HER. And when my friend in turn asked me where there was another Valley of Death in Russia, I answered that I didn't know and he said that it was here – a field of wormwood - and he ran off across the field. And because he was allergic to wormwood and because he was in the last stages of asthma, he dropped to the ground before he got to the middle of the field, the dancers in his lungs ceased and he fell into an eternal asthmatic sleep.

HIM. And because the tablet contained a large amount of psychotropic ingredients and because my friend was absolutely forbidden to take these, she dropped to the ground, the dancers in her lungs ceased and she fell into an eternal psychotropic sleep, as if she had been smashed to pieces after falling from the smallest big wheel.

REFRAIN:

HIM. And if you go to the opera and you think that everything has at least some logical meaning, then you'd be better off at the ballet. Because there are several ballets in the world where the ones in the white tights sing.

HER. And if you go to the ballet and you reckon that real suffering lies behind the profession go and look for this suffering at the opera where fat women act princesses and old men act young lovers.

Finale:

HER. And when someone wants to tell you about their friend who died in the middle of a wormwood field, they talk instead about the love they had for Sanyok from a small provincial town.

HIM. And when someone wants to tell you about a girl who poisoned herself with tablets, they talk instead about Sasha from the city.

HER. And when someone asks the people around them (what was he to you?) then you answer 'I don't remember' in order (not to condemn).

HIM. And when they ask why you've forgotten everything, tell the truth first of all: 'Because I've got amnesia'.

Track No. 8 'The Pearl'

1st Song:

HIM. 'Give not that which is holy, to dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine'. And do not offer your hand to a pig if you meet one: today you shake hands with a sow and tomorrow you believe that every person has a duty to defend the homeland. All lies! The homeland is a big fat pig wearing a pearl choker bought with your parents' money, when they near killed themselves trying to drag their sideboard of Czech crystal crockery into the next life.

HER. I don't agree: my homeland is a camel. And as is well known, it's easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than it is for someone's parents to drag a sideboard into the next life.

HIM. I agree that a camel is better than a pig, but a pig, on the other hand, however disgusting it is, is not to blame for being born a pig, whereas a camel is completely responsible for being a camel.

HER. That was complete rubbish, what you just said then.

HIM. The same complete rubbish as your story about the man who suffocated in the wormwood: someone you've never met and you only talked about in order to show, once again, that human suffering isn't alien to you.

HER. And that's exactly the same as your story about the girl who overdosed on psychotropic tablets and romantically died on this non-existent Big Wheel.

HIM. True about the girl, but definitely not true that the Big Wheel is non-existent. The Big Wheel is in the park. The park, where people are governed by leisure and relaxation. And the park is in a town and the town is in a country and the country is on the earth and the earth is a fat pig, with a pearl choker wrapped around its head. And this choker is the Big Wheel, and you turn and turn around the pig in your cabin of pure pearl.

HER. And the pearl – that's the oxygen. You turn and turn and breathe.

HIM. You turn and turn on the pearly Big Wheel and scream with all your might, you scream for only one reason – to open your mouth as wide as you possibly can.

HER. And you lie and you invent and you deceive yourself and you do all this for only one reason - to make your lungs work as hard as possible.

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning.

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig, without the pig all meaning loses its meaning.

REFRAIN:

HIM. Meaning loses its meaning if you say what you really want to say out loud.

HER. Meaning loses its meaning if you write down in letters what you really want to write.

HIM. Meaning is meaningless if you think at all about what is going on around you.

HER. And to search for the meaning in meaning is rude and uncultured.

HIM. Any culture is meaningless.

HER. Like any art.

HIM. Anyone who doesn't see that is a philistine.

HER. Or a businessman.

HIM. Or both.

2nd Song:

HIM. And the camel is different from the pig above all because he has holy water in his hump and the pig only has manure in his belly.

HER. So why then did you wince in disgust when a camel spat in your face at the zoo, but when you cooked kebabs on the barbecue in Klyasma your face shone with the taste of the cooked pork?

HIM. Because when I was eating the pork I was thinking about the majesty of the 'ship of the desert' and when this very same 'ship of the desert' spat in my face the first thing I said was 'pig'.

HER. So what's the difference between a choker around the neck of the camel and around the neck of the pig?

HIM. Have you got a boyfriend?

HER. Yes, but so what?

HIM. Do you love him?

HER. Yes.

HIM. Do you love me with the very same love you have for your boyfriend?

HER. No. And since I know that this is leading to 'Would you sleep with me?' I'll tell you. No I couldn't and not because I can't, just it wouldn't occur to me. You live your life, I live mine and our lives don't cross outside this little space.

HIM. I wasn't planning to ask you about sex. I'm absolutely not interested in that side of your life. I just wanted to say that you don't love me, but you're prepared to speak openly with me whereas with your boyfriend you'd hardly discuss such matters. I'm the same: I eat the pig, because I love it, and I praise the camel, because it's a symbol of nobility.

REFRAIN:

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning.

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig.

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning. And I am.

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig. Going.

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning. To my

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig. Yard

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning. And there

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig. I'll take

HIM. And only within the pearl is there any meaning. Outside the pearl there is no meaning. My

HER. In the pearl when it is on the pig. Axe

HIM. And I am

HER. Going

HIM. To my

HER. Yard

HIM. And there

HER. I'll take

HIM. My

HER. Axe

And I am going to my yard
and there I'll take my axe

Track No. 9 'Essential'

1st Song:

HIM. 'See that ye gather you not treasure upon the earth, where rust and moths corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal.'

HER. 'But gather ye treasure together in heaven, where neither rust nor moths corrupt, and where thieves neither break up nor yet steal.'

HIM. The heavens – they're essential, because people fly about them from country to country in aeroplanes. And aeroplanes – they're essential, because they fulfil the presages of fate with their falling from the skies. And people, they're essential, because they bring the end of the earth nearer with their deeds.

HER. And the earth – that's essential, because the bodies of those killed in war are buried in it.

HIM. And war – that's essential, because without war men wouldn't do physical exercise and women wouldn't get dressed up so that the men beat each other to a pulp over them with their weapons.

HER. And weapons, they're essential, because weapons keep a record of the dead. And most of all the dead, their death is essential, because without them there would be no beautiful memorials and other artworks, dedicated to their honour.

HIM. Honour – that's also essential: because of honour men throw themselves on knives and women destroy the unborn sons in their wombs.

HER. Sons – they're essential. And daughters, they're essential, too – Children only appear on this earth for the one essential thing, and they go to playgroup for it and skip classes for it and steal money from their parents and smoke their first ever cigarettes and rob flats for the first time in their lives – all of this is done for the one essential thing.

HIM. For the one essential thing scientists make discoveries and bandits shoot up cigarette kiosks with their machine guns.

HER. For this essential thing violinists play Mozart and philatelists collect valuable stamps.

HIM. Michelangelo's pictures, they're done for this essential thing, and obscene things are written on fences.

HER. People deal cocaine for the one essential thing, and for it I drowned a puppy in an enamel tub.

HIM. Because of the essential thing priests are gay and I slept with my own sister twice because of it.

HER. For the sake of this essential thing actors act in films, writers write novels and teachers seduce their pupils. For its sake I drank spirits for a whole week with some men and did everything they asked me to.

HIM. For the one essential thing you would betray your colleagues at work and sleep with the wife of your best friend.

HER. For it you despise your parents and hit your child across the face.

HIM. For this essential thing you throw fag ends in the flowerbeds and drink through the money meant to buy your child a bicycle.

HER. And you don't have any children for this essential thing.

HIM. And you shoot cats with a gun.

HER. And you love and you hate and you kill only for the essential on this earth.

HIM. And you blame and you curse and you torment for the essential, for what else would you do it?

HER. And you let the heroin run through your veins and you go to concerts of music by Bach and you help a blind man cross the road and you open your veins and all for the same reason.

HIM. And you give beggars your last pennies and you have an interest in politics and you open your veins and all for the same reason.

HER. For this essential thing you talk and you can't stop.

HIM. For this essential thing you stop and ask the essential question.

Pause

HER. So what's essential for you then?

HIM. The same as for you.

HER. If you're about to say oxygen, then I'll leave the stage.

HIM. No need to think I'm stupider than you.

HER. What then?

HIM. You say first.

HER. If I say this word out aloud then it'll sound crass and everyone will be embarrassed for me. You first.

HIM. It's the same for me. You start and I'll carry on.

HER. You probably played the same game in nursery school with some little girl: who's going to pull down their pants first?

HIM. I did. Did you?

HER. Shame...

HIM. Same for me.

Track No. 10 'In the stereo'

'Do men gather grapes of thorn? Or figs of briars?'

And any thinking person will always think to their advantage and any loving person will love to their own advantage and a believer will believe to his advantage and anyone living on this earth will live to their advantage and anyone listening to a stereo will listen to it just for themselves.

1st Song:

HIM. Strange. Where would I be if the heavy hand of the midwife hadn't hit my bottom and I hadn't taken in pain and surprise my first ever mouthful of oxygen. Where would I be? Strange – where would I be if they hadn't dragged me out of the scalpel-sliced maternal womb? Where would I be? And where would I be if my Mum hadn't lain under my father on the hospital bed, in the same hospital where he was recovering from a lung inflammation and she was working as a nurse. Where would I be? Strange... and where would I be if my Mum hadn't worked as a nurse and my father hadn't walked around all spring without a scarf on. Where would I be then? Strange... if my mother and my father hadn't existed, where would I be then? And strange... If I hadn't existed, where would I be... I don't know! I don't know that. I don't know. But I do know that if

my mother and father hadn't existed, then by my thirtieth birthday I would definitely have been in prison. I know that for sure. I don't doubt it for a moment.

HER. Strange. If I hadn't existed then where would I have been? In what place? Maybe in the same place? Maybe in the same place as all those who never existed in the world. Maybe amongst those who haven't yet appeared? Amongst those who haven't yet breathed oxygen, or insulted their parents or had abortions or participated in protests or blasphemed? Perhaps I would have been happy there, there where there is no oxygen starvation and there is only water, simple fresh water, not sold in plastic dispensers. There, where there is no grey aerosol cloud in the sky, where ice doesn't melt endlessly and there are no fires over the turf bogs, filling the lungs of the city dwellers with smoke, the lungs, created by God in order to consume oxygen.

2nd Song:

HIM. If it has been said 'Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know the trees' then what can I say about the tree called God?

HER. And if it was written 'A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit' then what does this mean?

HIM. I am a fruit of this tree, and by me people will know whether the tree is corrupt or not.

HER. It means that people will judge the fruit according to the tree.

HIM. Look at me. Look at me. I am the fruit of this heavenly tree.

HER. A beautiful tree bears beautiful fruit.

HIM. Yesterday, it was, only yesterday, I was round at someone's house and shall I tell you what I did with this girl?

HER. And the tree by the name of God is beautiful.

HIM. I am the fruit and people will know the tree by me. 'A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit'.

HER. That means that the fruit which this tree bears are beautiful by themselves.

HIM. It means that a fruit like me is born by a tree just the same. 'Ye shall know them by their fruits'.

HER. And the fruits, they contain oxygen, but not the oxygen, the O₂ which fills the aqualungs of divers, but the oxygen which we have been talking about all evening.

HIM. It means that I have a bad, a very bad God. If I am the fruit of the tree and people will know it by me.

HER. Oxygen, without which no heavenly angel, nor any saint from God's retinue can take a step.

HIM. So the only thing I can say to him is 'For God's sake forgive me and do not deny me the chance of breathing. Never mind the fact that I already have asthma.

HER. All of creation breathes this oxygen...

HIM. I'm just asking that the oxygen isn't completely turned off, that's all I ask, that's all it means...

HER. ...and all this complicated and contradictory earthly life was only thought up for the sake of this oxygen.

HIM. All it means is that even after death we breath oxygen and not the same shit which I breathed too much of recently at the registration office in my local district.

HER. Ye shall know them by their fruits. Amen.

There was once a girl called Sasha. She was born in the seventh decade of the twentieth century in a city. She studied at school and then at college and she married the one she loved. Then the twenty first century began. There was once a young man called Alexander. He was born in the seventh decade of the twentieth century in a city. He studied at school and then at college and he didn't have a family. And then the twenty first century began. These two: Sasha and Sasha, are people of the third millennium. Remember them as they are. They are a whole generation. Remember them like an old photograph. This generation, upon whose heads a huge meteorite from somewhere in cold space is falling, falling...