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Bedtime Stories

by CHARLES L. MEE

Originally produced under the title of *The Imperialists at the Club Cave Canem*

PROLOGUE

The monologue Rindecella:

Rindecella was a gritty little pearl
who lived in a wottage in the coods
with her two sugly isters and her sticked wetmother.

Now her sticked wetmother made Rindecella do
all the wurty dirk around the house
like pining the shots and shans.
(Wasn't that a shirty dame?)

Well, one day the ping issued a kroclamation:
he said "my son the pransom hince wants all the giligible earls
to come to the palace for a drancy fess ball."

Well, of course, the sugly isters had drancy fesses
but Rindecella only had the wurty dags she worked in.
So along came the gairy fodmother, and wouched her with her tand,
and turned the wurty dags into a drancy fess,
and the hice into morses, and the cumpkins into a poach.

And said, "go to the palace and dance with the pransom hince
all night long,
but be sure and be home by the moke of stridnight."

So Rindedella went to the palace and danced with the pransom
hince all night long,
but at the moke of stridnight, she ran down the stalace peps,
and at the stottom pep, she slopped her dripper.

The next day, the ping issued another kroclamation:
he said, "my son the pransom hince wants all the giligible earls
to sly on the tripper."
Well, of course, when the two sugly isters slied on the tripper
it fidn't dit.

But when Rindecella slied on the tripper,
it fid dit.

And Rindecella and the pransom hince mot garried
and hived lappily ever after.

OVERTURE

A violin solo with voice tape.

1.

A couple in bed.

MOLLY

Did you hear about this two ton guy?

PETER

Two tons?

MOLLY

About two tons, something like that, you know, like 240 pounds, five feet four, who didn't want to admit he was fat and so he wore clothes several sizes too small for him. He had a 44 inch waist but he wore pants size 38, and he choked himself to death on his shirt collar. One minute he was eating spaghetti with his fork and the next minute he was on the floor gasping for breath, and his shirt was so tight no one could get it unbuttoned. He died with a forkful of spaghetti in his hand.

[SILENCE]

I knew this guy who killed himself with his pants.

PETER

How did he do that?

MOLLY

He let them get so tight they choked off his circulation and he had a heart attack.

PETER

You mean he gained weight?

MOLLY

Sure.

PETER

A lot of weight.

MOLLY

I don't know. I guess so.

[Silence]

Did you hear about the little girl who fell into the washing machine?

PETER

I don't think so.

MOLLY

This is a true story. She was, like, 2 years old, and her mother had gone to take a shower, so she climbed up to look into the washing machine and she fell in and turned blue and her eyes were glassy.

PETER

Did she die?

MOLLY

No.

PETER

That was lucky.

MOLLY

That's like this guy who's a champion skier who skied off a natural little ski jump and landed head first in a snowbank and suffocated to death.

PETER

Sort of like that.

MOLLY

There was another guy.

PETER

This isn't going to be another story about death, is it?

MOLLY

No. There was a guy who died—I mean it starts out about death, but then it doesn't stay there. There was this guy who died but then he came back to life...

PETER

I think I've heard this story.

MOLLY

Wait. He came back to life and this is how he proved he had died. Wait a minute. Start it this way. There was this kid named Charan Varma from India who claimed he had been killed by British soldiers in 1857 during the Sepoy Rebellion. He said he had been shot twice in the chest, and slashed over and over with sabres after he

was dead—by British soldier (I don't know why)—and nobody believed the kid, so he led four archaeologists out to this grave where they dug up a mummified corpse that had the fragments of two bullets in the chest and markings on the rib and legs and arms consistent with stab wounds and sabre slashings. And this corpse had on the remains of a uniform worn by Sepoy soldiers.

[silence]

FETER

Well. So.

What did he learn from the experience?

MOLLY

Learn from it?

PETER

Has he learned anything from coming back to life?

FIGLLY

Well.

He forgives the British.

PETER

Unh-hunh.

Really, nobody knows whether he was telling the truth or he had already been out in the field, happened to dig up a body in a shallow grave, see the uniform, and make up the story.

MOLLY

Sure, anything is possible.

PETER

Yes, well, some things are more likely than others.

MOLLY

Sure. That's what makes this such an amazing story. This is the first time anyone has proved there is life after death.

PETER

You know, there are stories you shouldn't believe. For instance, did you hear about these pilots who were taxiing down the runway ready to take off, this was last December, and it was raining a little, and the co-pilot said to the pilot, you know I think the wings are icing up. And the pilot looked out the window...

MOLLY

How do you know this?

PETER

It was all recorded—this is a true story—and the pilot said, yes it looks like a little icing up, and he said something along the lines of did you see the Giants game on Saturday, and the co-pilot said something like what a runback, and are you going to see the Broncos play when we're in Denver and they went on, and the pilot said you know it looks like some heavy ice on the wings, maybe we should ask for a delay, and the co-pilot said he thought the Broncos were going to take the championship and the pilot said, not in my lifetime. Not in my lifetime. And the co-pilot said I'm worried about that icing up on the wings, and then they got clearance for takeoff, and they took off, and they got a few hundred feet into the air, and then they came down because of the ice, and a lot of people were killed including both the pilot and the co-pilot.

MOLLY

Jesus.

PETER

So, that's a story with a moral.

MOLLY Yeah.

PETER

It's not like a pointless story.

MOLLY

Well, I don't believe in dying anyway, really.

PETER

You mean you believe in an afterlife.

MOLLY

No.

PETER

Reincarnation.

MOLLY

No.

PETER

Well, what do you think has happened to all these people?

MOLLY

They died. I know that. I'm not a maniac. But that doesn't mean I believe in dying.

PETER

No.

MOLLY

I believe in living. You know, like, I've never been a religious person, and I never believed in God until recently when I was touched by God. In other words, I never believed in anything spiritual, really except having a good life and not hurting anyone. I always prayed to God, but just out of habit, and I never got anything from him anyway. But one morning I was in bed just thinking about my age, how long I've got left, and I thought I'm lost I'm totally lost, and I thought you know God help me. And all of a sudden—and I don't do drugs or anything—I lifted about two feet off my bed and moved like a clock hand all the way around my king-size bed. I mean I was in ecstasy. Unbelievable ecstasy. I couldn't believe it. I still don't believe it. It was such a feeling of floating—like having an orgasm 20,000 times for about 60 seconds. I thought, I must be imagining this. But I looked at my bed later, and the covers were not messed up. So I realized I had evidently gone out of my body.

PETER

That's not even necessarily rational.

MOLLY

Right.

[silence]

Neither is this. Like, the last election I went to the polls and stood in line for a couple

hours and when I got up there these people at a card table said well, you're not registered in this district. Not registered? Fuck, I've lived in this neighborhood for eight months, you know what I mean? I've been here longer than anyone except the Ukrainians. Plus, I'm a fucking American. So, I said, look, I know my fucking rights and I'm pulling a lever on that fucking machine or else I'm pulling your fucking arm out of its socket.

PETER

You said that?

MOLLY

That was good, hunh? So naturally they called the cops, and it turned into this big unpleasant scene, and I wind up in fucking jail for the night—that's what happened the last time I tried to vote. And you think, okay, what's the loss, cause she doesn't know a fucking thing anyway, but I'll tell you what I know: each man is an expert in the conditions of his own life. You know who said that? Jefferson or someone like that. You know, Lincoln. And I am a fucking expert in the conditions of my own life.

PETER

Is this relevant?

MOLLY

To what ?

PETER

To what we were talking about.

MOLLY

What were we talking about?

2.

A performance piece.

3.

A couple in bed.

KAREN

I had lunch with Kurt yesterday at City?

PETER

Yeah?

KAREN

You know Kurt?

PETER

No.

KAREN

He's putting the finishing touches on PIK ME UP, a club that's opening in a few nights, and we talked about a possible collaboration on a video, and we were sitting right next to David Steinberg who I used to open for in my first rock n' roll incarnation. And he's eating with Arlyne Rothenberg, who was his manager at the time, and who eventually became my manager when I decided to ditch the road and become just a song writer because it was all too much to handle. This was back in 1976, but at some point Arlyne...

PETER

God.

KAREN

decided I was too much to handle so she turned me over to Irving Azoff who I lasted with about two months and who became president of MCA Records, you know, I forget when. Do you know Irving Azoff?

PETER

No.

KAREN

My best Irving Azoff story is that when we decided not to work together anymore he wouldn't give me my demo tape back. I was completely broke and it was my only tape. So after a month of calling I dressed up as a cowgirl and my boy friend went as a gangster and we pelted Irving with water pistols as he walked into his office with Boz Scaggs, who he had just signed. So the next day I start writing with Mark Leonard, who co-wrote "Missing You," the John Waite song. He was in my first demo band. He was also in the Alan Thicke Sick of the Night show band. Do you know Jeff Stein?

PETER

No.

KAREN

Men screw you, you know. Women can't screw you. They can seduce you, but they can't screw you. Physiology is a fact. You have to have a cock to screw someone. Or, like Reagan, you know, when he was brought into the emergency room after Hinckley shot him, this friend of mine who works in the emergency room said, the standard procedure for a gunshot victim is you strip him down completely so you can trace where any bullets entered and any bullets exited, and so they stripped Reagan down, and they couldn't find his dick. I mean, it was so tiny, they had to call in a specialist to make sure he had one. So you could say he was compensating by screwing everyone because he didn't have a dick. But usually, if you don't have a dick you can't screw anyone. And I've often thought—these politicians, they all go around screwing people all the time—I'm not thinking politically now, although that, too, but personally screwing women all the time: the Kennedys, Gary Hart. I had this friend who worked in the White House who said Lyndon Johnson used to screw everyone, not just in his office but anywhere in the White House, in waiting rooms, in corners, standing up in closets. I don't think women do that. Of course, we haven't had a woman president. But, for instance, Margaret Thatcher, I don't think Margaret Thatcher screws people in closets.

You don't know Jeff?

PETER

I don't follow politics, you know.

KAREN

This isn't politics, this is just, you know, we're friends.

PETER

Well, you know, I like Louis XVI.

KAREN

His politics?

PETER

Yeah, well, his style.

KAREN

Unh-hunh.

PETER

And then, you know, in Sweden, the stuff of King Gustav III—most people don't know it, but they didn't seem to make one mistake. The linens are nice. The mattresses are nice, striped with mattress ticking. The first time I went into this house of the aunts of Louis XVI in Paris, there were eight of us for lunch. We sat in that dining room with the silver, all from Catherine the Great, and we had a footman behind each chair. Then in the salon I saw "MA" embroidered on the brocade on the Louis XVI chairs; and I said, "Why do they say 'MA'?" And this guy Arturo was happy I'd asked because he could tell me that it was Marie Antoinette's crest. So I was a great favorite immediately—not because of being naive but just because I'd say whatever came into my mind.

KAREN

Sure. And you like history.

PETER

I was like that when I was a kid. One night after my parents took me to see the movie *Cleopatra* I got together with some of my friends. We were about nine years old. We all wore towels wrapped around our heads. The kids in the neighborhood were all the slaves and I, of course, was Cleopatra. We erected statues in the living room and I draped myself in the chiffon curtains as an outfit. It was very Egyptian. When I was in the fifth grade I would tweeze my eyebrows, dye my hair, apply Clearasil, I mean really cake it on all over my eye lids. You know, I was looking at the fashion magazines, and I wanted to look like Twiggy. I bleached my hair, but I

couldn't do it right, so it was dyed in spots. My uniform consisted of stove piped bell bottoms, a purple sweater and a bow tie. I always was who I was and did what I did. Also in high school the collegiate look was in and I tried to work that look, but instead I just looked like a Lesbian trying to be collegiate.

KAREN

Unh-hunh.

[Silence.]

So, okay, anyway, the next night, Jim and I go to a party at Rusty Lemorande's house in the hills. Pee Wee Herman is there, Randal Kleiser, who directed Flight of the Navigator and a bevy of teenage beauties, and Greg Gorman, Herb Ritts, Pristine Condition, Shooter Hill, Catherine Oxenburg. Great view. Great food. And just a great spot for cosmetically perfect hairdos, you know, I'm just very glad this place exists.

PETER

I'd love to work with Richard Chamberlain.

KAREN

In 1979 Klaus and I met David Bowie at the Mudd Club, and he said he liked how we looked and he asked us to perform with him on Saturday Night Live.

PETER

How did you look?

KAREN

We were wearing padded Thierry Mugler dresses. I like my body. I think probably my shape will never go out of fashion. I love the way I look. You know I think shapes will come and go, but I think people will always want someone like me.

PETER

I'd like to do a male Mae West someday called Mae West of the Mounties. He'd have huge bulging arms, a huge crotch, big thighs, a blonde wig, huge cheekbones, kind of a mixture of Dudley Dooright and Mae West. And then I'd say, if my right leg was Christmas and my left leg was New Year's Eve, why don't you come between the Holidays and visit.

[She screams in ecstasy.]

4.

A performance piece.

5.

A couple in bed.

DAVID

In Africa there are people I've heard of who have pulled down their lower lips so far, you know...

KAREN

Is this in India?

DAVID

No, Africa.

KAREN

Because I didn't think this sounds like India.

DAVID

No, listen to me. Africa. I'm talking about Africa. Nobody ever heard of this in India. These are people who have gotten their lower lips so long that the only way they can eat is by walking backwards over their food until their lower lips get to the right position, and then they have a friend sort of shovel it up over their lower lip.

KAREN

Who told you this?

DAVID

I saw it on television. It was this program about these people in Afghanistan.

KAREN

I don't think this is new, you know, I don't know why this is on television, because I think people have known this for a long time.

DAVID

I thought, you know, it was an incredible coincidence.

KAREN

How is it a coincidence?

DAVID

Well, you know it's a coincidence.

[Silence.]

KAREN

Did you see that program where they discovered these people whose ears; were so long that they didn't need clothes and they wrapped themselves up in their ears when it got cold?

DAVID

Where is this?

KAREN

Some of them have their heads in their chests. In Melbourne, Australia.

DAVID

I didn't see that.

KAREN

You know where the car hookers hang out down Second Avenue or whatever it is below Houston Street?

DAVID

Yeah.

KAREN

Well, I went into that gas station there during this terrible thunderstorm, I drove in near the pumps and directly into what I thought was a huge puddle but turned out

to be a deep pit. The car sank fast, and I had a hard time getting out through the window on the driver's side. There were these two gas station attendants there watching me. Neither one of them made a move to help me out. And, when I got out on my own at last, neither of them was sympathetic either. One of them said, well, that's it for your car. But it wasn't. A few minutes later the three of us looked at the other side of the puddle, and there was the car. It had emerged by itself and was parked just across the water. It was a miracle.

DAVID

No, I dreamed that.

KAREN

What?

DAVID

What you just said. That was a thing that occurred to me in a dream.

KAREN

No, this is my story.

DAVID

Well, I mean, you can have it if you want it, you're welcome to it, but in actual fact it is my event that occurred to me.

KAREN

Where did I hear about it, then?

DAVID

How would I know?

KAREN

Where do you think I heard about it?

DAVID

I wouldn't have any idea.

(Silence.)

KAREN

Often I hear something and I remember it and I think it happened to me.

DAVID

Or it was your idea.

KAREN

Right. Like I'll see it on television maybe. One time I saw Stephen Gould on television. Is it Stephen Gould?

DAVID

Who?

KAREN

The biologist you sometimes see on television.

DAVID

I don't know.

KAREN

Anyway I thought I had this conversation with him in my living room.

DAVID

That happens to everyone.

I was with this woman named Lisa once, and she asked me if I'd like to have dinner, and I said sure. She had cooked spaghetti in the bathtub and she said, why don't you get in first? And I thought: oh, get into the tub, well: sure. And so I did. I got in and she handed me this soup spoon and I tasted the broth, it was very delicate and—lucid. I thought, well, I felt awkward, you know, thinking: there's something not quite correct about this, and I was not sure about the meal: there was very little spaghetti in the tub; it was filled with the clear broth and a few strands of spaghetti and some few herbs from her garden, but after a few minutes I relaxed, and she let the towel fall to the tile floor and joined me in the tub.

KAREN

I went to this performance once, I was late, most of the audience had already arrived and they were sitting in folding chairs that had been set out three deep around three of the four walls.

DAVID

You mean, like the chairs were facing the fourth wall.

KAREN

Right. There were about fifty people there, and the room was empty, painted white. I mean there was no performer in the space where the audience wasn't sitting. And I was expecting some kind of performance art.

DAVID

Right.

KAREN

But I didn't know exactly what it would be. And pretty soon this man in the front row began to speak, a short, stocky man, an Irishman, he looked like a cab driver or a carpenter, someone who worked with his hands, he was reading from his autobiography, and he was really good, you know he wrote with real force and— grace.

DAVID

Right.

KAREN

And I was really getting into it, thinking, gee, he writes practically as well as Joyce, you know.

DAVID

James Joyce

KAREN

Right.

DAVID

As well as James Joyce.

KAREN

Well, almost, you know, only he's writing about numerology, when anyway someone behind me began to whisper, and I turned around to shush them, and it was this man whispering to the young woman who was with him, and she was laughing and smiling and they were carrying on a whole conversation.

DAVID

People do that all the time.

KAREN

Yeah, well, anyway, it made me furious, and then while I was trying to get them to be quiet I heard someone over to my left near the wall talking—not whispering, but talking entirely out loud, and I just lost my head.

DAVID

I don't blame you.

KAREN

These people make me so fucking mad. I stood up and I shouted at them: why don't you shut up. And the whispering man behind me told me to sit down, so I said something to him, I don't remember what it was, something I was trying to have a tone of voice that showed some respect for the performer, and then these people behind the whisperer began to talk to each other, about me I guess, and then these two people on the other side of the room started talking out loud, and I was still trying to listen to the Irishman, but I could hardly hear what he was saying, and I was completely enraged, and everyone was talking all over the room, and the Irishman persisted with complete wonderful calm for about ten minutes—he was completely undisturbed by the whole thing and then, when he finished, he just neatened up his papers, put them into a manila envelope, took off his silver-rimmed bifocals, and got up to leave, and I couldn't tell whether he had come to the end of his piece or just given up because of the distractions, but all these people who I guess knew him came over to congratulate him and I sort of wandered toward the door to leave and sort of stopped there by the door where there was a table with some programs on it, and because I had been late in arriving I hadn't gotten a program, so I picked one up, and I saw that the performance had been called PATTERNS OF INTERFERENCE, and so I realized: I was part of the act!

DAVID

I don't get it.

KAREN

You don't get what?

DAVID

I don't get why it was called PATTERNS OF INTERFERENCE.

KAREN

No, because, you see, it was all planned, or anticipated, and incorporated into the conception of the piece, so that even what I said was already thought of even before I said it.

DAVID

I get that.

KAREN

Then what don't you get?

DAVID

I just don't get why it was called PATTERNS OF INTERFERENCE.

KAREN

You mean you don't like the title?

DAVID

No, I mean I don't get what it means. I mean, I know, since it is a product of human intelligence or culture it must mean something even if the Irishman didn't know what it meant or what it means is unintentional or that it means something about the collective consciousness even though the Irishman doesn't get it but is just the unknowing medium through whom the culture speaks, you know, but I don't get it.

[Long silence.]

KAREN

No. Neither do I.

Do you know Grace Paley?

DAVID

Well, I know who she is.

KAREN

She picked up the phone—this was what I heard anyway—and said hello and this voice said, hello, this is Linda Ronstadt and Grace Paley said: who is this really?

6.

A performance piece.

Music.

THE END.

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