

**I Am Happy**  
*a play*  
by Lonely Christopher



Anyway, they say he was never the same after she blew his guts out. Not that he was eminently knowable. The surface was meant to replace what was underneath. That was catchy. Most people took it too seriously. They bought it, to a point. Being assassinated was too human; doesn't happen to mirrors or machines. There was no room in the appearance for blood and gore. He was an unbalanced equation. If you suppress the inside it is bound to start leaking inopportunistly. Many would assume that's a paradox rather than a sign of integrity. A screen is a white void onto which images may be projected, but it is also a verb of protection and concealment.

V,  
Worthless shit!  
A,  
Oh, good morning to you too.  
V,  
I don't want to be here.  
V,  
I tell myself it's perfect.

Would it matter if his drive for meaninglessness and erasure belied an intense physicality? The term "body horror" was newly minted. Perhaps it's a moot point since he is long dead. In the disintegration of his bones, he became the symbol to which he pretended in life. But this is a closet

drama, a fiction, through which we may travel back in time to a sunny early afternoon on the Upper East Side. Imagine a skinny brick townhouse a block away from Central Park. (Now it's worth thirty-five million.) Andy relocated after his mother died. She haunted the basement of their old house. It was spooky. He didn't like to acknowledge the finality of her absence. One day she just wasn't around anymore. If anyone asked where she was, he would respond that she must have gone shopping at Bergdorf's. She was always shopping. That meant he was in denial, because compulsive buying was his way to survive. He knew that if he stopped purchasing, he would die.

V,

Just look at you!

A,

Not yet, I'm not ready...

V,

Pathetic. How you have to assemble yourself.

A,

Women wear wigs and makeup. I don't know what the big deal is.

V,

Women are trapped in a male dominated society where they must dress up as ridiculous clowns to appear sexually desirable to their exploiters.

A,

Well, I don't know about that.

Andy sent her body home for the family to put underground. His life felt empty. All the rooms in all his properties were barren. He had to fill them, with antique furniture, and cookie jars, and sculptures, and fixtures, décor, and bags and bags of unopened goodies from his latest spree. It didn't matter what it was, just that it was. Indigenous fabrics were a favorite, and beads, and wallpaper samples, candelabra, and silverware. Emaciated in form, he was still a glutton, worse than a collector: a hoarder. He wanted to crowd himself in. Drown out the vacuity with mass. There was little design to it. It was impulsive, almost scary. Andy would buy diamonds by the handful and keep them in his coat pockets to secretly fondle.

V,

Decadent swine!

A,

All you do is call people names.

V,

You have no idea; you can't see me. You can barely see yourself.

A,

I'm looking right at it.

V,

A mirror is violent.

A,

But I have such a great one. I mean I could spend all day right here. I think mirrors are like valentines.

V,

It's time for surgery.

The way that his mother used to fill the basement with her presence, he wanted a lover to be there in the space with him. His mother used to pester him, asking when would he settle down with a nice girl? He needed a wife. He told her he wasn't ready. But when she was gone, he was ready, because he hated being lonely. There were problems that made it difficult to attract a mate. His wealth and fame didn't counteract the repulsion most people felt for him. In their minds, he was a sickly specimen, a pale homunculus. Even the men who had been with him vehemently denied it to their last breath. His life was far from sexless, but this was rarely acknowledged. He had a fumbling, fragile demeanor in bed, like an adolescent without any experience or confidence. That's how he got his reputation for being a voyeur, because it was easier just to watch.

V,  
Aren't you ever afraid of what you see in there, like a stranger looking back at you?  
A,  
I used to like strangers, but not since the accident.  
V,  
It wasn't an accident.  
A,  
It wasn't my fault.  
V,  
Everything wrong in my life is your fault.  
A,  
Certain things are random. Beyond our control. Mistakes. We all make mistakes. That's why we go to church and confess our sins.  
V,  
I can't believe you're religious.  
A,  
Byzantine Catholic.  
V,  
You're a cocksucker!  
A,  
I'm an actor. I just did an episode of *The Love Boat*.  
V,  
Who did you play?  
A,  
Myself, of course.

It was hard to keep a boyfriend. There was the kid, but that fell apart. The kid was dewy and ambitious. His energy complimented Andy's lassitude. Everything was possible. The kid needed something to do. He wanted to learn, wanted a teacher. When Andy unzipped his jeans and presented his swollen member to the kid, there weren't fireworks, but the kid didn't cry and run out of the room. They kissed awkwardly and rubbed against each other. The kid folded him into the four-poster bed and fucked him. Andy couldn't come unless he was alone, looking at pictures. The kid sometimes didn't know what was happening. He didn't have any ideas, so he became a decorator. Andy let the kid redesign his offices. Then he let the kid redesign the townhouse and move in. The kid wanted his own bedroom. Andy didn't like that, but the kid insisted. When Andy

was young, his whole family slept on the same lumpy mattress. The kid said Andy was too boney to sleep with, unless he wanted to get jabbed by sharp elbows all night. The kid pouted, grew despondent. Even at a distance, it was enough for Andy. But not for the kid. The kid left. Eventually he died in a plane crash. He went shopping at Bergdorf's.

V,  
You're an isolated unit, trapped inside yourself. Totally egocentric, incapable of empathy or love. Just a machine.  
A,  
Thank you.  
V,  
That's not a compliment!  
A,  
But I want to be a machine. Or... the Empire State Building.  
V,  
A phallic monument full of dentists' offices.  
A,  
I don't need love. Just a good secretary and a diary of my daily expenses for tax purposes. Plus a bowl of soup with a glass of Coke. That's more genuine than love.

Andy was alone again. There was a closeted film executive at Paramount he had a crush on. He would send the guy bushels of roses at work, which would mortify him. They only fucked after arguments. Andy was terrified of disease. There was a virus going around killing gay men. Andy had to do a lot of coke and drink half a bottle of wine to get his mind off it, but then he couldn't get it up. He wanted the executive to be faithful. They could move to his beach house and watch the world burn from the shore. But the executive was slippery, dissatisfied. He was always running off to wild parties. Andy was so nervous. The executive got sick. He couldn't bear to visit him in the hospital. He avoided anyone who might tell him what was happening. Andy had nightmares about waking up and looking in the mirror, finding his face patterned with red blotches. At first, he thought they were the same splotchy rashes that he'd dealt with forever, until he realized they were lesions.

V,  
You know how I know the world is doomed? Because you're in it, rich and famous.  
A,  
I work very hard.  
V,  
You boss people around, use them, turn them into products.  
A,  
I run a business. I make money.  
V,  
But you don't know why. You have no idea what drives you. Incapable of purpose, you drown in delusion and false friends.  
A,  
I used to think everyone was my friend. I was wrong.  
V,

Is it lonely at the top?

A,

Not with you here to keep me company.

We are witnessing Andy in a private state. He wakes up alone in his bedroom, but he's not by himself. She blends in with the shadows. She slinks into the en-suite bathroom when he blinks. Groggily, without his glasses on, he follows. Andy struggles out of his pink girdle and then takes off his underwear. He is at his most vulnerable when he hops into the shower. This is the only time during his life when he is completely naked. His stomach distends in a scarred mass around his waist. He hums "Whistle While You Work" from *Snow White* as he washes himself. Now Andy is toweled off and looking at himself in the bathroom's huge rococo mirror. His back to the audience who can see his face and torso reflected. His dark fringe frames his marbled face, bulbous nose pocked and blushing. He cringes at the sight of himself and gets to work. The counter is crowded with beauty products, toiletries, and accessories. His interloper is sitting on the toilet nearby, facing the audience, peeing.

V,

You want to be a symbol because that's powerful. But I see right through you. Underneath you're just a weak and trembling man like all the others.

A,

I can't face the world until I'm put together.

V,

Nobody would recognize you without your wig. Nobody would pay you without your schtick. It's easy to flatten yourself out, isn't it? But it's not true!

A,

The truth is how much I profoundly care for people, for the world. It's better not to care, but I can't help it. It's a mistake.

V,

Bullshit.

A,

You're just so cynical. Really negative energy. I could give you some crystals.

V,

The only thing I want from you is what you can't give.

A,

Money?

V,

Your life.

Andy wipes cream on his ruddy cheeks and then rubs it off with a towel. He starts applying glue to his bald pate with a brush. He grabs a hairpiece and places it on his head, making arrangements. His interloper flushes the toilet, wipes herself cursorily, then stands up, puts the toilet cover down, and sits again. She snorts and swallows the mucus. She looks dirty and deranged, hair frizzing out at all angles under a floppy cap. Coat too warm for the weather, several sizes too big. Sweaty and agitated. Not somebody he would welcome into his home by choice. But one day he arrived back from the office to find her making a peanut butter sandwich in the kitchen. He's afraid to call the cops. If she feels threatened, she might do something terrible. Andy wants to stick to the routine.

He applies foundation evenly over his bumpy cheeks and then dabs concealer under his eyes. When he is satisfied, he takes his vitamins with a big glass of water. He straps himself into his medical corset and then sprays himself with perfume. Then he starts getting dressed.

V,  
Did you think I was just going to disappear?

A,  
We asked the judge to keep you in prison.

V,  
Nobody wants me, not even the jailers. I roamed the streets. Some poets took me in. But after a while even they rejected me. These behaviors are the conditioned reflexes of mindless drudges. Everything is predetermined against free thought. The most violent retribution awaits those who speak truth to power.

A,  
We said you were a danger to yourself and others. Nobody listened.

V,  
I gave you something nobody else could, an epiphany! You're too much of a coward to appreciate it. How did you repay me? You took my freedom just like you stole my ideas. You're a miserable rodent.

A,  
No. I am happy. I'd like to buy the world a Coke.

V,  
The male loves death. He wants to die. I'd be doing everyone a favor. The mayor would give me the key to the city. But then again, I'm crazy. Disgusting animal. You forgot to brush your teeth.

A,  
I'm ready.

When he went in for his final operation, he insisted on wearing his wig. There were complications. Andy hazily wondered if it might be a good time to go shopping at Bergdorf's. She wanted him in his last moments to be fascinated by her own pain. She needed him to finally understand. The night he died, she fell into a trance on the floor of her lousy room, foaming at the mouth. But she couldn't reach him. Andy didn't think about her at all. He was preoccupied with a sudden memory from childhood. He was walking down a dirt road to the grocer to fetch a bottle of milk for his mother. A burly man leaned out of a door and called to him. Andy thought the man looked like Stromboli from the movie Pinocchio. He asked Andy what he was doing. The boy said he was on his way to buy food. The man told Andy that he had a nice big, fat sausage right here that the boy could feast on. Andy blinked innocently before following the man into his house for a new treat. Valerie died alone, like everybody does. She didn't go to Bergdorf's, she just got sick and choked on her own spew. She was survived by her mother, who burned all her brilliant writings. The last thing Andy thought about before his brain stopped working was what that man said to him as a boy, when Andy was swallowing his come. "You get what you give," he moaned. It was something Andy often heard his mother repeat when her children were acting petulant, a generic turn of phrase that only meant so much because of what was happening when Andy heard it from the mouth of a dirty old pervert.

THE END.