

A SMALL HOUSE AND FIVE GENTLEMEN

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CHARACTERS:

MAN 1

MAN 2

MAN 3

MAN 4

MAN 5

WOMAN 1

WOMAN 2

(One large cardboard box is in the centre of a bare stage. Man 1 enters, looks at the cardboard box and tries to lean against it, but as soon as he does so, it is crushed and he falls on his backside. Man 2 enters.)

Man 1: Hey, give me a hand.

Man 2: *(While getting him up.)* What's the matter with you?

Man 1: *(Stands up.)* I leant against this box and it just collapsed on me.

Man 2: *(A little perplexed.)* Oh ... do you think someone's got it in for you?

Man 1: Who do you mean?

Man 2: Well, the person who put it here, thinking that you'd come and lean against it.

- Man 1: *(Ponders.)* Hmm ... *(Reconstructs the collapsed cardboard box.)*
- Man 2: Yeah ... do you know who'd do something like this?
- Man 1: Do you mean the person who put this here?
- Man 2: Yeah ... it's because of them that you fell over.
- Man 1: But I put it here.
- Man 2: You?
- Man 1: Yeah.
- Man 2: You put this here?
- Man 1: That's right.
- Man 2: Right ... now it's all clear. You aren't really aware of yourself, so you always think of yourself unfavourably.
- Man 1: I think of myself like that?
- Man 2: That often happens. It's what's commonly called self-hatred. You can't bear yourself.
- Man 1: *(Interested; agrees.)* Uh huh?
- Man 2: Well, don't worry. It isn't serious. I think like that too.
- Man 1: Do you hate yourself?
- Man 2: No ... well ... what I mean is, whenever I think of you, I think what a truly nasty person you are. So it isn't at all strange that you think of yourself like that.
- Man 1: Is that right?
- Man 2: Don't you feel like committing suicide sometimes?
- Man 1: Suicide? No ...
- Man 2: Of course you do. You're really thinking of that all the time ... committing suicide. It's just that you don't realise it. Hey, it's OK. You'll be all right. I'll keep a close watch on you all the time and when it happens, I'll punch your face in as hard as I can.

- Man 1: What time have you got in mind for “when it happens”?
- Man 2: When you feel like committing suicide.
- Man 1: Right ... *then* ... But tell me, what’s going to happen when you punch my face in?
- Man 2: What’ll happen? Well, whenever I do it, you’ll stop feeling like committing suicide, even when you *really* want to do it.
- Man 1: Why?
- Man 2: Because I’ll punch your face in as hard as I can.
- Man 1: Oh ... as hard as you can ...
- Man 2: Look, it’s all going to be OK.
Anyway, I don’t want you to become warped by all of this.
- Man 1: (*Becoming resolute.*) That’s right. I shouldn’t become warped.
- Man 2: Even you have a right to live.
- Man 1: You’re quite right. Me ... I, have a right to live.
- Man 2: Of course, you’d better think like that, even though it’s only an illusion. That’s all that you’ll ever have anyway.
- (*Man 1 finishes reconstructing the cardboard box.*
Man 3 appears completely covered in another cardboard box.)
- Man 2: Who the hell are you?
- Man 3: Huh?
- Man 2: I’m asking you who you are.
- Man 3: Huh? You’re asking me? (*Takes off the box and shows his face.*)
It’s me.
- Man 2: What are you doing with this bloody thing? (*Kicks the box.*)
- Man 3: Hey, stop that!
This (*Turns the box.*) is to do (*Gets in the box and sits.*) this.
- Man 1: And then what?

- Man 3: You feel ... very good.
- Man 1: How good exactly?
- Man 3: Well, how can I describe it? ... You have the feeling of sitting in a cardboard box.
- Man 1: *(Becoming enthusiastic.)* Oh ... I see ... all right, let me try.
(Turns his box.)
- Man 2: Stop being such an idiot.
- Man 1: What do you mean? *(Gets in the box and sits.)*
- Man 2: *(Bemused.)* Shit ... I mean ... how old are you, really?
- Man 3: *(To Man 1.)* How do you feel?
- Man 1: Huh?
- Man 3: Isn't it good?
- Man 1: Yeah, really good.
- Man 3: Of course you feel good.
- Man 1: But ... why is this so good?
- Man 3: You're right, you know. I've been thinking the same thing.
- Man 2: *(Looking down at Man 1.)* Explain to me why it's so good.
- Man 1: Well, like he said before, somehow I've got this particular feeling that I am sitting in a cardboard box.
- Man 2: *(Frustrated.)* Why is it good?
- Man 1: Yeah. You're right. I've been thinking about why it's so good, haven't I?
- Man 2: *(Dismissive.)* Idiot.
- Man 3: *(Suddenly stands up.)* It might be this. Basically ... look ... we're sitting in the boxes, aren't we?
- Man 1: *(Stands up.)* That's right.

- Man 3: See, because of that, *somehow* we've got a feeling of sitting in the boxes, now.
- Man 1: (*Realising.*) Oh, right ... (*To Man 2.*) Did you hear that? That's the reason.
- Man 2: (*At his wit's end.*) What is the reason? What are you talking about, you bloody idiot? I, am asking you, *why* it's so good.
- Man 3: (*To Man 2.*) Look, are you with me? Listen. We're sitting in the boxes, aren't we?
- Man 2: I said I *know* that. What I'm saying is, are you with *me*?
- Man 3: Hey, hey ... calm down and listen for a change. We're just now, sitting in the boxes. This is an absolute fact. Am I right?
- Man 2: Yes.
- Man 3: That's why.
- Man 2: So what?
- Man 1: Yeah, it must be that. We feel that we're sitting in the boxes. (*To Man 3.*) Is that what you mean?
- Man 3: That's right.
- Man 1: (*To Man 2.*) Can't you see that?
- Man 2: What are you talking about? What I am saying is this: are you with me?
- Man 3: (*To Man 1.*) Shall we sit?
- Man 1: Alright. (*Sits down.*)
- Man 3: Let's sit down. (*Sits down.*)
- Man 1: How do you feel?
- Man 3: Good.
- Man 1: Me too. Splendid.

(Man 4 appears walking with a crutch)

Man 4: Hey! How about this?

Man 2: What's that? What's the matter with you?

Man 4: What are you talking about?

Man 2: Your leg. Have you been injured?

Man 4: Oh yeah, this one. That's right. When I get along like this, people are usually alarmed and ask what's happened to me. *(To Man 2.)* You just did that, didn't you?

Man 2: *(Sourly.)* Yes, but I wasn't really surprised though.

Man 4: Of course you were surprised, if the truth be told. But listen ... my leg, there's nothing wrong with it at all.

(Stands quickly)

Man 3: Nothing wrong?

Man 4: That's right. Nothing wrong at all. I'm not injured and I'm not in pain either. So, whenever I'm asked what's happened to me, I respond by saying that there's nothing to worry about. Then what happens—and this is the most important part—is that everyone gets more surprised than ever.

Man 3: More?

Man 4: Yeah, more. You get more surprised when you realise that nothing's wrong with someone, when *before* you wondered whether they were injured or not. On top of that, everyone cheers up. They become almost *moved* by this fact. It's because they know now that nothing's wrong, when before, they were wondering whether the person might have been injured. There's even been a guy who was so relieved that he grabbed my hand and shook it and said, "Fantastic!" You can see that, can't you? This idea's entirely my own. Whenever I do it, everyone becomes moved by the fact that there's nothing wrong with my leg at all!

Man 3: So what?

Man 4: How can you say, "so what"? (*To Man 1 and Man 3.*) I've got to insist, this really is an extraordinary matter. We all become moved by the fact that nothing is wrong.

(*To Man 2.*) Your leg's the same. There's nothing wrong with it, but no-one ever gets moved by a leg like yours.

Man 2: I don't want anyone to be moved by my leg.

Man 4: Well ... if not a leg, what else of yours do you suggest has the potential to move others? You tell me. Then I can tell you how we could make it more moving. I'm right, you know. Everyone's so busy these days that we're no longer moved by the simple fact that things exist.

Man 2: Oh, shut up.

Man 4: (*To Man 1 and Man 3.*) What do you think about all this?

(*Man 1 and Man 3 slowly sink into the boxes.*)

Man 4: (*To Man 2.*) What happened to them?

Man 2: They've been doing that for quite a while ... They say it's good.

Man 4: (*Agreeing.*) Hmm. It looks good.

Man 2: What's good about it?

Man 4: (*Approaching Man 1's box.*) Well, they must be somehow feeling that they're sitting in cardboard boxes. (*Looking down at Man 1.*) Hey, is that really good?

Man 1: Oh yeah, I can't tell you how good it is!

Man 4: (*Happily.*) He says he can't find words to describe this sensation. Right then, I'm getting in too.

Man 1: (*Standing up.*) Don't do that. Hey, you can't get in!

Man 4: It's OK. Move to the other side a bit more.
(*Forces his way in.*)

- Man 1: Wait a minute! What are you doing? This is my box!
- Man 4: Don't worry about it. Here, I've got in.
(Man 1 and Man 4 are crammed in the box, unable sit down.)
- Man 1: Are we going to stand like this?
- Man 4: This is alright, isn't it? It's nice. *(To Man 2.)* Hey, you get in the other box.
- Man 1: Don't move about so much.
- Man 4: Yeah, yeah.
- Man 3: Why are you standing?
- Man 1: Well, because ...
- Man 4: Don't worry. There's nothing wrong in standing like this. It's no different from standing in a peak hour train.
- Man 1: Keep still.
- Man 4: I am keeping still. *(Suddenly realising.)* Oh! I've just thought of a better way!
- Man 1: What's that?
- Man 4: Why don't we tickle each other?
- Man 1: Don't do that. It's so stupid.
- Man 4: Why do you say that? It's nice. I've done it before with friends of mine. See, do it like this. *(Starts to tickle.)*
- Man 1: Don't! Stop it!
- Man 4: There's nothing wrong about it. I just try doing a little bit, like this ...
- Man 1: Stop!
- Man 4: See, just do it like this ...
- Man 1: Stop! Can't you understand "No" when you hear it?

- Man 3: *(Standing up.)* Stop, you bloody idiot!
- Man 4: What's the matter?
- Man 3: Stop that! This isn't the right place.
- Man 4: But I only tickled him, you know.
- Man 3: Don't tickle. You've got to be quiet. If you're not ... you'll never understand ...
- Man 4: What?
- Man 3: What's good about it. *(Sits.)*
- Man 4: *(Agreeing.)* Oh.
- Man 1: *(To Man 4.)* Don't be so restless.
- Man 4: *(To Man 2.)* Why don't you go in?
- Man 2: Me? I don't want to.
- Man 4: You don't want to? Come on, don't be like that. Why not?
(To Man 3.) Hey, let him in.
- Man 3: Yeah alright ... but it's no use telling me that, because he doesn't want to get in.
- Man 4: Oh, he wants to get in, I can assure you.
- Man 2: I don't want to get in.
- Man 1: He just doesn't understand that this is so nice.
- Man 4: You'll never understand unless you get in; why don't you try?
- Man 2: Try?
- Man 4: Yes.
- Man 2: Well, just a bit.
- Man 4: *(To Man 1, laughing.)* Listen to him! "Just a bit"!
- Man 2: What?

- Man 4: Get in, you idiot.
- Man 2: *(To Man 3.)* Can you move over a bit? There's no space for me to get in.
- Man 3: What are you talking about? We've only got this much space.
- (Man 2 stands in the box with his back to Man 3.)*
- Man 4: *(To Man 2.)* How about that?
- Man 2: What?
- Man 4: Feeling good?
- Man 2: I feel ... nothing.
- Man 3: Just stay quiet for a while. Then you'll start to feel good.
- Man 4: Well, this'll do. *(Turns around to face Man 1.)* We can do this together.
- Man 1: *(Apprehensive.)* What are we going to do?
- Man 4: Oh, we're not going to do anything particular. We're just going to keep standing still.
- Man 1: *(Concerned.)* Hmm ... why don't you face the other way? I don't feel right like this, you know? *(During this line, Man 3 surreptitiously tickles Man 2.)*
- Man 2: Hey, stop!
- Man 3: What?
- Man 2: What? *(Looking back over his shoulder.)* I just told you to stop!
- Man 3: I'm not doing anything.
- Man 2: I'm getting out.
- Man 4: Wait, what's the matter?
- Man 2: He tickled me just now.

- Man 3: Tickled you! ... I only did it a little bit.
- Man 2: Even if it was only a little bit, it's a *fact* that you tickled me. Listen, I don't want anyone to tickle me.
- Man 3: I understand.
- Man 1: (*To Man 3*) How come you tickled him?
- Man 3: Because I heard that guy tickled you. So I just tried.
- Man 4: Hang on. You said just now, "don't tickle".
- Man 2: (*Frustrated, trying to get out.*) Oh, I've had enough of all this.
- Man 3: (*Stops tickling*) Well, don't worry ... I won't do it again.
- Man 2: Don't touch me. It's weird, your way of touching.
- Man 4: (*To Man 2.*) You stay there.
- Man 2: Why?
- Man 3: It's alright. Why don't you tickle me once? Then that'll be fair, won't it?
- Man 2: Tickle you?
- Man 3: Anywhere you want.
- Man 2: How do I do it?
- Man 4: Don't you know how to tickle?
- Man 2: Of course. I've seen it done before.
- Man 1: Look, put your hands under his armpits like this, and tickle him a little bit.
- Man 2: (*Tickles.*) Like this.
- Man 3: (*Confirming.*) Yeah.
- Man 2: How do you feel?
- Man 3: How do I feel?

- Man 4: Don't you feel anything?
- Man 3: No. Nothing at all. You call that tickling?
- Man 1: (*To Man 2.*) Did you really tickle him? It's no good if you just thrust your hands under his armpits. You've got to do it this way.
- Man 2: I did, you idiot. What are you saying? I just did it properly, like this.
- Man 4: Do it again.
(Man 2 tries once more. Man 3 still doesn't feel anything.)
- Man 1: I see.
- Man 2: I'm getting out. (*Getting out.*) I don't like all this. It's weird.
- Man 3: (*Stops him.*) Don't do that to me. You can't talk like that.
- Man 4: (*To Man 2.*) Yeah. Don't do that. All that's happened is that he doesn't feel ticklish. No need to be ashamed.
- Man 2: Hey, even though I tickled him he didn't feel ticklish ... he's like a frog.
- Man 1: (*To Man 3.*) Are you all right with other parts of your body?
- Man 3: What? What do you mean, "other parts"?
- Man 1: Well, what about feelings like ... being itchy; painful; cold, warm?
- Man 3: Of course I have those feelings, you idiot! What are you talking about? I didn't exactly feel nothing. When he tickled me a bit I felt ... a strange sensation. But I don't think that feeling was what I understand as 'ticklish'.
- Man 4: (*Understanding.*) Ah. But what's meant by 'ticklish' is that you suddenly get ticklish. It's not a matter of understanding at all.
- Man 3: But unless you know what ticklish is, even if you feel ticklish you don't know how to express it.

Man 1: You don't have to say that you feel ticklish when you feel ticklish. You only feel, "Ah, ticklish".

Man 3: Well, then I felt like that a little while ago, at the time he tickled me. It might be what you say ticklish is, mightn't it?

Man 4: Tell me how you felt then.

Man 3: How? ... I felt something strange.

Man 4: It wasn't strange. What's 'ticklish' is simply ... ticklish.

Man 2: But when I think carefully, what he said makes sense. Basically, this guy doesn't know what 'ticklish' is.

(To Man 3.) Am I right?

Man 3: You're right.

Man 1: But, even if you don't know what 'ticklish' is, you can still feel ticklish.

Man 2: Hang on. I'm talking to him. See, if that's the case, what I mean by that, is, basically ... um ... he doesn't know what 'ticklish' is. Because that's what he said just now.

Man 4: That's OK. But what do you want to say? Tell me simply, *simply*.

Man 2: I know. Well, if he doesn't know what 'ticklish' is, even if I tickle him and he feels ticklish, he doesn't know whether it's ticklish or not. So, in fact, even if he feels ticklish, he might think that it isn't really ticklish.

Man 4: What are you talking about?

Man 2: You don't understand me?

Man 4: You've lost me completely.

Man 2: *(To Man 3.)* You've got the idea though, haven't you, what I'm talking about?

Man 3: I have no idea.

Man 2: ... What I'm explaining to you? ...

- Man 1: (To Man 3.) You're right. You don't feel ticklish.
- Man 3: But I felt *something*.
- Man 1: Well, that's completely different—separate from being ticklish.
- Man 3: Then what is 'ticklish'?
- Man 4: (Pondering.) What is ticklish? ... (Trying to explain, failing.) Ticklish is ... (To Man 1.) Hey! ... um ... would you tickle me a bit?
- Man 1: Tickle you?
- Man 4: Yeah.
- Man 1: I don't want to.
- Man 4: How come?
- Man 1: I don't feel like it.
- Man 4: It's alright, isn't it? I tickled you before.
- Man 1: But you did that even when I didn't want it.
- Man 4: Well, I'm not saying that I don't like it.
- Man 1: That's the reason I don't want to do it. It's weird to tickle someone who likes to be tickled.
- Man 4: Don't say that. There's no other way. I've got to explain to him what 'ticklish' is.
- Man 1: Well then ... only a bit.
- Man 4: That'll do.
- Man 1: Turn around.
- (Man 1 tickles Man 4. Man 4 endures it by writhing his body.)
- Man 4: (To Man 3, triumphant.) See?
- Man 3: What?

Man 4: What do you mean by “what”? You bloody idiot! What I’ve done right now is ‘*ticklish*’.

Man 3: (Confused.) Umm ...

Man 2: Don’t you understand?

(Pause)

Man 3: Yes—I don’t.

Man 4: You’ve got to be crazy ...

Man 3: (*Edges up to Man 4.*) Say it again?

Man 2: (*Stopping Man 3.*) Forget about it. (*To Man 4*) What the hell? It’s no use!

Man 4: What do you mean?

Man 2: (*Agitated.*) This guy doesn’t feel ticklish; so it’s no use demonstrating, in front of a guy, who *doesn’t feel ticklish!*

Man 4: But, if that’s the case, he should be more humble. Yeah? (*To Man 3.*) I don’t like your attitude ... (*Disgusted.*) Really! Is that the right attitude from someone who wants to learn from me? Huh?

Man 1: (*Stopping Man 4*) Hey, calm down!

Man 4: It’s almost impossible that someone doesn’t feel ticklish! It’s positively shameful!

(*Man 5 appears with a mayonnaise bottle containing mud. The bottle is hanging at the end of a short stick with a string through the hole in the lid. He takes care not to shake it.*)

Man 5: (*Holding his finger over his mouth.*) Shh!

Man 2: What?

Man 5: I said, “shh”, idiot.

Man 1: What?

Man 5: Shh! Can’t you understand what I said? Be quiet, you goose!

Man 4: What's the matter?

Man 5: (*Giving up.*) It's not "What's the matter?" Haven't I said "shh" before? How many times do you want to hear me say it? When I say, "shh," like this, it means, "be quiet!". Even a smart cat knows that. How many years have you been on this earth, and you're still so stupid?

Man 3: It's you. You're so noisy.

Man 5: Because *you* keep being so noisy. I'm asking you to be quiet for a bit.

Man 2: Why do we have to be quiet?

Man 5: (*Pointing to the bottle.*) Because he's sleeping.

Man 4: Who's sleeping?

Man 5: This little guy. (*Places the bottle carefully on the ground.*)

(*Men 1 and 4 come out of the cardboard boxes one by one and surround the bottle.*)

Man 1: (*Stretches out his hand to the bottle.*) What's in there?

Man 5: (*Brushes Man 1's hand away.*) Hands off! You'll surprise him.

Man 2: What's that?

Man 5: Huh?

Man 4: What's in there?

Man 5: An earthworm.

Man 4: What?

Man 5: An earthworm.

Man 2: (*Whispering.*) Did you say an earthworm? Is that the kind of earthworm we all know about?

Man 5: That's right.

Man 3: (*Still inside his box.*) Hey, what's in there?

- Man 1: (To Man 3.) An earthworm.
- Man 3: What's the matter with the earthworm?
- Man 1: Well, it's in this guy's jar ... an earthworm.
- Man 3: How come?
- Man 1: That's the reason we're asking him. Just shut up!
- Man 2: (To Man 5.) Hey, we're asking you how come the earthworm's here.
- Man 5: Well, I've been keeping it.
- Man 1: Keeping it? An earthworm?
- Man 5: Yeah.
- Man 4: Of all things, why are you keeping an earthworm?
- Man 5: Well, at first I thought I might keep a silverfish. But they move and can't stay still; so earthworms are good, they're quiet. They always sleep in mud like this. (*Contented.*) Pink; lustrous, plump ... sometimes I take him out and wash him in water. He really likes that. (*Stops whispering.*)
- Man 2: And what do you do afterwards?
- Man 5: What do you mean "afterwards"?
- Man 4: Well, when you've finished keeping it.
- Man 5: After I've finished keeping it? There's no way that'll ever happen. I mean to keep him forever.
- Man 1: Forever? You'll be keeping it forever?
- Man 5: Sure. What's the matter? Is there something you guys are trying to tell me?
- Man 2: No, no, it's all OK. We didn't mean anything.
- Man 5: What the hell are you talking about?

- Man 3: I can't work out what you're on about. Anyway, what's it like, keeping it?
- Man 5: What's it like?
- Man 3: I mean, is it good when you keep it?
- Man 5: Sure. Extremely good.
- Man 1: Tell me what it's like. I mean, what do you mean by 'good'?
- Man 5: Oh, I understand. How can I describe it? ... The feeling of existence ...
- Man 4: What exists?
- Man 5: (*Obviously.*) The *earthworm*.
- Man 2: (*To Man 4.*) Of course. The earthworm.
- Man 3: You feel that it really exists.
- Man 5: Of course. It exists. I mean, it applies to me, too. Here he is—so I get the feeling that I exist. Understand?
- Man 1: Well ... sort of ...
- Man 4: Yeah, yeah, but is that so good? ... That we really exist?
- Man 5: Of course it is! Because we exist, here he is and here I am.
- Man 4: (*Wryly*) Well, you're certainly existing.
- Man 5: If that's the case, it's right, isn't it? We know that we exist. Don't you understand that?
- Man 2: Yeah! (*To Man 4.*) See, you know it's true that we really exist. (*To Man 5.*) Isn't that right? I think it's like feeling ... that the earthworm is distinct and I am distinct.
- Man 5: You guys have obviously never had pets. You wouldn't understand. It's a feeling that here he is and here I am.
- Man 2: (*To Man 4*) See, it's that sort of feeling.
- Man 3: I once fed a dog with the leftovers from my lunch ...

Man 4: And how was that?

Man 3: Um ... nothing particular.

Man 5: (*Outraged*) You can't call that keeping pets! You can't say that you kept a dog when you only fed it once with your lunch scraps!

Man 2: Didn't you give him anything from dinner?

Man 3: No, there was nothing left.

Man 5: What an idiot.

Man 1: (*To Man 5*) Hey, I'm just asking you: (*Pointing at the jar*) what if I wanted to swap this jar (*Pointing to the box with Man 3 in it.*) for that box—what do you think?

Man 5: What?

Man 4: Don't ask him a question like that.

Man 1: I just did.

Man 4: You can't do that, even if you did ask him! Because the box is much bigger, you know?

Man 1: I know it's big.

Man 4: If I was asked, I'd refuse to swap one of my crutches for that.

Man 1: (*Exasperated.*) I just asked ...

Man 2: (*To Man 5.*) What about you?

Man 5: What?

Man 2: Well, I am asking you whether you'll swap or not.

Man 5: For a crutch?

Man 2: No, no, with the box. What he has.

Man 5: What am I going to do with that?

- Man 2: You get in it and sit down. They say it's extremely good, though I didn't quite feel like that myself
- Man 5: How stupid! If you get in, who can see you?
- Man 1: Who'll see?
- Man 5: Yeah. If you're in there, no one can see you. You can't even see yourself.
- Man 3: What?
- Man 5: (*Demonstrating putting his arms over his head.*) You're in like this.
- Man 3: Oh, you're right.
- Man 2: I've got the idea.
- Man 4: You haven't got it at all. What he said was pretty strange.
- Man 2: Yeah, yeah I've got it. It's clear. Let's do it. (*Pointing to the box with Man 3 in it.*) Let's swap my box.
- Man 3: This is mine.
- Man 2: Yes ... you think it is.
- Man 3: What? You're saying that I only *think* it's mine? Because truly, this is mine.
- Man 2: Yeah. See, you're in the box thinking that it belongs to you. (*To Man 5.*) I'm saying that I'll exchange this, including everything. How about that?
- Man 5: Including that guy?
- Man 2: That's right.
- Man 3: What are you talking about? Can't you see this is mine? (*To Man 1.*) Hey, tell him, this is mine!
- Man 1: Yeah. That belongs to him. (*Rephrasing.*) Um ... it's been his since a while ago.

- Man 2: Never mind. It doesn't matter.
- Man 4: No, but if that one belongs to that guy ...
- Man 3: Not "if". This is truly mine.
- Man 2: That's why I'm saying don't worry about it. (*To Man 5.*) It doesn't matter, does it? You don't mind that that guy thinks the box belongs to him, do you?
- Man 5: (*Taking time to examine the box with Man 3 in it.*) Oh, I don't mind. My precious little earthworm thinks that the bottle belongs to him. Of course, I don't think so.
- Man 2: (*To Man 3.*) Look, you'll be OK. You can still think that it's yours.
- Man 3: But he said that he doesn't think so!
- Man 2: Relax! Whatever he thinks, you can still think that it's yours.
- Man 4: (*Laughs.*) I understand now! He's going to exchange it with everything, including what he thinks!
- Man 2: That's exactly right. (*To Man 5.*) I don't think this a bad deal at all.
- Man 5: (*Sceptical.*) Hmm ...
- Man 3: But how about me?
- Man 1: Well, really—you don't count at all when I think about it. As you know, the deal will be done by them.
- Man 3: I don't count at all, did you say?
- Man 4: That's right. You don't count. But don't worry. Just keep still.
- Man 2: (*To Man 5.*) What do you think? Is it a good deal?
- Man 5: Well, not too bad.
- Man 3: I don't agree with this sort of thing.

Man 2: Shall we swap?

Man 5: Um ... alright.

Man 2: That's it. Done. (*Taking the jar in his hand.*) Well, this is mine.

Man 5: Take care of it, won't you.

Man 2: Of course I will.

Man 5: And you'll wash him with water, won't you?

Man 2: (*Certain.*) Yeah.

Man 4: (*To Man 1.*) Have they swapped?

Man 1: Looks like it.

(Man 5 sits in a place a little further away, without paying attention to Man 3 in the box.)

Man 4: (*Coming closer to Man 5.*) Have you swapped?

Man 5: Yeah.

Man 1: (*Coming closer to Man 5.*) Well, what are you going to do with that now?

Man 5: Don't worry. I'll leave it there as it is.

Man 4: Hmm ... "you'll leave it there" ...

Man 3: What are you talking about?

Man 1: (*To Man 5.*) He's saying something, you know.

Man 5: Who cares? He can be as free as he wishes.

Man 4: (*To Man 3.*) Hey, he says you can be free.

Man 3: Stop this bullshit! I'm as free as I want! You don't have to tell me that.

(Man 3 gets out of the box and comes closer to Man 2 who is touching the jar.)

- Man 1: (To Man 5.) Hey, he's out!
- Man 5: OK. Tell him he can get out.
- Man 4: (To Man 3.) Did you hear him? You can get out.
- Man 3: Shut up! I'll get out even if he tells me not to.
- Man 1: It's all right. He's already said you can get out.
- Man 3: What a dickhead! (To Man 2.) Hey, what's the matter?
- Man 2: (To Man 5.) My earthworm—where the hell is it?
(Tilting the jar.) Hey!
- Man 5: (Standing up.) Don't! Didn't I say to you, "don't treat it harshly"?
- Man 2: But there isn't any earthworm—anywhere.
- Man 3: (Laughing.) You idiot! You've been cheated.
- Man 5: You could say that.
- Man 3: What?
- Man 5: I'm saying that you can say anything you like without considering such things as whether you want my good opinion or not.
- Man 3: When did I do anything to suggest that I want to be thought well of by you?
- Man 1: Well, he's saying that you don't have to be well-regarded by him. Is that right?
- Man 5: Yes. If you have something to say to me, then you shouldn't be afraid.
- Man 3: Why would I be afraid? What are you saying? Why should I be *afraid*?
- Man 4: Listen. Isn't he saying that you don't have to be afraid?
- Man 5: Yes. You don't have to be afraid. It's really nothing ... You can do what you usually do, in the way you usually do

it. Usually. See, I've swapped. (*Trying to comfort Man 3 gently.*) All you have to do is to pretend that nothing's happened to you ...

Man 3: (*Brushing Man 5 off and standing up.*) Stop this bullshit right now! What are you talking about?

Man 2: Forget it. It's such a stupid thing. What about the earthworm, where is it?

Man 5: He's there.

Man 2: Where?

Man 5: You open the lid and push your finger in. Then you'll find him—because he'll bite you.

Man 2: Bite?

Man 5: Yeah. He's not familiar with you yet.

Man 1: (*To Man 5.*) Has he ever bitten you?

Man 5: No, no ... When I push my finger in, all he does is coil around it, like this.

Man 1: (*From a place a small distance away.*) Liar.
(*To Man 2.*) Hey, turn the jar upside down and throw the mud away. You won't find any earthworm in there.

Man 4: (*To Man 5.*) How can he say that?

Man 5: (*To Man 4.*) Shut the hell up, you bloody idiot! Because you go on and on with such trivial things, he's become agitated and behaves like this. I'm not going to support you if this sort of thing happens again. (*To Man 3.*) Don't worry, my friend, I just said that to support you.

Man 3: What the hell's he talking about?

Man 5: (*Resigned, crouching down.*) He's become completely agitated and you did it.

Man 2: (*To Man 4.*) Put your finger in.

Man 4: No, I won't.

Man 2: Why not?

Man 1: *(To Man 2)* Why don't you do it yourself

Man 2: It bites you, you know?

Man 1: *(To Man 5.)* It could hurt you, but the injury wouldn't be serious?

Man 5: *A little* bit painful.

Man 2: No ... I can't ...

Man 5: Don't worry. You only have to believe that it exists.

Man 1: Isn't it really there?

Man 5: As a matter of fact, it is.

(Woman 1 enters with an open parasol and a little older woman, Woman 2, on a leash. She meets Man 3 who is standing a little away from the others.)

Woman 1: Hello.

Man 3: Hi.

Woman 1: Great day isn't it?

Man 3: *(Confirming it sceptically.)* Yeah, it's all right.

Woman 1: *(Pointing to Woman 2.)* This is my mother.

Man 3: Oh, your mother. *(To Woman 2.)* Hello.

Woman 2: *(Does not respond in any way.)*

Man 3: Why's your mother so quiet?

Woman 1: Normally, she isn't like this, but lately she seldom speaks.

Man 3: *(Questioning.)* Oh?

Woman 1: But if you really want her to speak, I'll try ...

Man 3: No, no, not at all. I don't mind at all.

(Men come closer to Man 3, with Man 5 at the front.)

Man 5: You're having a good time with this lady, are you?

Man 3: Shut up! It's none of your business.

Woman 1: Are you his friends?

Man 4: We are. *(Rethinks.)* Um ... To tell you the truth, as individuals we're not, but as a group we are.

Woman 1: That's quite complicated, isn't it?

Man 2: It is. It is complicated.

Man 1: Well, I don't know if I'm being rude but ... why is your mother tied up like that?

Woman 1: Unless I do this she'll run away.

Man 1: Run away?

Woman 1: You've never had the idea of running away, have you?

Man 2: Us? *(Looking around.)* Let me think about that for a minute ...

Woman 1: That's the reason you're not chained up.

Man 4: Yeah. I see your point. Well, we're not, but ...

Woman 1: May I sit here?

Man 5: Please, please sit down.
(To Man 3.) Is that OK with you?

Man 3: Why are you asking me?

Woman 1: May I?

Man 5: Of course you may. Don't take any notice of this guy. I've been saying all along, he's become agitated ...

Woman 1: *(To Woman 2, patronising.)* It's OK. Look, you can sit down, you know. *(Increasingly annoyed.)* What's the matter with you? Can't you follow what I said? I said sit down. *(Knocking Woman 2 heartlessly and making her sit down.)* Don't carry on with this charade!

Man 4: (*Uncomfortable; making conversation.*) Are you going somewhere now?

Woman 1: (*Pleasant again.*) Not particularly.

Man 1: Then you'll be here for a while.

Woman 1: No, I won't be here forever ...

Man 3: But you will be here for a while?

Woman 1: Yes, for the time being.

Man 2: Your mother looks very tired.

Woman 1: Yes, she is. (*Pause.*) Do you feel like touching her?

Man 2: Touching her? No, no, I never suggested that.

Woman 1: But you can, if you feel like touching her ... If you all want to do it, please do ...

Man 5: No, no, we can't really ... that kind of thing would be ...
(*Unspoken: disgusting ... weird ...*)
(*To Man 3.*) Do you want to touch her?

Man 3: Of course not, you bloody idiot. You annoy me with one thing after another.

Woman 1: (*To Man 3.*) Touch her. If she's any trouble, I'll hold her down. I won't let her go crazy.

Man 3: No ... no, thanks. I really mean it.

Man 4: Does she become violent?

Woman 1: Yes ... sometimes. When she doesn't like something she'll kick me, but nothing too bad ... Would you like to touch her?

Man 4: No, please stop that.

Woman 1: (*To Man 1.*) Well, how about you? No need to worry. When you look at her, my mother's letting you know by her expression that she doesn't like to be touched, but it isn't true. In fact, she'd really like to be touched by somebody like you.

- Man 1: Um ... no. I'm not familiar with this sort of thing.
- Man 2: (*To Man 1.*) You say you aren't familiar, (*Pushing Man 1 towards Woman 1.*) but it's only a matter of touching.
- Man 1: (*Pulling away.*) Don't do that!
- Woman 1: Look, it's not all that difficult. It's just a matter of touching. Or would you rather pinch or tickle her?
- Man 1: No!
- Man 4: (*His interest piqued.*) Tickling?
- Woman 1: Yes—when I get bored I often pinch and tickle her. Would you like to do that?
- Man 4: No ... I'm no good at that sort of thing. But how about you? Would you like to do it instead of me? (*Pointing to Man 3.*) Because this guy doesn't know what it is to be ticklish.
- Woman 1: (*Pointing at Man 3.*) You want me to tickle him?
- Man 4: No, not him. You tickle your mother.
- Woman 1: Then he'll understand what ticklish means?
- Man 4: Well, it's possible. (*To Man 3.*) Or would you like to be tickled as she suggests?
- Man 3: Definitely not! What are you talking about? I don't want to be involved in any of this!
- Man 5: But she's kind enough to say that she'll do it for you.
- Man 3: Shut up! How many times do I have to say I don't want to do it!
- Man 4: Well, you heard what he said; so, go ahead and do it to your mother.
- Woman 1: OK ... where shall I do it?
- Man 4: Where? I suppose under the armpits might be best ... (*To Man 3.*) Hey, will under the armpits be alright?

Man 3: I keep telling you it's got nothing to do with me.

Woman 1: Mother, lift up your arms.

(Woman 1 tickles Woman 2. Woman 2 puts up with it and groans. Woman 1 continues tickling.)

Man 2: Hey, she's groaning.

Man 1: *(Unsure how things are proceeding.)* Um ...

Man 4: That's enough.

Woman 1: *(Stops tickling. To Man 3.)* Do you understand?

Man 3: Huh?

Woman 1: That's what it is to be ticklish.

Man 5: But she was groaning.

Woman 1: Because she was ticklish. That's why she groaned.

Man 1: Well, don't we all laugh when we're ticklish?

Woman 1: We groan. Laughing's when we think something's funny.

Man 4: I laugh too when I'm feeling ticklish ...

Woman 1: That's not ticklish.

Man 3: *(To Man 4.)* You don't know what ticklish is. Really. You just don't know!

Man 5: But *I* laugh when I feel ticklish.

Woman 1: They're two separate things. You're mistaken when you think that's ticklish.

Man 4: Hang on ... That's not *ticklish*?

Man 3: You idiot! *(Anguished.)* Aaargh! How could you think that *that* is ticklish?

Man 1: Well, tell me then? What's ticklish?

Woman 1: Ticklish is a feeling mixed with itchiness and coldness.

- Man 4: Oh ... mixed with itchiness and coldness.
- Man 3: (*To Man 4.*) What do you think?
- Man 4: Um, yeah ... it'd be a feeling mixed with itchiness and coldness.
- Man 3: Then how come you laugh?
- Man 5: I always laugh. Anybody'll laugh when they feel ticklish. When they feel itchy, they become cold.
- Woman 1: Does anyone feel like pinching her? If you do, then you'd also know what pain means.
- (*Men look at each other and there is a short pause.*)
- Man 1: (*To Man 2, indicating the earthworm's jar.*) Why don't you give it to her?
- Man 2: This?
- Woman 1: What is it?
- Man 1: (*Takes the jar to Woman 1.*) An earthworm. Would you like it?
- Woman 1: Is it edible?
- Man 5: No, it isn't for food, it's just for keeping. Then you feel that he's existing, and that makes you feel really good.
- Woman 1: (*Touching the jar, interested.*) Oh? But I can't just take it.
- Man 1: Don't worry, (*To Man 2.*) It's OK, isn't it? This lady says she wants it.
- Man 2: That's all right by me. But isn't it that ... well, I've swapped this for him ... (*To Man 3.*) No, I don't mean you. I'm saying that I've exchanged everything, including everything. You're in the box and you think it's yours ... (*To Man 1.*) You agree don't you? So you ...
- Man 1: (*To Woman 1.*) Are you suggesting that you want something else instead?
- Woman 1: (*Considering.*) Hmm ... Even if it is only an earthworm, I couldn't really accept it for nothing ...

Man 2: No, you misunderstand me. I don't mean that. I've already bargained to get the earthworm. An exchange has already happened.

Woman 1: But I should make up the difference. Well, how about this? Could you exchange it for my mother?

Man 2: What?

Woman 1: If you're going to give that to me, I'll give you my mother.

Man 2: Please don't do that. You can't do that. Let me just give you the earthworm.

Woman 1: But I can't accept it for nothing.

Man 5: (*To Man 3.*) Would you like to have the mother in return?

Man 3: Oh, shut the hell up. What are you saying?

Woman 1: (*Cheerfully.*) Oh, it's all right with me. Anyway, I'll get this earthworm in return.

Man 3: No, don't do that. You're talking about your own mother.

Woman 1: I know. But my mother doesn't think that way.

Man 1: What do you mean?

Woman 1: (*Musing.*) How do I explain? My mother doesn't think of me as her daughter ... (*Agreeing with herself.*) Yes ... (*To Man 3.*) She might even be thinking that you're her son.

Man 3: Don't tell me that. I'm no good with this bullshit.

Man 4: Does your mother often think like that?

Woman 1: Yes. Shall I ask her how she thinks of you?

Man 4: No, no thanks. I'm not that sort of guy.

Man 2: So, your mother (*Pointing to Man 3.*) thinks that he might be her son?

Man 1: Yeah. Her mother might think that he's her son.

- Man 2: What's the difference?
- Man 4: It's different, stupid. It's not true that she's thinking that he might be her son, but she might be thinking that he's her son.
- Man 5: That's the same.
- Man 1: How come?
- Man 5: Don't worry. It's mostly the same. (*To Man 3.*) Yeah? Because she's thinking that you're her son.
- Man 3: What? Oh, this is all just bullshit ...
- Man 5: Because she thinks that you're her son?
- Man 3: No, she doesn't think that at all! She's never thought that. (*Addressing Woman 1 and the Men.*) What all of you said right now is that she might be thinking it. You said that, didn't you?
- Man 5: No, well ...
- Woman 1: I've made up my mind. I'm going to ask her how she thinks of you. That's OK, isn't it?
- Man 3: Don't. don't do that!
- Woman 1: Don't worry. Just ask. (*Taking hold of Woman 2.*) Mother!
- Man 3: (*Stopping her, fumbling weakly.*) Please stop! You ... (*Touching her shoulder.*) you ...
- Woman 1: (*Questioning his touching, shocked.*) Oh!
- Man 3: Huh?
- Woman 1: Why have you touched me?
- Man 3: (*Bewildered.*) Excuse me?
- Woman 1: I never said you could touch me!
- Man 3: All right, I just wanted you to stop ...

Man 1: (To Man 3.) Stop that!

Man 3: I didn't mean anything.

Man 2: It's no good even if you did that without meaning anything ... (Clarifying) by touching her ...

Man 5: (Pushing Man 2 away.) What the hell are you talking about? He said he didn't mean any harm. (To Man 3.) That's right isn't it? (Admonishing.) Don't do it again. (To Woman 1.) Go ahead. We won't touch you; please go ahead.

Woman 1: Please, just get right away from me!

Man 3: Oh, this is ... (Unspoken: wrong.)

Woman 1: (Still holding Woman 2.) Mother! Speak up! You've heard what we said. What do you think of him? Look! That man ... (To Man 3, assertive.) Excuse me, would you show her your face?

Man 3: (Hesitating.) No. Just let it go ... Please stop.

Man 2: Come on. She said to show your face. (Pulling Man 3 by force towards Woman 2 to show her his face.) Why don't you do that?

Man 3: Don't!

Woman 1: This man! (Starting to strike at Woman 2.) Speak up! Yes, quickly! What do you think of him? There's no way you can tell me you're not able to talk. (Kicks Woman 2.)

Man 3: We've got to stop this ... Look at her! She doesn't look like she's thinking of me at all!

Woman 1: Yes! She is thinking of you, only she doesn't say it! Please go away a bit. I'm sure I can make her talk very soon.

Man 3: But ...

Man 5: Don't worry, it's just talking.

Woman 1: (Quiet and intense.) If you won't talk, no matter what, I'll make things hard for you. Huh? It's such a simple thing. You only have to say whether you think of him as your son

or not ... Ah, OK. You won't talk? Well, then, I'll make you! (*Twists back the finger of Woman 2.*) Hah! How does that feel? Now you'll be able to talk. What do you think about him?

(*Men become nervous since the situation has changed so drastically. Woman 2 puts up with the pain, groans, screams, but doesn't open her mouth.*)

Man 1: Hey! Your mother doesn't want to speak.

Woman 1: Yes she does. But she's controlling her desire to speak. If we make it so she can't bear it any longer, she'll talk. (*Twists Woman 2's finger even more.*) Hah! How's this? If you don't talk, your finger'll break!

Man 4: Stop! We'd better stop this ... (*To Man 3.*) Don't you think?

Man 3: I said that before!

Woman 1: No, leave it to me. (*Lifting her hand from Woman 2's finger. Nonchalant.*) This is what usually happens. I usually talk to her like this. (*To Woman 2, taking a knife from her pocket and exposing the sharp side, flicking her finger over the blade, quiet and intense.*) This time I'll do it on your fingernail. If you don't talk, your fingernail will peel off.

Man 2: (*Jumping suddenly at Woman 1.*) Stop!

Woman 1: What?

Man 2: Stop all this! (*To Man 5.*) We've got to stop this.

Man 5: Um ... I'd think that we'd better stop, but ...
(*To Man 3.*) Well, only if you agree ...

Man 3: What are you saying? I have been saying that all along!

Woman 1: Don't worry, please be quiet. With this she'll speak. Soon. I'll make her say that she's thinking that you're her son.

Man 3: But, how can you do that? You're really ... (*Unspoken: crazy.*)

Woman 1: (*Putting the knife closer to Woman 2.*) Yes, say it. You can say it!

Man 1: Stop, really, you ...

Woman 1: Can't you say it? *(Pause.)* OK. You still won't say it. *(Tries to put the sharp edge of the knife between Woman 2's fingernails. Woman 2 screams.)*

Man 5: *(Grabbing Woman 1.)* Stop! It's not right! *(Pulls her back from Woman 2.)*

Woman 1: What are you doing to me? *(Shakes the knife around.)*
Leave me alone! Let go of my hand!

Man 2: Hey, take her knife!

Man 4: How can I get it off her?

Man 2: Hold her hand, *hand* ...

Woman 1: *(Becoming wild.)* Stop! Haven't I told you "don't touch me"?

Man 2: Be careful!

Man 5: Hey, everybody, get hold of her!

Man 4: I've got her hand. Take her knife!

Man 1: Right. *(Takes the knife.)*

Woman 1: Let go of me! If you don't I'm capable of anything! She's about to talk! Take your hands off!

(Men 2, 4 and 5 hold Woman 1. Man 1 wanders around with the knife in his hand. Man 3 moves closer to Woman 2.)

(Becoming wilder.) Get off me! Get off me!

Man 3: *(To Woman 2.)* Are you all right?

Woman 2: *(Exhausted.)* Yes, please unchain me.

Man 3: Of course. It must be hurting you.

Woman 1: *(Noticing Man 3 and Woman 2.)* Don't! Don't unchain her! Don't take off the chain! *(Almost like a scream.)* Please! Leave the chain on. Don't take it off!

(Man 3 unchains Woman 2. Woman 2 slowly stands, quietly getting the knife from Man 1's hand. She closes in on Woman 1.)

(Screams.) Don't let her come near me! No!

(Woman 2 moves towards Woman 1 and thrusts the knife into her chest. Woman 1 withdraws her breath once and then collapses on the floor, falling out of the men's hands.)

Woman 2: *(Looking down at Woman 1)* Now you can't think that I'm your mother.

(Woman 2 throws the knife away and leaves the stage slowly. The men are stunned.)

Man 5: Is she dead?

Man 4: *(Pause.)* Yes.

Man 1: But ... why?

Man 3: That woman ... was believed by this girl ... to be her mother. Probably that woman couldn't stand it ...

Man 2: This girl couldn't stand it either. She believed that the woman was her mother, but her mother didn't believe that.

Man 5: It's only a matter of believing

Man 3: You can't believe ... and you can't be believed.

Man 1: Pity ...

Man 4: What should we do?

Man 2: What?

Man 4: With this girl.

Man 3: Let's ... throw her away.

Man 5: Where?

Man 3: Some place where no-one can see. If we do that, then we'll forget her.

- Man 5: Yeah. We'll carry the body away.
(*To Man 1.*) You take that end.
- Man 1: All right.

(*Man 1 and Man 5 exit carrying Woman 1.*)
- Man 3: (*Pointing to the earthworm jar on the floor.*) The earthworm's been left.
- Man 4: (*To Man 2.*) It's yours.
- Man 2: No, it's not mine. I gave it to that girl.
- Man 3: She's gone.
- Man 2: Yeah, but I did give it to her ...
- Man 3: (*Murmuring alone, going closer to the jar.*) But, as she's gone, I wonder what'll happen to it now that nobody owns it.

(*Man 4 turns the cardboard boxes upside down and starts to put them together at the back of the stage.*)
- Man 2: What are you doing now?
- Man 4: I'm making a house.
- Man 2: A house?
- Man 4: Yeah.
- Man 3: Are you going to live in it?
- Man 4: Someone will, but not us.
- Man 2: Then what are we going to do?
- Man 4: We can look at it from a distance—and we can think that we're living there. (*Makes a hole in a box with the knife.*)
- Man 3: (*Pause.*) What's that?
- Man 4: A window. The most important thing in a house is a window—because if there isn't a window, no-one would know how to look out at the world.
- Man 2: Why can't we live in the house?

Man 3: We just can't. To live in the house we'd have to think like those two women: who the mother is and who the daughter is. (*Puts a crutch on the "roof" area of the boxes.*)

Man 4: What's that?

Man 3: An antenna.

Man 4: Antenna?

Man 3: So the people in there'll be able to communicate with the people in the distance wirelessly.

(*Man 1 and Man 5 enter.*)

Man 5: What's this?

Man 2: We're making a house ... it's not that we're going to live in it. We only look at it from a distance and think that we're living there.

Man 5: Is that good?

Man 4: Yeah, it *is* good—because we think from a distance that we're living there, but the people in there know nothing about how we're thinking.

Man 5: (*With cautious agreement.*) Hmm ...

Man 1: Is this a window?

Man 3: Yeah.

Man 1: Well, I'll make a curtain. (*Takes a handkerchief from his pocket and attaches it inside the window.*) If I didn't, the people inside would feel they're continually being watched from all over the world.

Man 4: (*To Man 2.*) Will you put this in?

Man 2: What?

Man 4: The earthworm.

Man 2: Oh ... the earthworm. (*Puts the earthworm jar inside the box.*)

(The five men move a small distance away from the boxes while still looking at them. The surrounding area gradually darkens and a light is seen dimly through the handkerchief curtain. They begin to hum a shortened version of the "Coming Home" theme from Dvorak's "New World Symphony" slowly and slightly out of tune, continuing under the following dialogue.)

Man 4: So, what's good about the earthworm, is that he doesn't think about us, even though we're thinking of him like this?

Man 2: But does the earthworm really exist?

Man 3: Sure he does ... at least I think so ...

Man 1: Yeah, I think so too.

Man 5: Of course he does. We see that now.

(The last note of the melody should occur after the last word. Blackout.)

Translated by Yasuko Claremont

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