

Angelos Michalopoulos

April fifth
(Why sorrow is the poorest poverty)

Translation:

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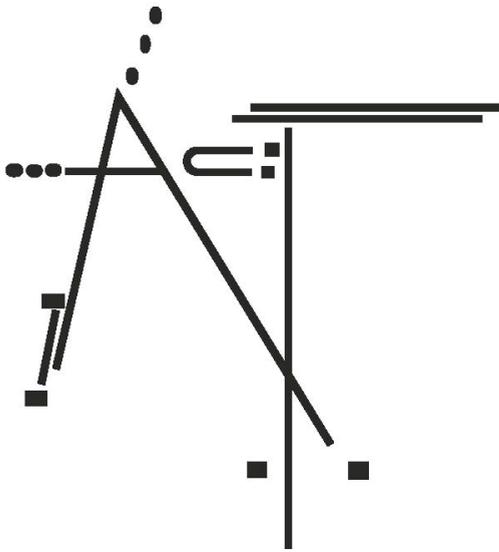
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CHARACTERS:

NICHOLAS
HIS HAPPINESS

Man is the only living being on Earth
that keeps searching for happiness
even after having found it.

I am happy because I don't feel the need to hate anyone,
not even someone who has harmed me.
I am peaceful because I know out of how much ugliness
I've manufactured my beauty.





NICHOLAS: Please tell me, happiness of mine, what do I owe you?

HIS HAPPINESS: Before I answer, stop wrestling with those secrets of yours you have abandoned in your heart for years now. Stop trying to hide them in the one breath of yours you are certain will never betray you by coming out of your lungs.

NICHOLAS: Hey, do you really want to force me to understand what part of my happiness I owe to my laughter?

HIS HAPPINESS: Tell me, what would you prefer to be a sad king or a humble but happy citizen?

NICHOLAS: I would rather be someone who didn't have to ask his success to tell him how happy he is.

HIS HAPPINESS: What a pity that man is usually smaller than his truth... Before you start making any plans, though, you should know two things. First, you will find me in every moment of your life when, while crossing the emotional winter you have personally created out of every instant you shut your ears when your soul was talking to you, you decide to finally listen to what your passion has been shouting at you from afar. Right after that, you will make a sharp right turn and manage to get lost for a while, hoping this way to gain some time to figure out in which day of February you have managed to hide an entire summer. And second, never use "1". I hate "1", I really do!

NICHOLAS: So, the math of happiness refuses to host a “1” in it? Stop trying to make me start flirting with my loneliness again. There’s no way you can do that tonight. Now I understand why you were always more ambitious than me!

HIS HAPPINESS: Perhaps you believe that for the same reason you believe that your greed is the tax you must pay to your misery so it will make you feel less miserable than what you think you are.

NICHOLAS: Why the hell is every thought that wants to get out of my head right now thinking of its own success, and not mine? Tell me, happiness of mine, in which part of my future do you hope to hide me in all that I’ve asked you to give me, before I start trying to find out who I want to be?

HIS HAPPINESS: Come now... You know that everyone is secretly in love with their loneliness.

NICHOLAS: It’s so odd that I keep the most catastrophic lightning I have in me for the people I love the most!

HIS HAPPINESS: Maybe you should ask any thunderstorm you raise in you to explain why it takes so much pleasure in watching the people you love suffer. Come on! Will you, please, stop hiding from those parts of yourself you’re pretending to be looking for? Can you please tell me what you gain by dumping your trash right in front of the main gate of the paradise you want to enter?

NICHOLAS: I was never one of those people who tossed all the gifts their enthusiasm gave them in the trash before even opening them. What can I say? I wish I could explain to myself the math my logic uses to convince me that what will be left after subtracting all my sorrows from my life’s joys is something I can explain to the meaning of my life. It’s so hard to love what you don’t allow yourself to feel.

HIS HAPPINESS: It's such a shame you don't allow yourself to love what you feel before forcing yourself to understand it.

NICHOLAS: Dear God, why do I often feel that my joy is the bill my self-confidence brings me to pay whenever I don't realize how many mistakes I haven't made yet I have bought back from my own future?

HIS HAPPINESS: Build a sky, piece by piece, out of all the used gray you came across in your life that kept looking for a heart to teach it what it must do to look more like blue.

NICHOLAS: While talking to myself about you, I often feel like a writer who, by writing, gives himself a second chance to defeat everyone he lost to during his life.

HIS HAPPINESS: No product is consumed more every day around the world than false hopes. And do you know why that is? Because not only do you offer false hopes to the people around you, but you consume a lot of them yourself. The people who are so sure they can fool the reality they live in anytime they want are so silly! Yet you'll do anything to try to fool reality...

NICHOLAS: The same way nature needs only one cloud to fool the sky, man only needs one delusion to fool reality. And what's incredible is that I'm no longer troubled knowing that I won't be able to fool reality if I first don't manage to fool myself, convincing any arguments in my mind that still believe me to crush any innocence that still lives in my heart.

HIS HAPPINESS: I'm always impressed by how much you like to make your thoughts fool your own mind. Why? Why do you like to deceive your mind so much?

NICHOLAS: Because I need to constantly find new ways to avoid realizing who I am. *(Pause)* Somewhere in that quest, in that chase between man and his mind, lives a strange kind of misery, a kind which, as soon as you come into contact with it, you realize that it is a semi-transparent happiness made out of unhappy moments, an accidental joy made of tears.

HIS HAPPINESS: Delusions, delusions... Have you ever thought that misery might be reaching the point of believing that you don't need anyone in the world, not even your own happiness?

NICHOLAS: It's really not nice to always have to rediscover that my sorrow lives permanently in my self-criticism.

HIS HAPPINESS: Sure, self-criticism is the big weapon you think always works for you. Yet quite often, without the slightest warning, it slips through your fingers and, standing a few feet away from you, turns around and starts shooting at you.

NICHOLAS: Why, dam it, do I feel as if my ambiguity always held inside it the big secret my happiness never wanted to tell me?

HIS HAPPINESS: I don't know, but I can assure you that you don't become wiser by deleting from the questions you wanted to ask your ambiguity for so long those answers you gave it every time it managed to wedge you between your sorrow and reality. You won't persuade your ambiguity to leave you alone unless you give it an entire part of your character to define anyway it wants.

NICHOLAS: What are you driving at?

HIS HAPPINESS: How the hell do you wake up every morning and start assigning jobs to everyone around you,

giving me the worst and most difficult chore you have to do? Don't you think that's unfair? Every day, you throw at my face the obligation to make you feel happy by noon, to make you feel great about yourself without, though, being inclined to do anything to help me.

NICHOLAS: For a happiness, you seem to be in a bad mood today!

HIS HAPPINESS: Who told you that hapinesses must always be happy?

NICHOLAS: You have a point there...

HIS HAPPINESS: Don't ask me to keep stirring your poor soul, like a good cook, to find any smiles of yours that no longer remember how to discover the truth they contain and then grab them by their ends and run as fast as I can to affix them on your mouth. I don't understand why I must always help you keep the promises you gave your ego about managing to convince those who don't know you well enough that you are truly happy.

NICHOLAS: Why, aren't my smiles genuine?

HIS HAPPINESS: Come now! You know very well that you pressured me into making them as hastily as I could.

NICHOLAS: I didn't know that hapinesses could give birth to badly made smiles!

HIS HAPPINESS: Especially after all these things you people make us do...

NICHOLAS: So, why do you, my happiness, insist on keeping a diary which, no matter how hard I try, I cannot read without my sorrow's help?

HIS HAPPINESS: You little devil, you like to believe in the majesty of the minimal, don't you? Tell me something. Why do people become better at forgetting the reason they were born as they grow older?

NICHOLAS: What do you mean?

HIS HAPPINESS: Man is born to live his life as happily as possible, doing whatever makes him and the world around him better and happier. Do you agree?

NICHOLAS: I agree since I cannot convince those words of mine which still believe in my honesty to disagree.

HIS HAPPINESS: So, how come, while becoming wiser, more sophisticated and more experienced with every day that goes by, you end up distancing yourself from your happiness, forgetting the reason you were born? How come you leave yourself in the hands of your greed, which pulls you here and drags you there to make you more successful, even if it ends up making you more miserable? But let's be more specific. The most beautiful aspect of happiness is that it is not a zero-sum game. It's not like so many things we do in life which sooner or later become a game, at the end of which, since one competitor wins, the other must lose. In happiness, everybody wins. That's why a single true smile can fill a vast room with joy in just a few seconds, giving birth to smiles on countless mouths and brighten thousands of souls with its sunshine. Have you ever tried to stand across someone and with only one warm grin of yours see his lips instantly give birth to a smile? Why do I feel, though, that you often fight with your own smile?

NICHOLAS: I don't want to live in a paradise others built for me, but I also don't want to live in a hell I don't know how to finish making by myself anymore. I want to find the spot of my character where at every sunset my smile manages to recognize its own shape again and my embrace hugs any part of my soul I injured during the day so it can try to heal it.

HIS HAPPINESS: Why do I always feel that you are resisting me? Why do I feel that you could betray me without the slightest hesitation? *(Pause)* In your life, you haven't betrayed anyone more than me, your own happiness. Why?

NICHOLAS: I don't... Nobody can fight with his smile and win, nobody. Certainly not me...

HIS HAPPINESS *(Interrupting him):* Do you think you were born to envy me?

NICHOLAS: What for?

HIS HAPPINESS: Because you know that quite often you cannot convince me to be yours. So, when you cannot have me, love becomes hate and you end up envying me. Don't you realize how miserable you are every time you reach a point of not knowing how to ask your dreams to open the door to the happiness they promised you at the end of that night, when you had emptied your soul so much that even your dreams were afraid to enter her? Don't you understand how miserable you become everytime you realize that you have the courage to talk to anyone, yet you are afraid to talk to your own dreams? Don't you realize that your meanness is always watchful, hoping you will do it the favor of letting it become the impatient undertaker of every happy moment in your life, seconds after it is born? And you should know that the mean things you do really love to grab these happy moments and bury them alive in a future that will never choose to become yours...

NICHOLAS: Come now. Let's be a little more understanding with those who must look through their meanness to find the reason they might want to be kind.

HIS HAPPINESS: Yes, but don't forget that only truth can tear down whatever meanness builds. And do you know why? Because by hating someone, sooner or later you will end up hating the part of yourself that gives birth to that

hatred. No matter how proud one is of the courage and efficiency of his meanness, when left alone to look for any part of his character still willing to go near him and keep him company, he will realize that the spot where his rage is born will be among the first to help him feel even lonelier than he already is.

NICHOLAS: How I wish I knew how to come into contact with what is left of my intelligence, once the reality of my life goes across it to find out which of those thoughts I never thought to their end I am made of. I wonder, will I ever figure out how to trust my innocence more without feeling that I am betraying my future victories? How I wish I could trust it enough to drape my two most self-serving thoughts over my eyes, so I can't see and let it lead me to you, to my happiness.

HIS HAPPINESS: Before you breathe in your next breath, could you please find the strength to shake off any thought that feels it has to hate your compassion before it starts loving your meanness?

NICHOLAS: If I knew what's not letting me reach my serenity, I wouldn't trust in my logic so much to choose a better future for me.

HIS HAPPINESS: History may flirt with all those who wish to write it, but at the end it will go to bed with the truth. History likes to play and flirt with various lies before it chooses the truth it will marry. It plays mental games with its reader, offering different points of view while he reads it, but in the end it will be the one that will select the truth he will use to throw out of his head all the lies he had read up to that point.

NICHOLAS: Unfortunately, I have experienced this so many times! At the end of the evening, my poor soul is the one that ends up paying all the checks left unpaid by my logic, which got drunk sipping anything that looked more exciting than the

life I have chosen. *(Pause)* Can I ask you something? I always knew how to steal from the end of every happy moment in my life those emotions I had made it from. I always knew how to steal from my own mouth those words that never believed in the meaning I gave them. Do you think that's why I feel so embarrassed when I run into that silence of mine I cannot find in my soul, no matter how hard I look, and so I end up ransacking my logic trying to locate it?

HIS HAPPINESS: Misery is being unable to realize that all that you are looking for in your logic has long since hidden in your soul.

NICHOLAS: Why?

HIS HAPPINESS: Because it could never stand living under so much light. So you end up making a mess of your logic without good reason. This is how people go crazy. Nevertheless, I have to admit that I have never met anyone who could grab and hide his own words from his mouth, without his intelligence noticing, as quickly as you can. Do you remember asking me once how beautiful a happy moment can be? Do you remember what I replied?

NICHOLAS: Any moment of one's life can be as beautiful as its owner's emotional honesty.

HIS HAPPINESS: So why do you keep asking for more to feel happy? How can you consider something that made you happy just a few days ago outdated and almost trivial? Why do you constantly need something more than you had yesterday to feel happy? Why do you keep making your life more difficult by asking the reality you live in for more than you asked for yesterday? Why do I feel that the moment each day you propose to me, you realize that you are secretly in love with your misery?

NICHOLAS: I don't...

HIS HAPPINESS: Is it possible that deep down you feel closer to your real self when you are melancholic rather than happy? Have you ever asked yourself why every morning, as soon as you get up, while no one can see you except the barely awakened sun, you raise the bar of your happiness even higher than it was the day before, just to make it harder for you to reach? How come, after relentlessly chasing a joy trying to make it fall in love with you, the moment it finally succumbs to your advances, you feign complete indifference and immediately turn your gaze to another? How the hell could you have dumped so much hate into your love so it doesn't seem empty?

NICHOLAS: Don't underestimate how much my extreme emotions like to communicate with each other behind my back.

HIS HAPPINESS: Believe in the miracle if you want the miracle to believe in you. Listen. A happy person spends little time in the center of his life. He can't stand living there for very long, because he can't get enough oxygen to survive there and suffocates. After experiencing the security and comfort it offers for a while, he jumps up spring-like and goes to his life's edge to breathe some fresh air. He constantly ventures to his life's remotest spots, to its limits, to its boundaries with his normality, its boundaries with all the rules the people around him have imposed on him. One's soul likes to live where his mediocrity is afraid to go. Perhaps he likes to live where his own strengths doubt how strong he really is. A happy person refuses to live in his past happiness. He loves to constantly try new things. He doesn't drape a black and white copy of an old smile over his mouth, but tries to produce a brand new smile every day of his life out of materials he has never used before, a smile that even he has never seen before.

NICHOLAS: Right... I can't tell you how many hours I've spent in front of the people I talk to, watching the reflection