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Jesus

by CHARLES L. MEE

SALOME

I had a friend:

when she first met her husband
he was preoccupied with young girls.

All the time.

Paul. His name was Paul.

Looking at pictures of them.

Looking at them on the street.

To her it seemed strange.

And, then, the first time she helped him get a young girl into the car
to take her home,

she was,

my friend was,

well,

quivering,

a knot in her stomach,

that sick excited sensation.

After that it was easy.

I don't mean she doesn't still get excited,

but it was never again like the first time.

The first time is always different, with everything.

I mean,

obviously.

You might say
I'd never do such a thing
how do you know?
you say: because that's not the kind of person I am
But you don't know.
Because one day you will do something
and then you will find out what sort of person you are.

[she smiles]

You see a woman when she is grown up
you see how she has turned out
and you think then you could say, oh, right
this was inevitable
the way she grew up
you could tell how she would turn out
this is the person she would be
because Freud bla bla bla
and the social dynamics
her background bla bla
hindsight is so good
all the theories of hindsight are foolproof
but you don't know
you never know—
she could be a hundred people
before she's through with her life
that's how it is these days

As a child
I thought about numbers a lot.
First there was the question
could a woman have several husbands all at the same time
or only one after the other?
And then, as the years went by,
I thought about how many children a woman might have.
And then,
a few weeks after I lost my virginity

I had group sex.
There were five of us altogether,
three boys and two girls.

[she stops and smiles —
a bright, engaging, innocent smile]

We were finishing our lunch in a garden
on a hill above Lyon.
It was in June or July
it was hot
and somebody suggested that we take off all our clothes
and jump into the pond.
I could hear Andre saying
his girlfriend would be with us in just a minute
but his voice sounded a little muffled
because I already had my T-shirt over my head
and then, in the end,
no one went in the water.

Andre fucked me first
quite slowly and calmly
which was his way.
And then Ringo came and took his place on top of me.
Ringo's body was different from Andre's
and I liked it better.
Ringo was taller, wiry,
he was one of those men who can isolate
the action of his pelvis from the rest of his body,
so that he could thrust without smothering a woman,
supporting his torso with his arms.

you look at history
not to know how things are going to be
and not for the rules of how things have to be
but to tell you that
the way things are is not the way they always have been
or the only way they can be

and now
looking back
whatever there has been
it's all available to us now
to pick and choose
have one of these and one of those
and make a life of that

I won't say how many shoes I've got
but I have no regrets about any of them.
In fact, there are some shoes I love so much
that I'll go out and buy double colors.
Because if it's like a great red shoe that's fabulous for the summer
and I love it
and it's the right color red
then I've got to have two—
because I know I'll live in the shoe
and it will get destroyed
and I'll need a new one.

This guy said to me one time
I can't pin you down
like a butterfly, you mean?
I don't know he said
well, I said,
I don't think I want to be pinned down.

[she smiles]

One time I was offered to my masters
I was going to be whipped in that humiliating position—
arms and legs spread—
and I was perspiring
my body was taut with the pain
but pain turning into pleasure
and then when Pierre began to put the pincers on my breasts
well that always makes me suffer a great deal
and I thought I couldn't endure it
but when I was suspended by the handcuffs

and I felt the pain in my thighs
and I couldn't turn my head to see anyone in the room
and Fiona put something on me
I don't know what it was
an electric drill and miniaspirator of some kind
while she was touching me with such a soft hand
and the sugar-sweet smell of her perfume filled my nostrils
so that it was very sweet and unbearable at the same time
this dizzying shiver shot through me
and I was afraid I was going to piss myself with pleasure
like a stark beginner
my thighs were trembling
I was soaked
I was soaked
so that I thought for a moment that the juices ran as far as my thighs

There was a time I thought after the first time
never again
OK
never again.
What you have done once is not your fate
not something you have to do over and over again
and so you say
never again

and then you do it again.

[ANOTHER WOMAN SITS AT THE PIANO
PLAYS A LOVE SONG AND
SINGS

For example,
if it's possible to acquire the rights,
it might be the song Yesterday:

Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday

Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday
Yesterday

Or something else,
and, while she sings,
a woman in bikini underwear runs in,
looking lost, turns around and around
runs out
and runs back in, looking for someone (?) and runs out again
and, when she comes toward the end of her song
several people wander in,
and set up things for a picnic—
several lawn chairs, a picnic blanket and picnic basket,
and they open a few beers]

ANNA

This friend of mine met her husband through a newspaper ad?

SUSANNAH

Right.

ANNA

And so now he's beating her up,

SUSANNAH

Right.

ANNA

and threatening he'll commit suicide if she leaves.

SUSANNAH

Sure.

EMILY

Who's that put herself in a bag full of shit?

SUSANNAH

Do I know this?

EMILY

Of course you do. Because of her stepfather.

ANNA

Right.

These people,

you know,

where I come from they still arrange marriages.

SUSANNAH

Can you believe it?

ANNA

I wouldn't mind it.

SUSANNAH

You say so.

ANNA

I wouldn't.

They say you marry for love, and then it's nothing but trouble.

SUSANNAH

It would be nice to have it settled.

ANNA

And just live with it.

EMILY

Have your family looking out for you.

SUSANNAH

Oh, sure.

(Sarcastically.)

Then you could just relax and live your life.

(They all laugh.)

ANNA

For me, I'm turned down 70% of the time I want sex now. It's been five years since I had as much sex as I want and I keep trying to adjust to less sex. Doing porno films really helps satisfy my appetite.

Right after I left my husband and was getting less sex than I wanted, I used to masturbate for 5 minutes in the morning when I woke up. Soon, I was doing it for 2 hours.

Same thing at night, soon masturbating for 4 hours before going to sleep.

I'm not saying this to brag, and I'm not making it up.

I had constantly repeating orgasms, one after the other. I was a slave to my orgasms. It took 6 hours a day out of my life that I could be doing other things. One time, I was playing with myself so much it was interfering with a job I had. My boyfriend pulled the vibrator cord out of the wall and said "You gotta get out of bed." I felt ashamed I was so attached to my body I would do something so awful. I never had that urge to masturbate when I was living with my husband, who was fucking me all the time.

So when I started doing films, that urge started to curb after 6 months. Now I hardly ever masturbate more than an hour. Usually I'm very happy with a half hour. I try to explain to my boyfriends that, for me, masturbation is not the same as cock sex. And oral sex is not the same as vaginal-cock sex or masturbation.

It's like the difference between beef and ham.

I get a different satisfaction from holding a person I love next to me than holding a person who is just an acquaintance. Different dildos and vibrators feel differently. So I get a different feeling when I have a vibrator up my vagina and somebody's fucking me in the ass, or if I have a vibrator in my ass and somebody's manipulating my clitoris with his finger. Even the orgasms are different for me.

Once I've masturbated I may stop at that, or I may feel like having something else next. I may want to go on to another thing. Or I may want to do only one thing for 6 months.

[a couple guys,
oblivious to the women who were just speaking,
have a conversation between themselves]

BOBBY

I don't know.

What do you think of the soaps?

EDMUND

What?

BOBBY

The soaps.

EDMUND

You mean the daytimes?

BOBBY

Right.

EDMUND

They're OK.

BOBBY

I think they're wonderful. I think the clothes could be better, and they could use some comic relief, you know, but otherwise I think they're wonderful. Although, of

course, I guess they could use some more fantasy. You know. In times like these, we need a little more "I wanna be," and not so much "I am."

EDMUND
Unh-hunh.

BOBBY
I think it's incredible how much excellence you see in the scenes.

EDMUND
Unh-hunh.

BOBBY
Although I think they could have more minority representation.
And I think they should move faster. You know, they should have shorter stories—beginning, middle, end, like that, and not just have the same story go on for a year or something. I mean they get lost in the past, they don't quite catch up with the times. You know, I like to see some stuff going on, I don't just want to watch my next door neighbors.

Do you think they're too believable?

EDMUND
No.

PHIL
Yes, I do. That's what I would say.

BOBBY
I'm a little tired of seeing spouses coming back from the dead all the time and plots with missing babies. I think that's a little too obvious.

EDMUND
To me, my only complaint would be that most shows are overly lit.

BOBBY
Too bright.

EDMUND

Exactly.

BOBBY

There was a guy checked in here once, were you on the floor then?, who had this old shoebox full of female genitalia. Did you see that? He had nine vulvas. This is a true story. Most were dried and shriveled, though one had been sort of daubed with silver paint and trimmed with a red ribbon. Another one, the one on top, seemed really fresh. He had part of the mons veneris with the vagina and anus attached. And when you looked real close you could see little crystals on it, he had sprinkled it with crystals of salt.

Another box, he had four noses, human noses, and there was a Quaker Oats box with scraps of human head integument.

And several pairs of leggings he had made, and a vest that he had made from the torso of a woman, tanned like leather, with a string on it so you could pull it up and wear it, breasts and all.

And masks that he had made by peeling the faces from the skulls of different women. Of course they had no eyes, just holes where the eyes had been. But the hair was still attached to the scalps. A few were all dried out, but some of them had been treated with oil, to keep the skin smooth and lifelike, and some had lipstick on their lips. If you had known them, and you had seen their masks, you would have recognized them.

JASON

Of course, you get into an area like this
it's hard to judge.

[A very quiet, gentle conversation follows.]

I mean:
your daughter was, how old,
nine?

JIM

How do you mean?

JASON

When you had incest with your daughter.

JIM

Three.

JASON

She was three?

JIM

From the time she was three
until she was ten.

JASON

From the time she was three?

Is this true?

Did I know this?

Did everyone know this?

JIM

And, well, it started when she was three.

I was in the bedroom and I was standing in my shorts and a T-shirt,
and she walked up to me and she pulled the edge of my
my shorts,

and I just had this overwhelming desire to have sex with her.

And....

JASON

And this is your daughter.

She is three years old.

Whatever.

And,

and,

but wouldn't your first instinct be to just move away and say,
"geez."

JIM

It was.

It was.

But it, it, I, I guess my, my instincts to,
to move against this, to—to guard against that,
to not do that
were just not strong enough.
I had a determination not to
but that,
you know.

JASON

How did you feel?

JIM

Like a piece of garbage.

Basically.

[silence]

JASON

And then
when did you do it again?

JIM

I

it was probably a few weeks later.

JASON

And this kept going on when she was four?

JIM

Right.

JASON

And did she ever tell her mom?

JIM

Well, yes, she did.
When she was nine.

JASON

When she was nine.
And what did your wife say?

JIM

She, uh, she confronted me on it.
And—and I made promises that—

JASON

Had you thought about
how that moment would be before it happened?

JIM

Oh, sure.
I'd, you know, had visions of the police pulling up
and hauling me off.

JASON

Did you love your daughter?

JIM

Yes, I—
I love her now.

JASON

You love her now?

JIM

Of course, yes,
I do.
If—
if I answered your question in the negative,
then I would be in denial,
and I would be in a more dangerous place than I am by saying,
"Yes, I am."

And, in being aware of that
and having the tools that I have gained in therapy
there are strategies I have for now —
for dealing with that that I did not have before.
There's learning strategies to deal with that.

Sometimes a moment will come in a child's life
when you will realize:
oh, this child loves me;
she
she's beginning to know me,
to recognize me,
to smile every time I come near her;
when I sing songs to her in my terrible voice
she loves to listen to them;
she doesn't cry or pucker up her face when I kiss her;
she stopped crying when I picked her up.
If anything were to threaten her
I would trade my life for hers.

JASON

Sometimes you think,
oh,
men's lives.

JIM

Right.

JASON

But then you think:
well, I mean: women's lives, too.

[Now,
while we hear Anthony and the Johnsons sing Rapture,

a legless man slowly drags himself through
from one side of the stage to the other
a drunk straddling a beer keg on a wheeled platform is wheeled through —
holding a spit that contains bits of pig, including the pig's head

a dead sheep carcass is dragged through
a coffin is carried through with a shroud-wrapped corpse in it
a wheelbarrow full of skulls comes through
demons with the heads of birds and other animals come through?
a giant fish head with a human leg sticking up out of its mouth is wheeled
through on a platform
the blind lead the blind from one side to the other]

SONG:

Rapture
Eyes are falling
Lips are falling
Hair is falling to the ground
Slowly, softly
Falling, falling
Down in silence to the ground
All the world is falling, falling
All the blue
From me and you
Teardrops falling to the ground
Teardrops
I'm talkin' 'bout your
teardrops
For instance
Oh my mama
She's been falling
Falling down for quite some time
And oh my papa
He's been falling
Falling down for quite some time
Oh my friends
I've watched them falling
Falling softly to the ground
Like the leaves
The Leaves are falling
Down in silence to the ground
Is this the rapture
Is this the rapture
Why don't you tell me

Is this the rapture
Is this the rapture
Our father who art in heaven
For the kingdom, the power, the glory, yours
Now and forever

JIM

In the baths,
How thin I look!
What a funny little old man I have suddenly become.
I have leaped from forty-five to eighty-five.
Forty years that have dropped out of my life.

The first moves of an illness that is sounding me out,
choosing its ground.
One moment it's my eyes,

floating specks,
double vision;

then objects appear cut in two.

Every evening
a painful spasm in the ribs.

Sometimes, on the sole of the foot,

an incision,

a thin one, hair thin.

Rats gnawing at the toes with very sharp teeth.

A burning feeling in the eyes.

A heightened awareness of sound:
the noise of the shovel

tongs near the hearth

the screech of doorbells

a spider's web on which work begins at four in the morning.

Great flames of pain furrowing the body,
cutting it to pieces
lighting it up.

At the baths, my cabin neighbors:
A little Spaniard, a Russian general.
Thin bodies, feverish looks, narrow shoulders.
Invalids' wheel chairs pulled about.
Steam cabinets.
Mr. B., sometimes in the wheeled chair,
Plump, white skin, healthy appearance;
At other times, he has to be carried, held up, shuffling along.
Noises from the showers, deep-sounding voices....
What sadness all this gives me,
This physical life that I can no longer lead.
Poor birds of the night,
Beating their wings against the walls,
With open eyes that cannot see....

And to see my neighbors eat is appalling;
Mouths without teeth,
Affected gums,
The toothpicks in the decayed molars,
And those who eat on only one side
and roll about what they have in their mouths,
And those who chew their cud,
And the gnawers.
All those jaws functioning,
Those gluttonous and haggard eyes
never raised from their plates,
Those furious glances at the dish slow in coming.
And the painful digestions,
The two toilets at the end of the corridor,
Side by side,
So that one can hear all the groans of constipation

Or the rich splash and the rustling of the paper.
Horror, oh, the horror of living.

Silhouettes of old men on crutches
along the country roads between the high hedges.
The mathematics professor who has the same illness as I.
I think of him,
I can see him pushing his feet along,
One after the other,
Pretty well done in and staggering;
Like walking on ice.
I pity him.
The maids say he urinates in bed.

Pain, like grief, like life itself,
will take the world apart.
Until, finally,
as everyone comes at last to see on their deathbeds,
a life is not so much a narrative
with a beginning and a middle and an end
as it is a constellation of vivid moments.

Clever
the way death reaps and gathers its harvests.

But what somber harvests.
Whole generations don't fall at once;
That would be too sad, too visible.
But bit by bit.
The meadow is attacked on several sides at the same time.
One day, one will go;
The other, some time after;

One must reflect, glance about oneself,
to notice the empty spaces,
the vast contemporary killing.

PHIL

Or you could say, for example,
I did love her,
I did love her,
and I knew she loved me,
even though she was in a sense you know
anorexic and blonde,
that kind of girl,
with creamy skin, pure that kind of thing
so that in the bedroom on her mattress in the dark,
the candles burning out one by one,
listening to music and stone drunk,
you know and passed out,
wasted, really, face it,
I couldn't wait,
I couldn't wait to get back to my own place
so I finished her off fast,
you know, she's chewing my lips and panting and her hair is all wet
I'm thinking this is a witch, this is a witch,
I hate these fucking people with their faces all twisted
like they've gone totally insane
you find yourself hacking at them
hacking at them with the butt of your hand,
she says to me, you're seeing someone else,
I said I am not, this is a fucking lie, that's not true at all,
she says swear it,
I said I do,
she said you're fucking lying you can't use the bathroom,
and it's dark, it's freezing out the fucking car won't start,
the cigarette lighter is broken
that's when I slam the butt of my hand into the dashboard
I say goddam you fucker goddam you fucker
and she reaches over and touches my leg,
that was her mistake,
I saw it, just my forearm
I saw it moving through the air
but it was too late then,
so I pushed her out behind the diner with the garbage cans,
it seemed a good place at the time.

EDMUND

The people I'm mourning the loss of?

So: Kitty.

Kitty had to endure my going to jail twice
and being embarrassed in front of her parents.

Amanda I murdered because her mother stood between us.

BOBBY

Okay, okay, Edmund,
what do you mean, you murdered your daughter?

EDMUND

OK, it seems to me that there's a great deal of risk to this;
my email can be traced.

I've been wide open about my identity.

But somehow I've left the impression
that I'm flailing myself

for some sort of weird self-gratification.

But when I talk about killing my daughter,
there's no imaginative subcompotent.

I suffered for years

trying to get custody of her after her mother divorced me.

When I did,

I still had to deal with her mother's constant attempts to take her back.

I had the upper hand;

in fact, her mother gave up her summer custody
just before I killed Amanda.

But I always felt that I was not in complete control.

My mother told me that I was too hard on her,
that I expected too much from her.

When I brought her home from her mother's,

I abandoned the rules I had set and let her do whatever she wanted.

In fact, my mother and grandmother visited the next day

and she forgot that she was supposed to get dressed before receiving visitors.

It was really very cute when she woke up

and started to walk into our living room, buck-naked.

I loved her for her willingness to be fun in simple ways.

I would do anything to have her back;

but the conflict was tearing me apart,
and the next night I let her watch the videos she loved all evening,
and when she was asleep I got wickedly drunk,
and set our house on fire,
and went to bed,
and listened to her scream twice,
and climbed out the window
and set about putting on a show of shock, surprise, and grief
to remove culpability from myself.

Part of that show was climbing in her window
and grabbing her pajamas,
then hearing her breathe
and dropping her where she was so she could die
and rid me of her mother's interferences.
Hearing her wheeze in the smoke which I could barely stand,
looking at her bedroom door burning,
these are things I can't forget.

SALOME

At one of the clubs
my usual place was in one of the back rooms
lying on a table
which was one of the most comfortable positions I know
my cunt on a level with the man's genitals
as he stands facing the table
my vulva well opened
and the man in exactly the right place to thrust straight ahead
and deeply
and not having to stop
it makes for a very precise fuck
and very vigorous
and other guys standing around the table
a lot of hands running over my body
and me reaching out and taking hold of cocks
on all sides
turning my head from left to right to suck
while other cocks rammed into me,
twenty guys could take turns during an evening

and sometimes they were so violent
I had to hold on to the ends of the table with both hands
and for a long time I had the scar of a little gash
above my coccyx
where the base of my spine had rubbed against the rough wood.

[a moment's pause]

Society has looked down on stripping
as the refuge for dumb beauties for many years.
But let's look at that:
being born genuinely stupid is no one's fault
any more than being born crippled or deformed.
Stripping is one of the very few ways
that these women can truly empower themselves
and command that kind of income,
and there's nothing they can do about that.
Does that mean that they should simply resign themselves to their fate
and live in some sort of caste system
in which those born with less advantage
may not transcend their station in life?
Just because some women dance because
they have no other skills
doesn't mean that they hate being there.

Women want to be strippers
for the same reason people take any job.
When you meet a telemarketer,
even though it takes very little talent or education
it's very rare to assume that she has that job because
she's not able to get another one,
to wonder what she does in her spare time,
or to assume that telemarketing is a lifestyle instead of a job.
Strippers do it because they like the money —
who doesn't want to be paid well?
Some strippers do it because they like the attention —
is that bad?

Humans are social creatures
who learn through praise and validation.
Wanting and enjoying attention isn't necessarily unhealthy.

The blue-collar worker is the backbone of our society,
Society needs the services and products they provide, whether the workers
themselves dream of something better or not. Many of them love their jobs, too —
that doesn't change that quite a few of them
aren't qualified to do much else.
There's no shame in that.

Not that this is why I did it.
Not that I am saying that.
Luckily, that was never my reason.
I was not forced into it in that way.
It was my choice.

[she picks up a magazine,
turns some pages to the back of the magazine
and reads]

Very Pretty, Stylish, Gay White Female-40-something
seeking pretty, white, sweet, intelligent,
feminine wife, 35-45
I am a hopeless romantic
very fit, socially outgoing,
yet shy at other times.
I am mentally strong
yet emotionally tender.
I wear dresses/high heels by day
and jeans/sneakers at night.
I love excitement and spontaneity
yet balance and security.
I am financially stable and I do not look gay—
neither should you.
I am looking for a woman capable of emotional intimacy
and committed to a partnership—
and not just after 5 PM.
I have flexible working hours

and believe weekdays were made for play, not just work.
If you have worked on your relationship skills
and you are what I am looking for,
be prepared to meet a woman
with a generous heart, quick mind, good sense of humor
and lots of integrity.

[she looks up from the magazine,
thinks for a moment
and then says]

I could do that.

[she returns to the magazine
and reads]

Distinguished-Looking, Successful Man-
Company president, grey hair, tall,
sense of humor.

Two residences. Variety of interests
including music, horses, sailing, etc.
and just "hanging out."

Interested in meeting woman in her 30s or early 40s,
to share good times and friendship.

[she looks up from the magazine,
thinks for a moment
and then says]

I could do that.

[she returns to the magazine
and reads]

Warm, Loving, Happy
Accomplished Professional—
very youthful, active, 55
fit, fun, full of life and love
bright, kind, sensitive,

communicative and involved,
seeks fine-valued, accomplished soul mate
to share love, laughter, family, and friends.

[she looks up from the magazine,
thinks for a moment
and then says]

I could do that.

[Music.

A woman puts a soft cello case over her back
so she looks like a cockroach
and does a cockroach dance on the floor

a clown comes in
gets down on his hands and knees
and barks at a dog

a woman lifts her dress up above her head
hiding her upper body entirely
exposing herself from the waist down
and takes a long, slow exit.

This is a place where new texts can be inserted into the piece-
texts taken from whatever current event
or political situation
or instance of priests molesting children
is in the news when the piece is being put on stage.

For example:

I had a hiding in the boot room,
you had to take your shirt off,
you were completely naked and he...Brother Jerome...
beat me with a strap and a hurley stick
on the behind and the legs and that.

I was beaten up quite a few times for not making the bed right,
I had to go to the boot room.
We used have long night shirts then you know, he...
Brother Jerome...dragged it off me, naked and whop,
he knocked hell out of me,
he knocked the shit out of me...
he hit with a leather strap with coins in it.
One Brother...he used a tire he did, a bicycle tire,
it used to wrap around your arm.
That was for wiping my nose in my sleeve,
he didn't like that,
it "wasn't a nice thing" he said.

One new lad came and he was covering himself getting dressed.
This Brother decided he was going to make a man out of him,
so he pulled off his clothes.
The young fella started crying
and Brother Alexander hung him out the window
by the 2 legs,
we all saw it.
You were always in fear of that sort of thing.
Different Brothers did different things.
I remember another boy who would not cry.
I remember one day he got 50 slaps on one hand
and then 50 on the other
and then another 50.
This Brother got so mad that he wouldn't not cry.
Brother Anthony kicked the legs from under him
and kicked him to the ground
and kicked him until he went unconscious.
He was just lying there with his eyes staring up to the sky.

One night I was lying in bed and I was woke up by Brother Nicholas
he said "I'm not going to harm you or anything, don't be afraid".
At that time I thought he just wanted to chat,
I thought it was a normal thing.
The next thing he sat on my bed,
he said "don't be afraid, I'm not going to hit you".
The next thing he took hold of my hand,

put my hand on his privates,
I took my hand away and with that he slapped me,
he slapped me quite a few times
and I was crying and he left.
He came back later,
he opened his trousers
and took my hand and put it on his privates,
out of total fear I obeyed.
He instructed me in what to do
and that amounted to masturbation
and that continued over the time I was there.

One particular morning Brother James put me up against the wall
he started flogging me with the leather strap.
This particular session I lost all control and soiled myself,
he took me by the ear straight out,
around to the showers.
He wanted me to strip off and get into the shower,
the water was freezing
I was crouched down in the corner,
he grabbed me by the hair into the cubicle,
dragged me up off the floor,
on the lats you know, lats for the seats
and he buggered me again, and told me to shut up,
I was screaming,
I was in sheer pain you know.
He had done it before in my bed and he made me bleed,
he tore the skin you know.
It could be once a week
and then he mightn't come near you for a month.
It lasted for all the years I was there.

There was a visiting priest,
Father Theobald
he used to come in holiday time and say Mass.
I had the job of polishing the sacristy,
I had to peep in to see if he was gone.
He called me in.
He was a tall man, he called me over,

I had to kneel next to him,
the next thing I could feel his hand up under my underwear.
I nearly died,
I thought "Jesus what will I do?"
I couldn't tell anyone.
They were Gods,
the priests were God,
no one would believe you.
I was about 11.]

SALOME

Then there was this girl
call her Leslie
who was really,
let's face it,
a troubled teenager
with a very independent personality
ignoring her curfews,
engaging in promiscuous sex,
skipping school
shoplifting.
So one night she went out for the evening
and came home way after her curfew
and her parents had just locked her out of the house
so what was she to do?
And then it so happened
that, when she was wandering around the neighborhood
she just, like, saw the lights on in Paul's house
and so he took her in
and he videotaped her
naked and blindfolded
and then Karla woke up
and he told her to make love to Leslie, too,
and he videotaped them together
and then he did some rough things
while Karla held the camera
these things happen all the time.

And so this young girl Jane
just idolized Paul's wife
I will call her Paul's wife
so that
when Paul's wife invited Jane over to dinner
Jane was thrilled
and Paul's wife gave her lots of sweet drinks
laced with Halcion
and when Paul came home
and found this gift waiting for him
he was just very pleased
and so they undressed Jane
and Paul videotaped his wife
as she made love to the sleeping girl
and then Paul had sex with her
a sort of brutal kind of anal sex
but Jane never woke up
because of the Halcion
and then Paul's wife was left to clean the blood off the girl
and put her to bed for the night
but anyway the next morning
Jane who was really sick to her stomach
and really sore
still she had no idea what had happened to her.

But this is all in the past
all this.
We live in the suburbs now.
Usually
now
I go from day to day
thinking of what I do
of the clothes I wear
of where I am living
whether I want to live in the city or the country
thinking of my friends
and when we will see each other
what plans we might make to get together
the bookshop I want to go to

the book I want to pick up there
and of the little basket I might buy to keep ribbon in
I think of a room in a little hotel in Provence
where I once stayed
with its faded yellow walls
and the shutters opening out onto the interior courtyard
the white arum lilies, purple irises,
a hundred little tulips with pointed cups,
and pittosporums whose scent paralyzes the will
this is why the world exists
so that we might enjoy it
and these men drift in and out of this world
and sometimes one of them seems a natural part of my life

[One woman's harsh almost screaming singing
dominates the room
and people stop singing and start to leave one by one
going toward the margins
several leave entirely, a few are left
the last guy tries to stop her
and she kicks the shit out of him
gets him down on the ground
pounding and kicking him
while she finishes the song
and leaves.
And, after a moment, the beaten man gets back up
and leaves, stumbling in pain.]

JIM

Now

it's impossible for me to go down a staircase without a handrail,
Or to walk on waxed floors.
At times I lose the feeling of a whole part of my being—
The lower part;
My legs get fuddled.

My hands persist in curling up in the morning on the sheet,
Like dead leaves, without sap.

From time to time, I have a memory of my active life,
Of happy times.
For instance, the coral fishermen,
in the evening,
among the rocks.

What happened to the summer days
we went to the seashore
and rowed out onto the water in an old skiff to swim
stood up in the boat naked and shouting
tied rags around our heads like turbans
and cooked turbot on the beach
I saw you
when you wore the softest cotton nothing of a nightgown
lying amid tousled sheets
your sweet, sweet shoulder.

Xavier Aubryet has died.
At the end his hands were shriveled up but still useful.
He was blind at the end.
He died,
Groping his way in the dark.
Sharp pains.
He was indignant that no one bothered about him.
But I would like to be alone for a year in the country.
To see no one but my wife.
The children might come once a week.
I should like to live burrowed into the earth
Like a mole,
All alone.

Moral and intellectual growth through suffering—
But only up to a certain point.

Today I have reached the point
Where I no longer desire to get well—
Just to keep on going.

Impossible for me to go down the front steps alone.

And what next?

Yesterday evening,
Toward ten o'clock,
Several minutes of atrocious anguish in my study.
Quite calm, I was writing a letter—
The white sheet of paper, all the light of the lamp concentrated on it,
And the room and table plunged in shadow.
My wife came in, put down a book or something on the table.
I raised my head, and
From that moment on for two or three minutes,
I lost all notion of things.
I must have looked very stupid,
Because my wife explained to me,
In answer to the question on my face,
What she had come to do.
I didn't understand her words and no longer recall them.
The horrible thing is
I didn't recognize my study.
I knew that I was in it, but I had lost all sense of place.
I had to get up, get my bearings,
Feel the bookcase and the doors,
And say to myself, "That's where she came in."
Little by little, my mind awakened,
My faculties came back into place.
But I recall the acute sensation of the whiteness of the letter I was writing,
Gleaming on the black table.

EDMUND

Men act.

We know this.

Attach no value to it,
particularly.
To act is to be.
No more no less.

JASON

A human being can be thought of as a tree trunk on fire
You can lay them down screaming
on their stomachs or their backs —
or you can spare the fire
and lay them out on the beach
nothing more than breathless lacerations
shapeless silhouettes
half eaten
getting up or moaning on the ground
then you might say
the head —
the eyes, the ears, the brain
represent the complications of the buccal orifice
the penis, the testicles
or you could say
the female organs that correspond to these
are the complications of the anal orifice.
So you have the familiar violent thrusts
that come from the interior of the body
indifferently ejected
from one end of the body or the other
discharged,
that is to say,
wherever they meet the weakest resistance.

EDMUND

The world is a bleeding wound
when it comes to that.

JASON

The natural state of a man,
the ecstatic state, will find itself in the visions of things that appear suddenly:

cadavers, for example,
nudity, explosions, spilled blood, sunbursts, abscesses, thunder.

EDMUND

Everything that exists
destroys itself
when it comes to that.
The sun in the sky,
the stars,
consuming themselves
and dying.
The joy of life that comes into the world
to give itself
and be annihilated.

JASON

I can imagine the earth projected in space
as it is
in reality
like a woman screaming,
her head in flames.

BOBBY

We came one time, my squad,
into the house of a prominent community leader,
and shot him
and shot his wife
shot his married son
his daughter-in-law,
a male and female servant and their baby.
The family dog was clubbed to death,
the family cat was strangled,
the goldfish was scooped out of his fishbowl and tossed on the floor.
When our squad left,
no life remained in the house—
a "family unit" had been eliminated.

JIM

the time a car came toward us,
when, just five minutes before, another car had come
and there were four Palestinians in it with RPGs
and they killed three of my friends.

So this new Peugeot comes towards us,
and we shoot.

And there was a family there—
three children.

And I cried,
but I couldn't take the chance.

Children, father, mother.

All the family was killed,
but we couldn't take the chance.

JASON

When we cleaned out a terrorist prison camp
we took a woman prisoner.

I'd already told my men we took no prisoners,
but I'd never killed a woman.

"She has to die fast," my sergeant said.

I was sweating.

The woman said to me,
what's the matter? you're sweating.

"Not for you," I said, "It's a malaria recurrence."

I gave my pistol to my sergeant,
but he couldn't do it.

None of them would do it,
and I knew if I didn't do it,

I'd never be able to control that unit again

"You're sweating," she said again.

"Not for you," I said.

And I blew her fucking head off.

BOBBY

Another time
charging into the trenches
shouting and yelling
horses neighing

I saw Corporal Bolte run his lance
right through a dismounted German
who had his hands up, surrendering
and we poured into the trenches
they all had their hands up
yelling "Camerad, Camerad,"
which means "I give up" in their language
but they had to have it that's all
they had to have it
no one can change his feelings during that last rush
the veil of blood before his eyes.
He doesn't want to take prisoners,
he wants to kill.

JIM

We came into a church
there were two naked men torturing a young woman
a nun as it turned out
stripped naked and stretched out in the aisle of the church
holding her down
burning her with cigarettes
another woman to one side
already raped I guessed
and dead, bleeding
I yelled at the guys holding down the woman
I told them to stand up
hands above their heads
the one who had been holding down the woman
was shaking from fear
his eyes flying uncontrollably around the room
the woman had rolled onto her stomach, rocking from side to side,
moaning
I saw him see the rifle lying in the church aisle
I told him not to be a fool
but suddenly he screamed and dove for the rifle
grabbing it, turning to look at me.
My first burst caught him in the face,
the second full in the chest.
He was dead before he fell over,

a body missing most of its head.
The second guy began to wave his arms up and down,
and he was looking at me
and looking as his own rifle leaned up against the pew
I said don't do it, don't do it,
but he went for his rifle
and he started to swing the muzzle in my direction
KILL HIM, GODDAMMIT
one of my guys yelled at me
KILL HIM NOW!
This guy was facing me now
trying to swing the long barrel rifle across his body
to align it with my chest
his eyes locked on mine.
His eyes never left mine,
not even when the rounds from my Sterling
tore into his stomach
walked up his chest,
and cut the carotid artery on the left side of his neck.
When his body hit the floor,
his eyes were still fixed on mine,
and then his body relaxed,
and his eyes dilated and went blind.

PHIL

Where there were houses
we left rubble,
smoldering woodpiles.
We smashed our way into crowds
of men and women;
we drove them across the fields
like frightened horses;
we set fire to their houses;
we hurled their corpses into wells;
everything that came to hand
we ruined;
we burned whatever we could.

In the aftermath,

you could feel the chill in the countryside,
the low-lying white mist,
shards of farmhouses in the haze,
shattered stones,
no grass,
no ruins,
empty streets,
and silence
no living thing
no bird, no animal broke the silence
no dogs,
no children,
not one stone left standing on another.

No one knew what was happening
or why—
or who had a chance to survive and who didn't
where the safe places were
who was born under a lucky star

And then the light ash
covering the fields
precious dust
One had the impression
of having passed out of the modern world
back into a vanished civilization.

EDMUND

There is a kind of wolf
which is also a part of nature
whose brains grow larger and smaller with the moon
and whose neck is on a bone that is very straight
and won't bend.
So that when it wants to turn and look at something,
it has to turn its whole upper body.
And sometimes
it will eat a kind of earth

to make its body heavy,
so that when it attacks a horse
or an ox
or an elk
or some such strong animal
it will take the big animal by the throat
and hang there,
and it will be heavy enough
finally
to bring the big animal down.

JIM

I had a friend,
a psychologist,
who did an experiment on rats when he was a student in the university,
and when he finished his experiment,
he was faced with the problem
of what to do with the rats.
He asked his advisor,
and his advisor said:
"Sacrifice them."
My friend said: "How?"
And his advisor said:
"Like this."
And his advisor took hold of a rat
and bashed its head against the side of a workbench.
My friend felt sick,
and asked his advisor how he could do that—
even though, in fact, as my friend knew,
this was not exactly a cruel way to kill a rat,
since instant death is caused
by cervical dislocation.
And his advisor said to him:
"What's the matter?"

Maybe you're not
cut out to be a psychologist.
How would you kill a rat?

I don't know.

If you had to.

Hanging by the wrists,

burning with cigarettes
burning with an iron
hosing with water

hitting with fists
kicking with boots
hitting with truncheons
hitting with whips

exposing to cold showers
depriving of sleep
depriving of toilets
depriving of food
subjecting to abuse
beating with fists and clubs
hitting the genitals
hitting the head against the wall
electric shocks used on the head
on the genitals
on the feet
on the lips
on the eyes
on the genitals
hitting with fists
whipping with cables
strapping to crosses
caning on the backside
caning on the limbs
inserting sticks

inserting heated skewers
inserting bottle necks
pouring on boiling water
injecting with haloperidol
chlorpromazine
trifluoperazine
beating on the skull
cutting off the fingers
submerging in water
breaking of limbs
smashing of jaws
crushing of feet
breaking of teeth
cutting the face
removing the finger nails
wrapping in plastic
closing in a box
castrating
multiple cutting

[a doll repeatedly dumped out of a baby carriage as it crosses

a guy in a wet suit with suspenders holding a wash tub around his waist
a shower over his head
carrying a placard saying: Don Quixote

dancers hitting themselves in the head with stuffed animals
and throwing them on the floor

the hulk of a ruined, smashed up, dented, burned car
is pushed and pulled out onto the stage
and a little guy in dunce cap
gets out and walks around and out

3 girls in lingerie on leashes
and a guy with a whip

a woman in an elegant black dress
with blood all over her face
does a wild wild dance

and, while this is going on,
someone throws himself to the ground

and then another man joins in
throwing himself to the ground

and a woman joins in

and then people throw other people to the ground
over and over

and
men throw women against the wall
and/or women throw men against the wall

and now loud deafening discordant music
takes over]

JASON

I'm not a child, you know.
After the things I've lived to see.

This boy
one time
jumped down out of a truck
thinking he'd be smart
and he said
Hey!
has anyone ever escaped from here?
So they stripped him naked
and hung him upside down for a few hours
and then they got him down and lay him on the ground
and poked sand down his throat until he died.

Or you hear the rules that have been set
anyone who walks away too quickly is shot
anyone out of line is shot
anyone who walks too slowly is shot
anyone who speaks too loudly
anyone who bends down
anyone who turns his head
any child who cries

a hospital floor cleared
by pushing the wheelchairs out on the balcony
tipping the people out of them
into the trucks in the street below

Last night: a child picked up
out of its bed by its feet
taken out to the courtyard
swung round by a soldier in an arc
its head smashed against a tree
all this done while another soldier held back
the child's mother
all this done right before the mother's eyes

and the mother
couldn't even cry.

ANNA

I had just come into the room and said "Good morning."
and suddenly it turned bright red.
I felt hot on my cheeks.
and when I came to,
I realized everyone was lying
on one side of the room.
No one was standing.
The chairs had blown to one side.
There was no window glass.

My white shirt was red all over.
I thought it was funny because
I wasn't hurt.
I looked around
and then I realized
that the girl lying next to me had pieces of broken glass stuck all over her body. Her
blood had splashed onto my shirt.
And she had bits of wood stuck in her.

EMILY

I had been holding my son in my arms,
when a young woman in front of me said, "Please
take this seat."
We were just changing places
when suddenly there was a strange sound.

All at once it was dark
and before I knew it,
I had jumped outside.
Fragments of glass had lodged in my son's head.
But he looked at my face and smiled.
He did not understand what had happened.
I had plenty of milk
which he drank all that day.
I think my child sucked the poison right out of my body.
And soon after that
he died.

BOBBY

One time:
they rang the doorbell;
they smashed the glass windows in the doors;
they walked right in.
They pushed the upright piano out onto the balcony,
smashed the balustrade,
and shoved the piano over the edge.
It hit the street below.
The wooden casing splintered away,
and left the insides of the piano

standing upright on the street
in the middle of the wreckage—
looking
like a harp.

EDMUND

A woman was holding a baby in her arms
begging that she be shot first and that the baby be spared.
There was a crowd on the other side of the fence,
raising their hands to take the baby if it should be passed over to them.
The woman was about to hand her baby to the crowd
when the soldier took it from her
shot it twice
and then took the baby in his hands
and tore it
as one would tear a rag.

PHIL

Everything that exists
destroys itself
when it comes to that.
The sun in the sky
like an orgy of frozen light,
lost.
Consuming itself
and dying.
The stars
consuming themselves
in an agony of fire.
The joy of life that comes into the world
to give itself
and be annihilated.
Everything
living and dead
mortally wounded.
Blood and open bodies.

A human being can be thought of as a tree trunk on fire
You can lay them down screaming

on their stomachs or their backs—
or you can spare the fire
and lay them out on the beach
nothing more than breathless lacerations
shapeless silhouettes
half eaten
getting up or moaning on the ground
then you might say
the head—
the eyes, the ears, the brain
are the complications of the buccal orifice
the penis, the testicles
the female organs that correspond to these
are the complications of the anal orifice.
Thus one has the familiar violent thrusts
that come from the interior of the body
indifferently ejected
from one end of the body or the other
discharged,
wherever they meet the weakest resistance
as in war.

[Deafening music.
A half-dozen brutes with plastic garden chairs come out,
put down their chairs
sit, looking straight out—
and then, after a while,
they stand and do a violent kicking dance
and then
a woman walks among the brutes,
yelling about something,
but the deafening music drowns her out
and
then
a soliloquy while all the brutes look straight out.

And,
while that is going on,
we see
a dozen random youtube videos
[on five screens that descend from the flies to different heights]
of cats falling from shelves
kids pulling chairs out from under their grandmothers
jackass movies
the baby that falls down again and again on purpose and cries

while, at the same time,
people drink vodka out of a bottle
and spit it out
drink and spit
drink and spit
while
a guy cooks scrambled eggs—
and 4 people eat plates of eggs—
spit them out, and throw the remainder on the floor
as
a woman cries hysterically for ten minutes, curled in a fetal ball.

and
an amazingly tall man,
with some bizarre Butoh-like inability to walk normally,
comes in naked and caked with charcoal and blood
and goes awkwardly to the ground and rolls in the dust.

a large screen on the back wall
has projected on it
a golden harp in flames,
and, as the harp burns, we hear the strings popping—
which provides the "music" for the charcoal man

a gold chalice is brought out
and set down on stage,
and left there,
gorgeously lit?]

SALOME

When my mother brought me a glass of rose
in the garden
and we sat in the shade of the lemon trees
where it was cool
and I could lean back in the reclining chair
surrounded by things that sought a resting place in the soil
and were not expected to move
the trees, the potted flowers
the stone walls and footpaths
things that could sink to the ground
and stay there
in their rightful place
and I sat back
and listened to the light voice of my mother
in the summer breeze
telling me of my grandmother
of my uncle Odon, Uncle Bebert and aunt O.
and all those who had never felt the need
to make the trip to the city
but had stayed at home in the country
carried along from year to year by the familiarities of daily life
and taken to the grave by their neighbors
as easily as any other of the quotidian events of their lives.

Home

its cove of green sea
its complicated rocks
the little woods
old and new trees
the warm terrace
the rosebushes
my yellow room
and the beach to which the tides bring treasures
mauve coral, polished shells
and sometimes casks of whale oil or benzine
from far off shipwrecks
and I have a rocky perch

between the sky and the sea
this was the world of my childhood
long gone, long, long gone

what wild orchids
almost a meter high, deep purple
growing in the meadows
and roses and medlar trees in blossom
the white rose vine covering the front of the chateau
so white with flowers
that at night it seemed to trace the milky way
and the nightingales
that didn't have time to eat or drink
they sang from four in the afternoon
to seven in the morning
and from four in the morning
to four in the afternoon
so that I have to wonder
when do they have time to make love?

SUSANNAH

Of all human qualities, the greatest is sympathy.

EMILY

Or compassion.

ANNA

Or compassion.

SUSANNAH

For clouds even.

EMILY

Or snow.

ANNA

The sound of a flute.

From a distance.

Or when you hear it nearby and then it moves away.

Or the other way around.
And the wind.
A brisk wind.
Or a moist gentle wind that blows in the evenings.

There are things that are near but distant at the same time.

SUSANNAH

Like the course of a boat across a lake.

EMILY

Like paradise.

SUSANNAH

I pray
I could see everything once more
everything that I have seen
lived through, suffered,
in the whole of the universe.
Because I am amazed
by the bodies
that are used and abandoned on the earth
in the dung beetle
the seagull
in the stub ash
the driftwood
the spring sky
blue spruce, pale eyes,
in my veins boiling
wet lips
black pitch
open window
from generation to generation

ANNA

I love a child eating strawberries.

SUSANNAH

An earthen cup.

EMILY

A new wooden chest.

SUSANNAH

A white jacket over a violet vest.

EMILY

Duck eggs.

SUSANNAH

Or beach parsley.

EMILY

Club moss.

SUSANNAH

The pear tree.

EMILY

The sunlight you see in water as you pour it from a pitcher into a bowl.

BOBBY [moved to join in, almost ecstatically]

In spring the dawn.

In summer the nights.

In autumn the evenings when the sun has set and your heart is moved by the sound of the wind and the hum of the insects.

In winter the early mornings, especially when snow has fallen during the night, or the ground is white with frost, or even when there is no snow or frost, but it is simply very cold, and someone hurries from room to room stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal or wood, and then, as noon approaches, no one bothers to keep the fires going, and soon nothing remains but piles of white ashes.

EDMUND

There are times you will see a black maidenhair fern

in shady places

or sometimes near the trunks of trees

on the banks of ditches

in wet ravines
on heaths or in the rocks
in the clefts of rocks
on rotted wood
or in a meadow
each one of these has its own affect
whether in a dream
or in the waking world
You might see two boys playing with a bird
an old woman feeding a cat

JIM

combs of horn
shoes of Spanish leather
buttons
silk stockings of the colors of the orient
rolls of parchment
a bundle of tobacco

JASON

an orange gathered from the tree that grew over Zebulon's Tomb

JIM

a sitar
birds nests from China

JASON

prisms

JIM

a stone taken from a vulture's head;
a large ostrich egg on which is inscribed the famous battle of Alcazar

JASON

the skin of a snake bred from the spinal marrow of a man;

EDMUND

jasmine
narcissus

JIM

scarlet ribbons
a toothpick case
an eyebrow brush
a pair of French scissors
a quart of orange flower water
four pounds of scented snuff
a tweezer case—
enamelled
an amber-headed cane
lessons for the flute
an almanac for the year 1700

JASON

petrified moss
petrified wood
Brazil pebbles
Egyptian bloodstones
hummingbirds
pieces of white spar

EDMUND

a piece of the stone of the oracle of Apollo

PHIL

Bucharest salami
a Turkish powder horn
a pistol

JASON

a giant's head

JIM

a music box

EDMUND

a quill pen

JIM

a red umbrella

EDMUND

some faded thing

handkerchiefs made of lawn

of cambric

of Irish linen

of Chinese silk

JASON

and each one of these

may make you wonder

whether it signifies the past or the future

or is only meant to

fill you with a longing

for such moments of life

in the afternoon

and the wish

that they should go on forever.

[We hear a hymn being sung.

Everyone on stage listens to it.]

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;

The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide.

When other helpers fail and comforts flee,

Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;

Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;

Change and decay in all around I see;

O Thou who changest not, abide with me.

Not a brief glance I beg, a passing word;

But as Thou dwell'st with Thy disciples, Lord,

Familiar, condescending, patient, free.

Come not to sojourn, but abide with me.

Come not in terrors, as the King of kings,
But kind and good, with healing in Thy wings,
Tears for all woes, a heart for every plea—
Come, Friend of sinners, and thus bide with me.

Thou on my head in early youth didst smile;
And, though rebellious and perverse meanwhile,
Thou hast not left me, oft as I left Thee,
On to the close, O Lord, abide with me.

I need Thy presence every passing hour.
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, Lord, abide with me.

I fear no foe, with Thee at hand to bless;
Ills have no weight, and tears no bitterness.
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, thy victory?
I triumph still, if Thou abide with me.

Hold Thou Thy cross before my closing eyes;
Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.
Heaven's morning breaks, and earth's vain shadows flee;
In life, in death, O Lord, abide with me.

Slow fade to darkness.

THE END

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