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Entangled

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HANA ANDRONIKOVA

Entangled

SCENE ONE

The scene takes places in the mother's house. **Mother** is there in the living room, seated on her sofa. Her son's coming to tea.

Son enters. As he walks in, **Mother** raises her eyebrows and puts her hand on her chest.

Mother: *Oh dear. A god of war marching into the room.*

While she speaks, **Son** comes to her and gives her a formal kiss on her cheek.

Mother: *You look like Mars himself, darling. It almost frightens me.*

He sits down and pours himself a glass of water from a pitcher on the table.

Son: *How are you, Mother?*

Mother: *Not well, actually. I couldn't sleep last night. And the night before. I had nightmares. About you and your father. Quite horrible, I have to say.*

Son (ironic): *Really? About my father?*

Mother: *Yes, about you and your father.*

Son: *How interesting.*

She leans forward, following his every move.

Mother: *Have you come to kill me?*

Son gets up and starts pacing the room. She shudders.

Mother: *Yes, I suppose you have. Don't you know I'm dying anyway?*

Son: *Are you?*

Mother: *I'm afraid it's become ridiculously obvious.*

Son: *So, why don't you speak?*

Mother: Speak? About what, darling? What's the point of speaking? I find speaking utterly useless. Nothing really matters.

Son: You mean nothing matters to you. Well, there are things that still matter to others.

Mother: I have no interest in others anymore.

Son: You never did. Me among the others.

She takes a sip of her tea, then looks out the window.

Mother: Splendid weather, don't you think? I don't remember a summer like this. Have you noticed the roses in the garden? They're all blooming as if they should live forever, silly little darlings. And the bees and butterflies—they all love them! Everyone loves my roses. Have you noticed—

Son: No, I haven't. Could you stay on the subject?

Mother: Of course, you haven't. You never notice anything.

Pause.

Son: Mum, could you make an exception—just once in your life—before you die—as you've been advertising lately—and try to have a meaningful conversation?

Mother: A meaningful conversation? You're talking in riddles, darling.

Son: I'm sure I am. Always. For God's sake, mother, you owe it to me!

Mother: Oh, Eddie, I hate to see you upset like this. What is it that makes you so upset? (Pause) Oh, I forgot. You were in that—how do you call it—a retreat? How was your retreat, darling?

Son: My centre. Do you want me to tell you?

Mother: I'd love to hear all about it.

Son: I'm sure you're dying to hear all about it. Well, I'll tell you anyway. In fact, I'm dying to tell you.

Mother: I'm here to listen. You can tell me everything.

Son: That's very kind of you. And quite rare. I should take advantage of the occasion.

Mother (a little offended): *I'm always interested in you. I have always been. I'm your mother. I could ask you dozens of questions—but you may not like to answer them.*

Son: *Try me.*

Mother: *Let's see. Well, where's your last girlfriend? Lucy—was that her name? Lucy?*

Son: *Yes, Lucy. Do you really care?*

Mother: *Of course I do.*

Son: *We broke up.*

Mother: *Oh, how disappointing. You mean she left you.*

Son: *Yes, you can put it that way.*

Mother: *Well, it is her loss. She doesn't deserve you then.*

Son: *Thank you. That's a good way of putting it. But what if she had a reason?*

Mother: *A reason? A reason to leave you? What reason could she possibly have?*

Son: *She probably had the same reason all my girlfriends had before her. She just joined the crowd.*

Mother: *I don't understand this talk. What reason did she have to leave you?*

Son: *She said she wanted a man.*

Mother: *She wanted a man? I beg your pardon?*

Son: *Yes, she wanted a man.*

Mother: *Preposterous! And what are you? You're not a man? What is she thinking!*

Son: *She thinks I'm split.*

Mother: *Nonsense. You're fine, Eddie. You're just fine.*

Son: *My psychologist says I'm split. He says "dissociated."*

Mother: Your psychologist is an alibi. A lame excuse so you don't have to live your life at its fullest. I suppose that's a very sophisticated and fashionable way for some people to avoid responsibility.

Son: I feel pretty split myself.

Mother: Split. What does it mean anyway? How are you split?

Son: How am I split? I'm split, like my ass, right there in the middle. That's how I feel inside. Split.

Mother: Watch your language! Split. All I know is that Split is a lovely city on the coast of the Adriatic Sea where Daddy and I spent our honeymoon.

Son: Oh, please.

Mother: Eddie, why don't you just forget about all this psychological extravagance and live—as other people do. Or is that too old-fashioned these days?

Son: As other people do? Well, do they?

Mother: Do they what, Eddie?

Son: Do they live? I mean really live? And besides, you forget that you don't know much about other people since you don't care, right?

Mother: Split. Why do you always have to be so special? You've been like this since you were a little boy. You may call it split, if you want. I'd just say—delicate.

Son: Delicate? For crying out loud, Mother. Delicate.

Mother: That's how I think of you. You were always sensitive and overwrought. But that doesn't necessarily mean there must be anything wrong with you, does it? (Pause) All right, darling, now why don't you tell me all about your retreat?

Son: I'm going to have some whisky first. Can I?

Mother: Of course. Please, help yourself.

He pours himself a big glass.

Son: Do you want some?

Mother: No, I can't drink unfortunately. I'll have to sit through this all sober, I'm afraid.

SCENE THREE

Living room. **Mother** and **Son** in the same positions as we last saw them in the first scene. **Son** is sipping his whisky.

Son: *Can you tell me the truth now?*

She's thousands of miles away.

Son: *Mother?*

Mother: *I don't know what you want to hear. There's nothing to say.*

Son: *I want to hear the truth.*

Mother: *People believe what they want to believe.*

Son: *Tell me.*

Mother: *Just because something odd happened in your retreat you come here and accuse me of cheating on your father?*

Son: *I'm not accusing you of anything. I just told you what happened. And I want to know whether it's true.*

Mother: *Some weird shaman tells you some nonsense and you—*

Son: *Is it nonsense?*

Mother: *Of course it is.*

Pause.

Son: *I don't believe you.*

He keeps staring at her. She takes a sip of water from her glass, then straightens up and looks at him.

Son: *This whole shaman nonsense makes perfect sense to me. It does. And I wouldn't blame you. There's no one to blame. You did what you did; I'm not here to judge you. But please, if it is true, say it.*

Mother: *You can be so eloquent. You should have been a lawyer.*

Son: *You have nothing to lose. Father is dead; he will never find out. But I am still alive, and I need to know. I have a right to know.*

Long silence. He comes to her, looking into her eyes.

Son: *Please.*

Pause.

Mother: *I want you to promise you will keep coming to see me.*

Son: *What?*

Mother: *Promise me you will still come to see me.*

Son: *Mother, please.*

Mother: *I want you to promise.*

Son: *All right. I will continue coming to see you.*

Mother: *Promise.*

Son: *I promise.* (He stands up and starts pacing the room again.) *I'm waiting.*

Mother: *Well, all right, then.* (Pause) *Yes.* (Pause) *Yes, it is possible you had a different father.*

Son: *It is possible. What do you mean—it is possible? You don't know?*

Mother: *Well, it's quite likely that your father was someone else.*

Son: *Quite likely.* (Exploding) *What about very likely? Or absolutely likely?*

Mother remains silent.

Son: *I can't believe this. I don't know how to—*(speechless)

Long silence. He stands still, then sits down. She's watching him. After some time he looks at her, she avoids his eyes, then looks him in the eye. They keep staring at each other. He takes a deep breath.

Mother: *I'm sorry.*

Long pause.

Son: *Did—did Daddy* (short laughter) *—I mean, did Albert know?*

Mother: *No. No, he didn't.*

Son: *He was never suspicious of—*

Mother: *No, I don't think he was ever suspicious of anything.*

Son: *God, how did you manage that? (Pause. She looks away.) What was his name?*

Mother (absentmindedly): *Whose name?*

Son (raising his voice): *His name! My real father's name! (Mother is silent.) You do know his name, right? Or you just—*

Mother: *Yes! Yes, I do know his name.*

Son: *So tell me his name, for Christ's sake, will you!*

Mother: *Oliver.*

Son: *Oliver. (Mother nods her head.) Oliver. Oliver who?*

Silence.

Son (raising his voice again): *His last name, mother!*

Mother: *Stern. Oliver Stern.*

Long silence. Emotions. Both breathing heavily.

Son: *Oliver Stern. (Softly) Well, do you know—I mean—is he still alive?*

Mother: *No. He's dead. He died long ago.*

Pause. He is trying to take it in.

Son: *And who—who was he?*

Mother keeps silent as if she didn't hear the question.

Son: (trying to bridle his emotions): *Can you tell me who he was. Something. Anything.*

Mother (irritated): *Why? What for? Why do you want to know all this? What's the point?*

Son (upset, tormented): *Is it so difficult to understand? I want to know the truth! Truth. I assume for you it is just a bad word. My whole life I've been living with this incredible, the most horrendous lie! This is your father.—Well, not really. Actually, it's quite likely that it was someone else. I'm sorry? Well, it's a bit hard to believe all this. You lied to me. The person I loved the most, the person I trusted the most, the person who gave me this fucking life! My own mother (desperate laughter). Well, if you really are my mother. Are you? (switching back to his rage) Maybe it doesn't mat-*

ter to you who you have a child with but for some strange reason it does matter to me! Imagine that: I want to know a thing or two about my father!

Mother (patronizing): It's hard to tell you the truth when you're so upset by it.

Son: No, Mother, you still don't get, do you? I'm not upset by the truth. I'm upset because I had to live with a lie. That you made me live with a lie. I'm thirty-three years old and until this day I've had no idea who my father was!

Mother (defensive): You don't understand. It was too complicated; I couldn't tell the truth. That would be the end.

Son: The end? Oh, my god! The end of what?

Mother (angry): The end of everything. It would make too many lives distorted. Too many people would be unhappy. I couldn't tell the truth. My life would have been miserable. (Raising her voice as if blaming him): And yours—your life would have been miserable!

Son (at the top of his voice): My life has been miserable!

Silence.

Mother: Truth. It's so hard to live with the truth.

Son: It's even harder to live with a lie. And the toughest part is that you are living with a lie and you don't know about it. You have no idea why your life doesn't make any sense.

Mother: So, now you know the truth. Does your life make more sense to you?

Son: Yes! Yes, it does. You have no idea. All my life I've been having this feeling, this constant nagging feeling, that something is wrong, something is off. You just don't know what. You always feel like there's something missing—something—you have no idea what it is—no idea where to look for it—you keep searching—your whole life becomes a kind of quest—a desperate search for that missing part—that unknown something that's coming to haunt you—there's no peace, just this urge, and this urge drives you mad, because there's no justification, it becomes an obsession, and you run and along the way—you just grab things and people and turn them inside out and upside down and throw them away once you realize that no, this is not it, it is not it, again and again, and you keep doing this to people and to yourself, you

destroy—with all your force, all your anger, your hate. You hate yourself. And this anger builds with every step, failure after failure, you're sailing this ship of anger leaving only destruction and pain in your wake. And you drive yourself mad, you cannot look back, for it's too awful to look at what you've left behind, and yet you cannot stop, you cannot let go. (Turning to her, almost in tears) And you know why? Because you are searching for a part of yourself! It is your own blood that drives this frantic chase. (Pause.) So yes, my life finally makes sense. Now, I don't have to go mad.

Pause.

Mother: Well, you don't seem to be any happier, though.

Son (howling): Because I'm in pain! I cannot describe how painful it is to learn all this. (Pause. He laughs.) But it is liberating. Even with all this pain and misery my life finally does make sense. I wouldn't trade this pain for any happy-go-lucky feeling of some bogus joy.

Silence. He sits down, exhausted.

Mother (slow): I thought—I was convinced I was doing the right thing. I thought I was protecting you. (Looking at him.) I never wanted to cause you pain. You must believe me. I never wanted to destroy you.

He nods. Cannot bear to look at her, his hands trembling, breathing hard. Silence.

Mother (looking into the distance, then speaking softly): He was a fine man. Strong and deep. He would have been proud of you.

Son looks up.

Mother: You have his eyes. (Girlish smile): He was the best thing that happened to me. Apart from you, of course.

Son: And did he—did he know about me?

Mother: No. No, he didn't.

Son: You didn't tell him?

Mother: No. I found out after he had left.

Son: You found out you were pregnant after he had left?

Mother (full of memories, as if not hearing him): He left for Africa, to do his research. He died there when you were four years old.

Son: *What kind of research?*

Mother: *Oh, it was that vaccination for . . . I don't remember. He was a professor; he was working on a new vaccination. And he died. He never knew he had a son. (Pause. She's breathing with difficulty.) He didn't know.*

Son: *Is this true?*

Mother: *Yes. It is all true. (Trying to get up): Come. Come here, please. Help me.*

Son gets up to help her. She walks to the cabinet and opens one of the drawers. He is standing next to her, holding her so that she can keep her balance. She hands him a thick leather album and walks back to her sofa. He hands her the album back. She flips through the pages and then takes out a scrap of newspaper.

Mother: *Here. Have a look at this.*

Son (taking the scrap of paper): *Professor Oliver Stern Dying on His Mission.*

Mother: *It's the only photograph of him that I have. (Son remains silent, still looking at the photograph of his father.) You look a lot like him.*

Son keeps holding the scrap of paper in his hands, hunched over his father's picture. **Mother** has tears in her eyes. He looks up and sees her shudder.

Son: *Are you OK, Mum?*

Mother: *Yes. Yes, I'm fine. Only tired. I think I need some rest.*

He nods. Getting up, pulling himself together.

Mother: *And you? Will you be all right?*

Son: *Yes, I'll be fine.*

Pause.

Mother: *You don't have to keep coming to see me, you know.*

Son: *I know. I might.*

Mother: *Yes, you might. I might be able to die now. (Son staring at her. A deep sigh.) What about you—what are you going to do, now?*

Son: *Don't know.*

Mother (mixture of irony and kindness): *You might be able to live. I mean really live.*

Son: *I don't know. I suppose I can give it a try.*

Mother: *Well, at least you don't look like Mars anymore.*

He is still holding the scrap of paper.

Son: *Can I keep this?*

Mother: *Yes. Yes, you should keep it.*

Son: *Thank you.*

He is getting ready to leave.

Mother: *Are you leaving?*

Son: *Yes. I should go now. Let you have some rest.*

Mother: *All right.*

Son: *I'll let myself out.*

Son goes to **Mother** and gives her a kiss on her cheek.

Son (tired smile): *I might come next week.*

Mother (gives a slight nod and smiles back): *I might still be here.*

He leaves. Blackout.