

Immutability

a stageplay by

Arthur Robert

CAST OF CHARACTERS

RAYMOND, mid forties. Therapist. Male.

PHIL, late twenties. Wayward young man. Male.

WALTER, late sixties. Raymond's mentor, appears voice-only. Male.

AUDIENCE MEMBER, any age/gender.

A one-act in four scenes. The play takes place first on an actual theatre stage, and then in Raymond's office.

Scene I.

Curtain opens. PHIL, a scruffy young man - late twenties - sits on a small chair, staring directly into the audience. He is smoking. A look of confusion gradually overtakes his face.

PHIL

Well go on with it, then. What're you all waitin for? Get on with it! Start acting!

Pause. PHIL squirms in his chair.

PHIL

The hell're you all lookin at me for? *(beat)* My... this is an awful big cast, innit? Some kinda *ensemble* piece, this? Doesn't look like much of a stage you got there, though. Looks more like an audience. That's funny. Must be one of those, uh, uh, what is it, *reflexive-type* New Age plays? Huh? *(beat... he studies his surroundings)* Come to think of it, where I am looks more like the stage, hey? Odd, that.

Pause.

PHIL

Well look, don't be put off by the poor attendance if that's what's delayin you all. I'm a real *astute* observer, you'll see, and am a... a... *suitable*, *suitable* replacement for... for a full-sized audience. You'll see. You'll find that. So. So go ahead and *get on* with it, then.

PHIL sighs uncomfortably. He puffs away on the cigarette, then turns to shout at someone off stage.

PHIL

Ray!? You back there!? You musta taken me to the wrong spot, doc! Nothin's happenin here!

So far I'm learnin *ab-so-lutely* nothin from this "play"!
(*turning back to the audience*) Wow... this must be one of those *really* New Age plays, like a... a *silence* type thing, huh? Hmm. Don't think I'm much a fan of that kinda play, no.

An older male AUDIENCE MEMBER stands up. He shouts at PHIL.

AUDIENCE MEMBER

We aren't the play, imbecile! You are the play!

The AUDIENCE MEMBER sits back down. PHIL looks disconcerted.

PHIL

Ha, ha. Yeah... right, *I'm* the play. Really, no, yeah... interesting, this. (*turning back*) RAYMOND! I'm just gonna leave now in a sec if you don't come out here and start explainin things! C'mon!

RAYMOND, a middle-aged fellow - around forty-five - enters from stage right. He is carrying a small chair with him, very similar to the one PHIL is sitting on. RAYMOND props his chair near PHIL'S and also sits down. He looks out at the audience, and then at PHIL.

RAYMOND

So. You've learned nothing, you say?

PHIL

Not a thing.

RAYMOND

And why do you think that is?

PHIL

It's clear you brought me to the wrong spot.

RAYMOND

Clearly.

Pause.

PHIL

What, you didn't? This is the place?

RAYMOND snatches the cigarette out of PHIL'S mouth and tosses it off stage.

PHIL

The hell?

RAYMOND

And that's the first problem, right there.

PHIL

Oh yeah?

RAYMOND

If you will change yourself... you will change your traits. And not just your addiction, no. No... your clothing. Your hairstyle. Your mannerisms. The sound of your voice. The way you *walk*.

PHIL

What's wrong with my clothes?

RAYMOND

Not saying there's anything *wrong*, Phil. But you want to change, that's what's clear. And how's a man going to change while he's constantly being reminded of his... his past self? His former persona?

PHIL

Oh...

RAYMOND

External solutions to internal problems.

PHIL

I dunno... doesn't seem like the best approach there to me, Ray, for some reason, but hey you're the doc.

RAYMOND

Go on then. Find somebody else.

Pause.

PHIL

Well, sorry. I just don't get it.

RAYMOND

We've already gone over it. I suspect you're not putting much effort in, Phil.

PHIL

Don't say that.

RAYMOND

If we're ever going to provoke any kind of change in you, Phil, any kind at all, you need to put effort into this. Use your head. You have already made it clear to me that you have much difficulty in very public situations.

PHIL

Yeah, but--

RAYMOND

Right, so. Phil. What'd I tell you earlier? *(beat)* Phil? *What had* I told you earlier, Phil? About taking command.

PHIL

Yeah, OK, yeah. When I find myself in a situation... where I'm uncomfortable... I should... *take command* of the situation...?

RAYMOND

By...

PHIL

By, uhh... yeah, goin *outward*...

RAYMOND

And what does that mean?

PHIL

Something like... focusing on what's... goin on *out there* and not... myself. *(beat)* To... to kill the self-consciousness?

RAYMOND

Good. You remember, Phil. So... why didn't you do it?

PHIL

I dunno. I'm sorry.

RAYMOND

Should only be sorry for yourself, Phil. *(beat)* You see, in a situation like this... you should've taken command by putting yourself out there. By focusing on *them*, on what you *see* and not *you*, you would've realized you had to start putting on some kind of... *performance*. Like so.

RAYMOND stands up from his chair, looks out into the audience. Lights dim and spotlight on RAYMOND.

RAYMOND

"For a long time I used to go to bed early. Sometimes, when I had put out my candle, my eyes would close so quickly that I had not even time to say 'I'm going to sleep'. And half an hour later the thought that it was time to go to sleep would awaken me; I would try to put away the book which, I imagined, was still in my hands, and to blow out the light;

I had been thinking all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book..." Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*.

RAYMOND sits back down. Spotlight fades and lights return.

RAYMOND

And that's just an example. Anything you have in your head would've been sufficient. If you had done that, just quickly anything like that... you would've passed the test.

PHIL

Well I didn't get what was goin on. I was confused. You coulda been clearer about the exercise.

RAYMOND stands up, grabs his chair, and repositions it behind PHIL. PHIL motions to get up as well.

RAYMOND

No, stay there.

PHIL

What now?

RAYMOND

It's better if I'm back here.

PHIL

Wh--

RAYMOND

OK, Phil. So let's get back to it, then. As I told you before. If we're ever going to make any kind of progress here... create any kind of *change* in you... you need to open up completely so that I can see who you really are.

PHIL

You ask, I answer.

RAYMOND

So, then, why did you kill that girl?

PHIL

Not again, Ray. Look. We went over this.

RAYMOND

Yeah. Not so sure I believe you, though.

PHIL

Why the hell not?

Again, PHIL takes out another cigarette from the pack in his blazer pocket.

RAYMOND swats it away.

RAYMOND

What, d'you need that for the truth?

PHIL

No. *(beat)* There's no reason... huhh, *look...* OK, you'll get it outta me again just cause all these new people are here now and I don't wanna... *(looking directly at audience again)* don't want you all thinking... heh, really, that's real good, Ray old boy. You got some clever techniques. This guy, people, this guy's some kinda quack or something, I dunno. I dunno why I put up with him, honest. *(beat)* Won't be happenin no more after this, Ray, you got it?

RAYMOND

OK. So explain, Phil.

PHIL

You wanna hear it again, huh? *(beat)* This... *girl...* yeah, she got strangled. I guess. Out at this here... uh, bus stop.

(beat) Annnd I was a, uh, *suspect* for a while there cause... well, I *was* with her that night. Briefly. But we parted ways and I dunno what happened to her after, honest. *And they realized* they had nothin on me, Ray. So that's that. I was let go. Don't even have a record.

RAYMOND

Alright. You had nothing to do with it.

PHIL

Thanks. Or is that...

RAYMOND

No, no, I believe you. I had to see if you'd say the same thing in this kind of situation... sometimes, when nervous, people break down. Understand?

PHIL

Yeah. Well. I am nervous. (beat) So what now?

RAYMOND

We can try something different today.

PHIL

I dunno. Do we hafta stay *here*? With... all these people? Just doesn't seem--

RAYMOND

Yes, Phil. It's part of this exercise. Now. Just try and relax for a moment. Before we continue I think I should explain a few things, provide a little context, as we have an audience for our session tonight.

PHIL

Whatever.

RAYMOND

So... folks. Let me tell you a little bit about Phil here. (beat) Phil has a problem with misanthropy.

He does not like people, much less being around them. And that is why he seems downright *angry* in the presence of so many of you here tonight. He no doubt feels incredibly uncomfortable right now with all of you watching him. But Phil wants to *change*, which is why he sought my help. Or... perhaps I should say... change *back*, right, Phil?

PHIL

I guess.

RAYMOND

Yes. See... the interesting part here is... Phil once was quite outgoing, quite socially competent. But then one day, he just... *changed*. And that's the mystery of it... what happened to provoke this sudden personality change in Phil? *(beat)* Any idea, Phil?

PHIL

Nope.

RAYMOND

And that's why I'm here, everyone. To figure that out. A tough task, certainly. But I enjoy a good challenge. And *you*... why are *you* here... well, I like to think some of you have surmised this already, but you're here for Phil's sake. For his betterment. So... while I understand you're all somewhat confused right now, as you were expecting to see a straightforward play tonight... please be Good Samaritans and stick around? It'll be your act of generosity for the night and you'll get to go home proud of yourselves for being so selfless. Because, you see, I... I really think your presence could greatly benefit Philip here tonight.

PHIL

(shrugs) Get on with it, then.

RAYMOND

Now, let's try an experiment... that chair there, see? Start focusing on it.

PHIL

(looking around) What chair?

RAYMOND

No, the one you're sitting in.

PHIL

Oh. *(looking down)* Whattaya mean *focus* on it?

RAYMOND

Just that. Might be on a better perspective if you're not actually sitting in it.

PHIL

You want me to get up?

RAYMOND

If it's not asking too much.

PHIL

Well... where'm I gonna sit then?

RAYMOND

Don't worry about it.

PHIL

So... I'll just get up and start looking at this chair, then. *Focusing* on it.

RAYMOND

If you give it much more thought, the whole thing will be ruined anyhow.

With a sigh, PHIL gets up from his chair. He stands back from it. He scrutinizes the chair.

PHIL

Like this?

RAYMOND

Good. OK. Keep analyzing it. Analyze it closely, that chair. Think about it. *Think about* that chair... *contemplate* it.

PHIL

There's not much--

RAYMOND

Really look at it and *think* about it. Start appreciating the contours of it... the way a well-made chair is built. Under-appreciated, really, isn't it? Beautiful in a way, don't you think? In its simplicity. It is only what it needs to be; no more, no less.

PHIL

...Yeah. It works.

RAYMOND

It doesn't just *work* though. It *emanates*.

PHIL

The chair *emanates*.

RAYMOND

Correct. It *emanates* with... its raw, powerful beauty. *Look* at the way those iron legs are so perfectly engineered... the perfection of them... standing strong, holding up that chair seat with... with... *perpetual* resolve. What else do you observe, Phil?

Pause.

PHIL

...Yeah. Oh. It's, uhh... yeah, the the the-- the way the, uh, chair seat is... constructed. It's got a, uhm, nice... *symmetry* to it.

RAYMOND

Mmhmm. Yes, it does. *(beat)* Now, Phil... now that you're really concentrating on that chair, I want you to go ahead and *shift* your attention onto a person. Not me. Somebody in the audience. Go ahead and do that. Just... smoothly *shift* your attention away from that chair now and toward... somebody out there.

Slowly, PHIL turns his head away from the chair and looks into the audience.

RAYMOND

That's right. Pick someone. Pick someone and make direct eye contact with them. Go ahead. Good. Now... just like with the chair, start studying them. Take a real interest in them. Can you do that?

PHIL

I'm, uh... trying...

RAYMOND

Just take the same approach with this person as you did with the chair. Really take *interest* in this person's features... what they're wearing... observe, notice the details. Do not think about yourself at all... you are only concerned with what you see. You are external, not internal.

Pause. PHIL breaks his concentration from the audience and sits back down.

PHIL

Sorry.

RAYMOND

What's the problem? No, no, not this again.

RAYMOND takes away another cigarette that PHIL had again been preparing to light. RAYMOND pockets the cigarette.

PHIL

For yourself, later?

RAYMOND

So I'm a hypocrite, then.

PHIL

(beat) I dunno... I dunno, it just got uncomfortable, didn't it? I get what you were goin for, but...

RAYMOND

Well, you gave it a sincere shot, it seems. It's to be expected. We won't give up there. Stand back up.

PHIL stands.

RAYMOND

Now... this is called "anchoring." It's behaviorism stuff, going way back to Pavlov and those fellows. Anyhow. It's effective, if you do it right.

PHIL

Can't I sit down?

RAYMOND

No. You need to be as alert as possible for this, Phil. So... just think back to a moment when you were really confident, mmkay? Close your eyes if you want to. Go ahead. *(beat)* Good. So, think about that time now when you were very confident. Could be any time you want... uh, for example, uhh... I remember graduating kindergarten of all things.

It was my first one, maybe... "you always remember your first." Anyway. But, uh... I remember walking and, uh, my mom was taking pictures and, uh, I had the little diploma in my hands and I had the little picture of it and I felt *great*. On top of the world. *(beat)* Could be... getting your PhD. Could be... getting a good grade on a test. Anything. Don't worry, Phil... doesn't have to be academic. Doesn't even have to be something you're really proud of... could be a school fight, for instance, or something, that you won.

PHIL

I got it.

RAYMOND

Yeah? OK, good. Really put yourself back there now. What did... what did it *smell* like during that time? Were there any odours in that room? Good or bad. What were the colors in the room? What was the, what was the *temperature* like? You see what I'm doing, I'm involving all of your senses? Did you hear anything? That time in your life when you were *very* confident, whatever time it may be. Put yourself back there now. Now make it more intense. Make the colors brighter, make the sounds louder, make the, the odours more... more noticeable. *(beat)* K... the clothing, can you feel the clothing you're wearing? I mean can you *see* the clothing, can you feel it? Really tune into that now.

PHIL

Yeah.

RAYMOND

Yeah? OK. Now make it even more intense. Most importantly, think about the confidence you felt. That's right, the confidence. Whatever it is you're remembering. How *confident*, how good you felt about yourself. *(beat)* OK. Now what I want you to do next, and you've got to trust me on this one...

is, uh, make a fist. With your right hand, go ahead and make a fist with your right hand.

PHIL makes a fist with his right hand.

RAYMOND

Now keep thinking those thoughts, keep thinking how powerful you were. OK. Now when I say *go*... I want you to... hit your right upper chest with your fist, with your right fist. I'm sorry, hit your left upper chest with your right fist. And say the word "*power*." But not til I say so. *(beat)* OK now let's get back to that frame of mind... *think about that* time. Let the feelings of confidence really *surge* through you now. You're very confident, whatever it is that happened made you feel really good about yourself... it validated you in your life, in your existence, made you feel really good about yourself. Now let the feeling *surge* through you. Good, good. Let it surge through you. OK, ready? Ready? *Feel* it. Feel those feelings of intensity, of that moment. OK, ready? *GO*.

PHIL

(hitting chest) POWER.

Pause. PHIL opens his eyes.

PHIL

...Am I a new man?

RAYMOND

No, Phil. You're still Phil. But, perhaps, a slightly more confident version of Phil. *YOU* might not realize it yet... but... that... that *WILL* help you *STOP* feeling so awkward all the time. If you continue to use it. With sincerity. Whenever you're in a situation when you're feeling a... a real lack of confidence, then use that. Instead, maybe, instead of *SMOKING*. It will help. *(beat)* It will help.

PHIL

OK.

RAYMOND

Right. You can sit down now.

PHIL sits down.

RAYMOND

So.

PHIL takes out his pack of cigarettes and throws them away.

RAYMOND

Where'd that come from?

PHIL

Just felt like it.

Fade to black.

Scene II.

RAYMOND'S office. A cluttered desk with chair center stage and two other chairs in front of it. A tape recorder on the desk. A bookcase stage right. A combination safe rests on the bookcase's top shelf. PHIL is pacing oddly around RAYMOND'S office as RAYMOND sits behind his desk, watching PHIL. PHIL'S hairstyle is completely different, as well as his manner of dress and overall look.

RAYMOND

No, no... more like this.

RAYMOND stands up and also begins to pace around oddly. PHIL mimics this pace as closely as he can.

RAYMOND

Yeah, yeah... you're getting it. *(beat)* Now, uhh, the voice still needs a lot of work, though. You can't just keep going without altering that more fully. Let's hear some ideas.

PHIL clears his throat.

PHIL

(speaking in an odd tone) I am a changed man.

RAYMOND

Probably a little too effeminate. That's not the kind of personality you're going for, is it?

PHIL

Not really. *(back to another odd tone)* I... am a changed man.

RAYMOND

Hm. Keep going.

PHIL

(odd tones) I... am a changed man. Imma a changed man. I am a... changed man. I am a changed... man.

RAYMOND

Hm. The second from last wasn't bad. Perhaps you can make it more about the, uh, you know... *rhythm* of the words than the... than the inflection itself... maybe that'll suffice. *(beat)* Try that one, then... *with the pace.*

PHIL now begins to pace around while doing the odd-sounding voice.

PHIL

I am a... changed man.

RAYMOND

Good, good. That was good, I think. Now as you keep doing it, it'll really... *supplant* your previous traits. But you need diligence and consistency, otherwise you'll just revert.

PHIL

I won't.

RAYMOND

Good. This has been a good check-up, then, Phil... you seem to be on the right track... stay on it, OK? *(beat)* I'll see you in a few weeks, then.

PHIL

Lemme tell you Ray, Raymond, I really *am*. I'm not even kiddin, no more. Not since... before the, the... *change*... have I been doin so good. I'm makin people laugh now. I go into social situations now, to a... a bar, say, and I make people laugh. *Laugh*, Ray! They find me *funny*, and... *likeable*. I'm not... well, *miserable*, no more. *(beat)* You are a true genius, Raymond, lemme tell you that. I... I'm able to make consistent eye contact now.

RAYMOND

Yeah, I noticed...

PHIL

I... I, I *initiate* conversations with strangers and, and *followed through* with them. But not only strangers... strangers of the *opposite sex*, Raymond.

RAYMOND

Yeah?

PHIL

Yeah. Even a *relationship*, Raymond.

RAYMOND

Really?

PHIL

Oh yes. She's real nice. *(beat)* She likes me.

RAYMOND

I don't doubt it. Good job, Phil. And... you've been staying away from the nicotine, too, I presume?

PHIL

Ah yeah. Wasn't even challenging.

RAYMOND

No, that's right. Things get easier as you get immersed in... and excited about... your new identity, Phil.

PHIL

And that, that session we did a few months back, on the theatre stage? It helped me a lot, I think. I actually thought back to that night a few times... when in need of motivation, y'know... when... I guess, *tempted*. And it does the trick every time.

RAYMOND

It was a pivotal night for you.

PHIL

We should do more sessions out there, I think. I'm actually real willing to get out there now, in front of many people as they're watching and... listening to me. I really don't dislike being around people so much now.

RAYMOND

That's good, Phil. But it wouldn't be very practical to try that again... it worked and now we should move on. But... public speaking is something similar you could try.

PHIL

Ah yeah. Maybe I'll try that. I could talk about *you*. Give others hope.

RAYMOND

Perhaps. It's a... well, it's a very hit and miss thing, though, to be honest with you. I've tried the same techniques on patients in the past and, well... they just haven't worked. Chalk it up to the mysteries of life. "*Why are people the way they are?*" Not an easy question to answer, but one I've been attempting to since... well, too long. *(beat)* But with *you*, Phil, I seem to have finally hit the nail on the head. It's a very satisfying time for me, too, really. You alone practically validate my career, heh.

PHIL

You know what I think really did it for me, Raymond? Your uh, e-mail that night. "10/12/2007, 11:46pm." The most important message I ever got.

PHIL takes out a sheet of paper from his jacket pocket.

PHIL

(handing it to RAYMOND) I... printed it out. Well, here's just one copy. Could you... just... read it to me? I'd like to actually *hear* it from you.

RAYMOND

Well... *(checking watch)* there's another appointment soon... but... OK. It was important for me, too.

RAYMOND takes the paper with him over to his desk and sits down.

RAYMOND

(clearing throat) Phil, I believe you've finally told me enough about yourself and your history for me to be able to draw a conclusion. Usually, I'll admit, this isn't the case. Sometimes I'm never able to reach an answer. But you, for whatever reason, turned out to be different... and this time... I really think I've got it. *(beat)* I'll attempt to put it as clearly and concisely as I can for you: "Phil, you told me some months ago what you could remember about your sudden personality change. You could only remember that it had happened somewhere around your mid teenage years, and couldn't remember the details of it. But you knew you had gone from a very outgoing and social individual with many friends to something of a misanthropic loner, not at all interested anymore in friends or people in general. Quite suddenly. Naturally, I paid a lot of attention to the fact that you were beaten as a child by your father. Surely, I thought, it must have something to do with that.

RAYMOND pauses, moves to his desk and sits down. PHIL continues to listen.

RAYMOND

But then I recalled what you told me about your friend... and your best friend in particular: that you just became 'bored of him.' Only then did it occur to me that perhaps you weren't telling me everything about that. Perhaps you wanted to think it was all your father's fault in the end - after all, something like that is completely out of a child's hands. But losing a best friend... well, perhaps that was partially *your* fault? *(beat)* Of course I realized that if you'd repressed it, you'd repressed it, and there wasn't anything I - at least with my level of psychiatric training - could do about that. I thought the next logical step, then, was to contact your former best friend... this 'Jeffrey Pritchett'.

It wasn't easy, but I finally managed to get hold of him, and after explaining myself... he put forth a decidedly less simple version of events. Jeffrey says that he in fact wronged you once. That you two had agreed to go on a mountain climbing trip one weekend that you'd been planning for quite some time... but at the last minute, he pulled out in favor of spending time with another friend. *(beat)* If this version is in fact the truth... and I see no reason why he'd lie after all these years... then I imagine that must have been quite a painful experience for you. He, of course, feels that you overreacted quite strongly... and this is understandable. But I also understand something now: this occurrence of rejection from your best friend during such an impressionable period of your life is what caused you to spontaneously transform into a misanthrope, of sorts. I know what you're thinking. This seems like a rather slight impetus for such a life-changing transformation, but my experience in psychiatry has taught me that small disappointments often have profound effects. But perhaps now, I hope, your realization and acceptance of this will gradually allow you to - as we say in psychiatry - *de-learn* how you've taught yourself to behave ever since that moment in time over fifteen years ago. What can be learned... can be *de-learned*. Sincerely, Raymond."

Pause.

PHIL

It's too beautiful for words, maybe. *(beat)* I think I just needed it to be said, and it all suddenly made sense. Thanks Raymond, I'll leave you now...

PHIL turns to leave, then turns back.

PHIL

Oh, yeah... by the way... wanted to ask you... just outta curiosity, really.

I guess it's maybe something you don't like to talk about since it's so high up there and outta the way and all, but... what's the deal with that safe up there?

RAYMOND

Oh, that. Yes now that you mention it I should perhaps place that in a more discrete location.

Pause.

PHIL

Yeah. *(beat)* Well, that's fine, I won't make you talk about it. See you later...

RAYMOND

Walter, my mentor *(beat)* ...he left that for me, along with the combination. I guess... that was over a decade ago, now. He's since passed on. But... he told me... eventually, I'll come to "the dilemma", is what he called it.

PHIL

Oh yeah?

RAYMOND

Yeah. *The* dilemma. The dilemma to end all dilemmas.

PHIL

Right.

RAYMOND

And... he said... that's when I'll have to open that safe.

PHIL

Really. That's interesting. And so... you, uh, you haven't...

RAYMOND

I don't think I've encountered the dilemma yet.

PHIL

Or maybe you have... but figured it out on your own?

RAYMOND

That's a nice thought.

PHIL

Yeah. I'll leave on that note, then. Take care, Ray.

PHIL exits. Pause. RAYMOND sits there for a few moments, staring off pensively into space. RAYMOND then turns on the tape recorder that is resting on his desk.

RAYMOND

August the seventeenth, two thousand and seven. *(beat)* A distillation of my thoughts for the day: this... is a very important day. I am now finally convinced that Phil has reached a *changed personality* status, with my help. He behaves differently, he conducts himself differently, he has been getting different life results, and on the whole he is indeed a different man. And by different I of course mean improved. The misanthropy seems to have all but disappeared. *(beat)* And I now... finally... strongly believe that my use of logic and various behavioral exercises... have indeed *brought about* this change for the better.

Pause. RAYMOND turns off the recorder. Fade to black.

Scene III.

RAYMOND'S office. RAYMOND is sitting at his desk, reading. PHIL walks in without knocking, looking distressed.

PHIL

Raymond. I, I...

RAYMOND

Phil. What's wrong?

PHIL

I hate people again.

RAYMOND

What happened?

PHIL

Lost the will. I feel nothin... but disdain for people again... can't even look at them. Again. I'm just like I was. All over again. I prefer to just stay locked away in my apartment all day. It came full circle. I guess it was good while it lasted.

RAYMOND

Look, Phil. Don't overreact. You aren't going to be happy and outgoing all the time. That's not what we did. Nobody is happy and outgoing all the time. What we did was make you *more* extroverted, like you once were. But even extroverts have their bad days, Phil. Now. Whatever happened to anger you... you'll get over it and move on.

PHIL

Nah, no. I thought that at first, too. Believe me. But I... been like this for over a month now, Ray. Over a month.

RAYMOND

Hmm. *(beat)* Well, that is problematic...

PHIL

I know it is.

PHIL takes out a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket.

RAYMOND

What's that?

PHIL

What's it look like?

RAYMOND

Phil. We agreed you'd quit. Do you not realize how important it is that you quit?

PHIL

Yeah, well... I tried...

RAYMOND

Phil. You're not going to light that. If you light that... you can stop coming to see me. I'll have nothing more to do with you.

Pause. PHIL puts the cigarettes away.

PHIL

Alright Raymond, alright... they're gone. They're gone.

RAYMOND

Your, uh... relationship, then?

PHIL

Over.

RAYMOND

Hm. Right. Well. *(beat)* I'm sure it's because you've regressed.

PHIL

Nah I didn't.

RAYMOND

No? What did I just see? Have you not been smoking?

PHIL

Oh, yeah... well..

RAYMOND

Phil. The idea was ultimately for you to reinvent yourself mentally, but one cannot do that without corresponding physical change as well. Now while this nicotine addiction might seem like a trivial thing... it isn't. That addiction is strongly associated with your *past* self, the socially incompetent self. You only picked up the habit until *after* the change. Re-association with this past addiction *will* cause all elements of your past self - both physical *and* mental - to come rushing back to you. Don't you see the logic in this? It's very logical, Phil.

PHIL

Yeah...

RAYMOND

We built a new walk for you. A new voice. A new manner of carrying yourself. A new personality. A new man. And that new man, Phil... doesn't smoke.

PHIL

Uh huh. (*standing up*) Maybe... maybe I'm just too weak.

RAYMOND

You aren't weak, Phil. You wouldn't have got--

PHIL

I'll see you later, Raymond. Sorry to bother you.

PHIL exits. Fade to black.

Scene IV.

RAYMOND'S office. RAYMOND is again sitting at his desk, reading. PHIL walks in.

PHIL

Raymond.

RAYMOND

Phil.

PHIL

I thought you might wanna hear about my progress. *(beat)* I feel great again. Have for over *three* months now. I mean, it's not, uhh... *perpetual*? Whatever you said. I have moments of sadness, like everyone, but I get over it quick enough. And I'm *motivated* now - real consistently - to *interact* with people. It actually seems to be lasting this time.

RAYMOND

That's great news.

PHIL

Yeah. I don't feel this intense dislike for people... I can stand to look at people again. I can stand to speak in front of, of large numbers of them without getting uncomfortable - as a matter of fact, I even think I *enjoy* it now.

RAYMOND

And the relationship?

PHIL

Ah, yeah, that's back on, too.

RAYMOND

Great.

PHIL

Life isn't so intolerable.

PHIL takes out a pack of cigarettes from his jacket pocket.

RAYMOND

Wait, why are you... didn't you quit again?

PHIL

Oh, no. Oh, right. Sorry, forgot. You don't like this.

PHIL puts the cigarettes away.

RAYMOND

It's not that I'm bothered by the smoking, Phil. *(beat)* Don't you even get it? I mean... how...

PHIL

Yeah, I dunno. I know it's confusing, maybe even more for you. I know you think of it as a... a... whatever you call it, "reversion" or whatever. But I just decided to, y'know, stick with it for a while... and see...

RAYMOND

It's not confusing. It doesn't make any sense. At all. At least there's a... a *trace* of logic... in confusion.

PHIL

Well, Ray... it's just... it was too much for me. I always loved this addiction, y'know? Can't just give it up.

RAYMOND

Fine. That's fine. But you shouldn't be back to your positive state. That just doesn't make any sense. The smoking was associated with your *misanthropic* self. Not your positive self. We constructed your positive self as a *non-smoker*.

PHIL

That's true.

RAYMOND

So, why... how... it just... *contradicts*...

PHIL

I just figured, you know, maybe if I hold out with it long enough I'd just return to the, the, as you call it... positive self. Right? While still being able to smoke.

RAYMOND

No. It just doesn't work like that. It *shouldn't* work like that. It--

PHIL

Yeah, well anyway, Raymond... thanks for your help. I do appreciate it.

RAYMOND

Three months? You've been back to good health for that long? While still...

PHIL

Smoking? Yeah. Matter of fact, I really wanna go have one now... so... see you later, Raymond.

RAYMOND

No, no. Don't bother coming back, Phil. Let's just make it a goodbye.

PHIL

What's that?

RAYMOND

There's no point, Phil. I *thought* I was applying some kind of logic that was helping you. But now, clearly, I see that... there's no logic to any of this.

PHIL

It might not make sense. But I know you help me.

RAYMOND

Stop it, Phil. I don't. Clearly, I do nothing for you other than... listen. I thought... maybe... by analyzing your problems, I thought I was providing some logical solutions for you. And for a while there... it almost looked like I was. Huh. Sad how I'm only realizing this now... no, maybe it's something I realized long ago but am only just now admitting to myself.

PHIL

I guess... I guess I don't know either, Ray, pal. I can only feel it. I can only *feel* you helped me.

Pause.

RAYMOND

If you have changed for the better, it's just a fluke is what it is. I've done nothing, really, to help. At least not intentionally, consciously. You've destroyed my logic. It's fate. That's right. It's *fate*, Phil. That's what it is.

PHIL

Yeah?

RAYMOND

Sure, that's it. It's that thing I never really wanted to think about. Because... well... it kind of negates my whole existence, really, doesn't it? As a doctor.

PHIL

I don't... I don't think it's--

RAYMOND

If it's all just left up to fate in the end, then what the hell is the point I mean really? *(beat)* Huh?

PHIL

I dunno, I think I had some control over the change. The change *back*, I mean.

RAYMOND

Yeah. We think. We think a lot. We think and we guess and we... we *surmise*. But never can we really be sure. We can only *think* we're sure. That's what makes this whole thing endless, really.

PHIL

I dunno.

RAYMOND

Exactly. Never a truer word, Phil. It's good to hear you say it. *You don't know*. Well, neither do I. I thought I did, but now I realize I don't. So... so there's no real purpose in you coming back here anymore. *(beat)* I wish you the best though, really. I hope you remain in your positive state... I hope you never go back to being a misanthrope again.

Pause.

PHIL

Alright. *(beat)* Bye, then.

RAYMOND

Bye, Phil.

PHIL turns to exit, but then turns back to RAYMOND.

PHIL

But you *have* helped me, Raymond. So... concretely. The anchoring, remember that? Just for instance. It's what comes to mind now. You taught me to take things from my past... that I'm not necessarily proud of, even... and turn them into... *tools*... tools for self-empowerment.

Yeah, *self-empowerment*. You taught me to do that, Raymond, remember? Not fate. I didn't learn that through God, the heavens, whatever! I learned that through *you*, Ray.

RAYMOND

Sure, Phil. OK.

PHIL

(*beat*) Look, I could be more specific, but... I dunno if it's such a good idea...

RAYMOND

Fine, Phil. Just... leave me alone now. Please.

PHIL

OK. Fine. I'll be specific, then. The anchoring technique you taught me? (*beat*) Well... you remember how you told me to think back to a time in my past when I felt *real* powerful? Real confident, real *in control*?

RAYMOND

Phil, really...

PHIL

Let me finish, OK? (*beat*) This'll convince you. So... I did that. And you know what I used for that? That moment in time? Well, like I said, I'm *not* proud of it. But I was feeling *real* powerful at that time. It was when I killed that girl, Ray. At that bus stop there.

Pause. RAYMOND looks at PHIL.

PHIL

Yeah... but wait. I didn't *want* to. I didn't. It's just... I... I met her there, at that bus stop. Right? I was just waiting for the bus there that night, that's all, honest. And this *girl*... she just starts talkin to me, right? Well... I tried ignoring her for a while, but the bus just *wasn't* coming. So, I responded. We got to talking.

And for a while, I thought I mighta actually been *enjoying* the conversation, even. This surprised me, as you can imagine. But then... then we got to talking about how I wanted to *change*, right? And this was long before I came to you, Raymond. How I wanted to... *change* things about myself. You know. About my... personality. And you know what she said, Ray? I mean, I got to the point where I think I was actually pouring my heart out to this random girl. I was actually talking to her about *that*. Can you believe it? *(beat)* And... you know what she said to me then, Raymond?

RAYMOND

Phil...

PHIL

She said, Ray, she said... "*people don't change*". And it... well, hearing that just tore my heart right out, Ray. It really did. It really broke my heart to hear that coming outta somebody's mouth. Somebody I was even beginnin to think I actually *liked*. But then that just took the wind right outta everything for me, and so I began to hate her. See? To *hate* her. And so we got into this whole, real big argument about how people can or cannot change. And she was real adamant about it, Ray, lemme tell you. Real adamant. Far *too* adamant. And it really frustrated me... so much. That's an, an *understatement*, y'know? I dunno the word. It just *killed* me. And so I killed her.

RAYMOND

Is that right...

PHIL

You know what I mean, right, Raymond? I mean... if anybody's gonna know what I mean, it's you. You know it, right? When... when something you just feel so strong about, or at least *hope* so strong for... when you hear that gettin broke down by somebody? You just can't take it. I just...

I just couldn't take it. I couldn't bear to hear it. I just had to shut her up, you see? *(beat)* I guess... I guess I sound crazy to you now, huh? Well, what can I say. Like I said... I'm not proud of it. But you helped me learn how to turn that... that... *unfortunate* memory into a, a *plus*, really. I take from it what I need when in moments of doubt. I take from it... the *power* part, you know. When I had my hands round her throat. It did feel, real... well, yeah, real *empowering*, I guess. But then I just leave out all the rest. All the regret stuff and all. I just forget about that. And then... then it becomes a real self-empowering memory. You see now? *(beat)* And, Ray, Ray... I'm tellin you this cause I trust you. More than *anyone* else. *(beat)* Look... I guess, I guess what I'm tryin to say and all is this: you *are* important, Ray.

RAYMOND

Yeah. OK, Phil.

PHIL

Yeah?

RAYMOND

Yeah.

PHIL

See you later, then?

RAYMOND nods, and PHIL hesitantly exits. Pause. RAYMOND pulls his tape recorder closer to him, and then just sits there staring at it for a while. He rests his head in his hands and rubs his brow some.

RAYMOND

I can't understand... can I... I just. Cannot. Understand.
(beat) What is this, anyway...

RAYMOND stands up from his desk and starts pacing around his office.

RAYMOND

OK, so... it's not that... is there no rationale to any of this? There has to be. Has to be. *(beat)* Yes. Yes. While some... *some* personal choice is involved, circumstances beyond his control have... have also contributed to making him the way he is. Right? Yes. That's good.

RAYMOND sits back down, now in the patient's chair.

RAYMOND

It's fate that affects us all. No matter... *no matter* how hard we pro-actively try to alter ourselves, there's always that... that outer force beyond our control that will affect us, too. Right? Yeah. *(beat)* It's like... it's like something overtook him... wasn't a conscious decision... and he started being the way he is. That's it. Simple as that, really. It's simple. Yes. We should therefore be *optimistic* about this outer force... we should have *faith in fate*. Yes. *(beat)* Faith in fate. Eventually, let's posit, it will strike you for the better. Just hold out hope.

Pause.

RAYMOND

Yes. He knew in his heart that he wanted to change... and then somehow, *someway unbeknownst* to him, he just *became* that way. It's some kind of power *beyond our control*, yes. Something out of our hands. A *fate*, that's it. That's just it: a *fate* that finally decides to give us a break. *(beat)* But if it's only about fate, what factor does, uh... *free will*... play in all of this? What can we do ourselves? Well... well...

let's say, fate saw me and him rationalizing it so much, doing everything we could, everything we could, everything in our power as little humans... and so in the end, fate finally decided... "let's give these guys a break. Yeah. Let's just go ahead and... and give these guys a break. Just look at them. They're trying so *damn* hard, these guys... trying so damn hard to figure this whole *life* thing out, aren't they? It's cute really, isn't it? Yeah. Let's go ahead and throw these guys a bone then, the poor saps." Yes. That's it. And so fate threw Phil a bone. *(beat)* If... if he had simply stood around and done nothing, though... without trying, without seeking consultation, without seeking my help... well then no, things wouldn't have worked out for him. Nope. Things wouldn't have worked out for old Phil, then. Nope. He would've stayed in his miserable state forever, yes. *(beat)* But... yes, that's it. Yes. Finally, I've figured it out, now. Right? It makes sense. Doesn't it? That's it. Right there: "*genuine effort through free will eventually gains us a positive fate.*" Yes, that's it... my efforts were not in vain. No, they weren't.

Pause. Slowly, RAYMOND stands up from the chair and walks to the other side of his desk. He sits down in his own chair now and once again begins to concentrate on the tape recorder. He turns it on. Pause.

RAYMOND

February the first, two thousand and eight. *(beat)* A, uh... distillation of my thoughts for the day: ...

Pause. RAYMOND seems to be thinking about what, exactly, to say. Pause. He turns the recorder off. With a sigh, he looks about the room.

His attention eventually lands on the aforementioned safe at the top of his bookcase. Slowly, he stands back up and moves to the bookcase. He takes down the safe. Putting it down on the floor, he enters a combination from memory and opens it. He takes out from the safe another, much older-looking tape recorder/player. He turns it on.

WALTER (V.O.)

Raymond. So you've arrived at "the dilemma". (beat) I knew you'd eventually have to listen to this, because you're a good doctor. And good doctors do a lot of thinking. In fact, they sometimes get to a stage where they've thought *too much*. This is the stage that you've now reached. (beat) And so now I'm going to pass on some words to you, Raymond, words that I, personally, consider to be the most important I've ever known. (beat) And these words are: "*Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must pass over in silence.*" (beat) Have the balls to embrace the mysteries as mysteries, Raymond. That's just all there is to it. (beat) Take care, friend.

A sound of the tape coming to an end is heard. RAYMOND turns off the recorder. Slowly, RAYMOND moves over to his desk. He sits down. He turns his own recorder on again. Long pause. Once again, he simply stares pensively at the recorder for a while. He opens his mouth as if about to say something, but then does not. Pause.

RAYMOND turns off the recorder, and sits back.

Curtain