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The Life of a Playwright

by CHARLES L. MEE

The playwright enters carrying a portable computer
and a pile of papers and a couple of pencils.
He goes to a table downstage center
or off to one side
and sits.

During the play he never speaks.
He thinks
and he writes some things from time to time on his computer
and makes notes and writes things with pencil and paper
and thinks.

He walks out once and returns with a cup of tea
walks out second time later on
and returns zipping pants, having just peed

when he walks out
the rest of the cast stands around with nothing to do
wondering where he has gone
and if he will come back.

With lots of doubling and tripling,
the cast can be 8 or 10 actors.

Or the actors could change their names and costumes now and then—
or some additional actors could be cast in the production—
so there would be 16 or 18 characters in the piece
since it's clear the playwright isn't writing a single coherent play.

The characters in the play should be
straight, gay, lesbian, multiple races, old and young,
able and disabled, and.....

All the scenes and physical performances
in this script can be cut or replaced
with other scenes from the Re-Making Project
and other performance pieces.

And the director and actors should feel free
to cut 10 or 20 pages of material that they
don't feel is working wonderfully for them.

So, in the beginning,
after the playwright has sat down and begun making notes
two actors enter,
find a place to locate themselves,
and speak.

ELLEN
The fact is:
I've never been in love before
I thought I was but I never felt like this

BONDO
Things happen so suddenly sometimes.

ELLEN
Do you believe in love at first sight?

BONDO
No.

ELLEN
Neither do I.
And yet there it is: I'd like to kiss you.
I think for me it took so long to be able to love another person
such a long time to grow up
get rid of all my self-involvement
all my worrying whether or not I messed up

BONDO
Right.

ELLEN
Or I thought
I need to postpone gratification
and so I did

and I got so good at it
I forgot how to seize the moment

BONDO
you know damn well
you're not going to find the perfect mate
someone you always agree with or even like

ELLEN
you should be able to get along
with someone who's in the same ball park

BONDO
a human being

ELLEN
another human being

BONDO
because we are lonely people

ELLEN
we like a little companionship

BONDO
just a cup of tea with another person
what's the big deal

ELLEN
you don't need a lot

BONDO
you'd settle for very little

ELLEN
very very little when it comes down to it

BONDO
very little
and that would feel good

ELLEN
a little hello, good morning, how are you today

BONDO
I'm going to the park

OK , have a nice time
I'll see you there for lunch

ELLEN
can I bring you anything?

BONDO
a sandwich in a bag?

ELLEN
no problem
I'll have lunch with you in the park

BONDO
we'll have a picnic
and afterwards
I tell you a few lines of poetry
I remember from when I was a kid in school

ELLEN
and after that nap or godknows whatall

BONDO
and to bed

ELLEN
you don't even have to touch each other

BONDO
you don't have to be Don Juan
have some perfect technique

ELLEN
just a touch, simple as that

BONDO
an intimate touch?

ELLEN
fine. Nice. So much the better.

BONDO
that's all: just a touch
that feels good

ELLEN
OK, goodnight, that's all

BONDO
I'd go for that.

ELLEN
I'd like that.

BONDO
I'd like that just fine

ELLEN
I'd call that a happy life

BONDO
as happy as it needs to get for me.

[They look at one another,
look at the playwright,
and then turn and leave.
And a moment later
another couple enters
and speaks.]

LEON
I look at you and I think
if it wouldn't be wrong
I'd like to make love with you on a pool table.

AKIKO
It wouldn't be wrong if you'd let me handcuff you to the pockets.

LEON
You could do that.

AKIKO
What I think about is
I'd like to have sex with you in the parking lot
behind the Exxon station
near that diner on the Malibu highway
you know the one?

LEON
Near that road up into the canyon.

AKIKO
That's the one.

LEON
That would be pretty public.

AKIKO
I'd like to have the whole world see
you want me so much
you can't wait.
I'd like to have the whole world see
you're not ashamed of me.

LEON
Why would I be ashamed of you?

AKIKO
I feel ashamed myself.

LEON
For what reason?

AKIKO
Who knows?
Every fifteen minutes I feel ashamed of myself at least once.
And humiliated.
For no reason.
It just comes back to me over and over again.
Do you ever feel that way?

LEON
Every fifteen minutes I feel worried.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want to hurt someone?

LEON
No.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want to get even?

LEON
No.

AKIKO
That's good.
Do you feel you want to bite something?

LEON
I don't think so.
Maybe I feel that.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want to take off all your clothes?

LEON
No.
I usually don't feel that.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want more money?

LEON
Oh, sure. Everybody feels that.

[They stop,
look at one another,
turn and walk out.

and now
FRANK enters:]

FRANK
I remember when I met Maria
our first date
I don't remember who arranged it
a blind date
and I picked her up at a little hotel where she was staying when she first came to New York
and she came running down the stairs
to meet me in the lobby
there was no elevator
and we talked there for a moment
and then we saw
water running down the stairs
amazing it was
a little waterfall
cascading down the stairs
and then Maria said, Oh,
I left the bathtub running!
And the water just flooded the lobby
before they got it turned off.

So of course she was kicked out of the hotel
and I told her she could come and stay with
me so she did.

[FRANK leaves, and ARIEL enters.
And she speaks to FRANK.]

ARIEL

People are smarter than we think.
We think
it takes a long time to get to know someone
and in a way it does
but we know so much from the first second
it's not just the words another person speaks
we right away take in
their, you know, body language
the way they hold themselves
cock their heads
how their hair falls and how they push it away from their eyes
whether impatiently or gently
whether they are irritable or thoughtful people
gentle or violent
caressing or insensitive
how they smell
whether they look directly in your eyes
or they can't look up from the ground
or meet your gaze directly
or their eyes dart from side to side
because they are anxious in a way
they will never change
I saw you
and I knew:
I've looked for you all my life.
I love you.

[Edna enters.]

EDNA

I was driving through the country yesterday
and I saw all these huge, gorgeous trees
and I thought
here they are

they aren't hoping to be rich or famous
they don't have a story to tell
all they're doing is growing and growing
and they're going to live a long time
most of them
some of them 200 years or more
and there are all these different kind of trees
and they don't care if they aren't like the tree next to them
they're just the trees they are
growing and growing
and having a wonderful life
and now I think
trees are my model of life
this is the life I want
the life of a tree.

[The whole group of actors now have a conversation
with one another.]

FRANK

I look at nature
I think:
did god have any taste at all?
The shapes are grotesque
The colors are garish
The smells are horrid
And your feet are always wet

EDNA

you do have
the sun-blown rose
the morning dew
meteors in the night sky

FRANK

but back in civilization you would have
plum cake
thick cream

BONDO

scones and butter

ARIEL

hot cocoa
EDMUND
Silk garters

FRANK
whereas here what you have is
pebbles
moss
hail

EDNA
the sighing of the night wind

ARIEL
the scent of the violet

EDNA
birds nests from China

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

FRANK
And back in civilization again
you have handkerchiefs of lawn,

ELLEN
cambric,

AKIKO
of Irish linen, of Chinese silk

ARIEL
initialed handkerchiefs
embroidered with satin stitch
trimmed with lace

EDMUND
hemstitched

FRANK
Necklaces and rings and nose jewels

JIM
A tweezer case, with twelve sets of tweezers,
one for each hour of the day

BONDO

An ostrich egg, incised with a picture of the Coronation

EDMUND

the complete head and body of Father Crispin
buried long ago in the Vault of the Cordeliers at Toulouse;

LEON

a stone taken from a vulture's head;

EDMUND

a large ostrich egg on which is inscribed the famous battle of Alcazar

JIM

a toothpick case
an eyebrow brush
a pair of French scissors

LEON

a quart of orange flower water
a quill pen

ARIEL

a red umbrella

FRANK

Still, if you prefer nature,
of course,
that's lovely.
You can have it.

[And now

someone brings in
the bust of a guy with a hundred toy cars glued to his head
the person who brought in the bust looks around
thinks a moment
and then puts the bust somewhere
looks at it for a moment
and then turns and walks out.

Now someone else brings in a white pig covered in tattoos
and puts that somewhere
and leaves.

a wild dance
throwing herself to the floor
rolling around
she can't get up
and finally another woman comes out
and gets on her hands and knees
and kisses the woman who had been dancing
kisses her and kisses her
and finally, slowly lifts her back up onto her feet
by kissing her and lifting her up by the lips

Then they look around at everyone
and at the playwright
and at each other
and then turn and leave.

FRANK
What you like
what people like
it's so strange.
And it doesn't necessarily stay the same.
In the olden days
years ago
I used to drink five or six cups of coffee
every morning to get myself going for the day

JIM
really ready and full of energy

EDMUND
and able to work at anything—

FRANK
and then I'd crash around three o'clock in the afternoon
so I'd lash myself with a few more cups of coffee
so then
around five o'clock
I knew someone was persecuting me
but I didn't know who
so I'd lash out at the first person who came into the room

EDMUND
and this wasn't good for a marriage.

FRANK

So I switched to tea
and that was good

JIM

because tea will give you a nice lift

EDMUND

and you can float on it on into the afternoon
and it won't fade away

JIM

and it won't make you feel persecuted.

FRANK

And I mostly drank Assam tea from the south of India,
and I visited the south of India once
and saw some of the tea plantations
which I thought were beautiful
and then
on the way back to New York
I stopped in the south of France
and I was introduced to rose wine.

EDMUND

Although probably you know most wine connoisseurs will tell you
you should only drink red or white wine
that rose wine isn't really for people of good taste,

JIM

but everyone in the south of France
thinks it's ok to drink rose in the summer,

FRANK

so I drank it
and then I drank it some more
and then it just became all I drank
in the afternoon and evening
and also in the morning
instead of coffee or tea?
and so I just felt my whole life
was living in the south of France

JIM

morning and afternoon and night
all the time.

FRANK
That was my life.

[Another group has gathered to listen to

FRANK and JIM and Edmund,
and now they chat.]

LEON
I would eat tarte tatins all the time if I could
and drink Chateau Neuf du Pape

ARIEL
and sometimes a glass of rose?

EDNA
sitting in the garden in the afternoon

ARIEL
and, if it wouldn't hurt too much
or become a habit leading down the path to hell I'd like to have just one cigarette

EDNA
every day?

ARIEL
or even one every other day

FRANK
with an espresso, in the café
one of the cafes

ARIEL
and then I'd drive out to the hospital
where Van Gogh spent that year
painting the cypresses and the olive trees

EDNA
and you think:
he was crazy
and pathetic

FRANK
what a tragedy

EDNA
how he suffered

ARIEL
but you know
he turned out a hundred and thirty paintings
or a hundred and forty paintings
or, like a hundred and forty three paintings
like he turned out a painting every two and a half days for a year!
that's where he turned out The Starry Night!
I don't even mention the olive grove
or the field with the red poppies
and that's what I would do
I would be a painter if I could even just hold a brush right
if I just had enough talent to dip a brush
into some paint and slather it on the canvas
because that is a perfect life

FRANK
you just get up in the morning
and you get your cup of coffee
and you wander into your studio

EDNA
and whatever catches your eye is what you do

FRANK
you think
oh, that painting I was working on yesterday
that could use a little splash of red up there near the top
and so you dip your brush into the paint
and you splash some red

EDNA
and then a little yellow

FRANK
some green here over on the right you think
okay
I could put a sailboat up there in the sky

EDNA
and then you have another sip of your coffee
and you notice the little ceramic vase

you had been working on the day before yesterday
and you think

I could put some kind of flat, muted purple
right there where its stomach bulges out a little bit

FRANK

and then you see that drawing
that fell on the floor off that table
down near the other end of your studio
and you go to pick it up
and you just can't resist
doing a little something to it

EDNA

adding a little picnic table to the landscape

FRANK

and by the time you finish that
you find yourself down at the other end of your studio
near the door out onto the terrace
so you go out onto the terrace
and sit at the little table there overlooking the vineyard
because by then it's time for lunch

ARIEL

and your husband brings you a sandwich
and maybe a little glass of beaume de venise
and after lunch
you make love for the rest of the afternoon.
That's the life I have in mind.

[Silence.

Everyone looks around at one another.
And then they look over at the playwright.
The playwright looks at his computer for a few more moments,
and then stands up,
hesitates for a moment and thinks,
and then exits.

All the actors stand around
looking at each other,
wondering what the playwright is doing
and when he will come back
and
after a few minutes

the playwright comes back and sits down
and starts writing again.

[AKIKO and
SUSANNAH enter.]

SUSANNAH
Who's on first?

AKIKO
How do you mean?

SUSANNAH
You know: who's on first?

AKIKO
In what sense?

SUSANNAH
In the sense that you, you know
I'm trying to start a conversation with you.
Like: Who's on first?

AKIKO
What the fuck do you mean?

SUSANNAH
What the fuck do you mean's on second?

AKIKO
I beg your pardon

SUSANNAH
I beg your pardon's on third.

AKIKO
What?

SUSANNAH
No, what's on first.

AKIKO
This is what you call a conversation?
Because this is the kind of conversations people these days?
Because of
What?
Because of the internet and texting and shit

This is how people communicate with each other/

SUSANNAH

I'm sorry.
I thought you'd get my classical reference.

[And now Edna steps forward
and says to Jim:]

EDNA

I love you, Jim.
I love you, with all my heart.
I love your hands and your kneecaps
and your hair and your ears
and I love the way you
are sweet when you are sweet
and the way you fuck up
because even when you fuck up
and it makes me so mad
you are actually so incompetent at it
such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you
because I think the reason you are such a loser
is that your heart is good
and so you can't hit the bullseye
when you are acting like a nasty shit
so that people don't have to take it seriously
and they can just wait till you realize
how wrong you've been
and also right
also right
because I don't think you are a pathetic loser
that people love out of pity
or because they want to be with some weak
useless guy they can manipulate
you really are a winner
because of your heart
which is always there
and when you come around
we all see it
and see you always were a good human being.

Leon speaks to Akiko.

LEON

More than anything
I love to lie in bed with you at night
and look at your naked back
and stroke your back slowly
from your neck to your cocyx
and let my fingers fan out
and drift over your smooth buttock
and slip slowly down along your thigh
to your sweet knee
only to return again
coming up the back of your thigh
hesitating a moment
to let my fingers rest in the sweet valley
at the very top of your thigh, ju
st below your buttock
and so slowly up along the small of your back
to your shoulder blade
and then to let your hair tickle my face
as I put my lips to your shoulder
and kiss you and kiss you and kiss you forever
this is what I call heaven
and what I hope will last forever

[And now Edmund begins to speak a poem:

EDMUND
UHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUHNUH
UHNUHNUHNUH
EEEEEEEEEEEE POOH-POOHPOOH-POOHRRA slslsl

[AND, as Edmund goes on speaking and singing his poem,
some other actors begin to join in
occasionally, from time to time,
and then, finally
everyone together]

drrrrroomoom
UHNUHNUHNUHNUH
aaaaaaaaaatzeen
UEEEE EE EE EE EE
HAHAHAHAHAHAHA
rrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrr
Rrumpfftilffto?
Bee bee bee bee bee
Zee zee zee zee zee
Pe pe pe pe pe
Pii pii pii pii pii

Poo poo poo poo poooo?

Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bim-bimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm

Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bummbimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bimbimm
Grimm glimm gnimm bim-bimm

Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bumm bimbimm bamm bimbimm
Bemm bemm Bemm bemm
Bemm bemm Bemm bemm

Tilla loola luula loola
Tilla luula loola luula
Tilla loola luula loola
Tilla luula loola luula
Tatta tatta tuiEe tuiEe
Tatta tatta tuiEe tuiEe
Tatta tatta tuiEe tuiEe
Tatta tatta tuiEe tuiEe
Tilla lalla tilla lalla
Tilla lalla tilla lalla Tilla lalla
tilla lalla Tilla lalla tilla lalla
Tuii tuii tuii tuii Tuii tuii tuii tuii

Tee tee tee tee
Tee tee tee tee
Tuii tuii tuii tuii
Tuii tuii tuii tuii
Tee tee tee tee
Tee tee tee tee

music and dancing
music and dancing

music and dancing
music and dancing
music and dancing
music and dancing

And then EDMUND enters,
carrying a box of pizza.

EDMUND
And yet, I think, nonetheless,
forgiveness is possible.

LEON
You do.

EDMUND
Well, sure.
Really under any circumstances.
Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...
primarily the question is
does man have the power to forgive himself.
And he does.
That's essentially it.
I mean if you forgive yourself,
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,
of all wrongdoing in an incident,
then you're forgiven.
Who cares what other people think, because uh...

LEON
Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?
Did you have to think about it?

EDMUND
Well, no.
Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,
did I strike upon,
you know I had almost had ends meet
because I had certain uh you know
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.
And uh,

LEON

I'm sorry, what was that?

EDMUND

Triple murder.

Sister, husband. Sister, husband,
and a nephew, my nephew.

And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

LEON

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?

What were the instruments?

EDMUND

It was a knife. It was a knife.

LEON

A knife?

EDMUND

Yes.

LEON

So then, the three of them were all...

EDMUND Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat) like that.

LEON

So, uh,

do you think that as time goes by,
this episode will just become part of your past,
or has it already...

EDMUND

It has already become part of my past.

LEON

Has already become part of your past. No sleepless nights? No...

EDMUND

Aw, no.

Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

[he sits,
making himself at home]

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that. Who ordered a pizza?

ELLEN

So this is how people speak to one another these days? Men.

Who wants you?

With a man, every act of love is an act of rape.

A man will swim through a river of snot,

wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit,

if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him on the other side.

He'll screw a woman he despises,

any snaggle-toothed hag,

and furthermore, pay for the opportunity.

A man will fuck mud if he has to.
And why is that?
Because every man, deep down,
knows he is a worthless piece of shit
hoping some woman will make him feel good about himself.
Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities obsessed with screwing,
to call a man an animal is to flatter him;
a man is a walking dildo,
a completely isolated unit,
trapped inside himself,
incapable of love, friendship, affection or tenderness
his responses entirely visceral, never cerebral
his intelligence a mere tool of his drives and needs;
a half-dead, unresponsive lump of flesh,
trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes.
Why did god create man?
Because a vibrator can't mow the lawn.

Why were men given brains larger than dogs?
So they wouldn't hump women's legs at cocktail parties.
Men pretend to be normal
but what they're doing sitting there
with benign smiles on their faces
is they're manufacturing sperm.
They do it all the time.
They never stop.
They are suffering from testosterone poisoning.
You know what they say:
What do you call a man with half a brain? Gifted.
Why do men name their penises?
Because they want to be on a first-name basis
with the person who makes all their decisions.
What do you call the useless bit of fatty tissue at the end of a penis?

A man.

LEON
People think
it's hard to be a woman;
but it's not easy
to be a man,
the expectations people have
that a man should be a civilized person
of course I think everyone should be civilized
men and women both

but when push comes to shove
say you have some bad people
who are invading your country
raping your own wives and daughters
and now we see:
this happens all the time
all around the world
and then a person wants a man
who can defend his home

you can say, yes, it was men who started this
there's no such thing as good guys and bad guys
only guys
and they kill people
but if you are a man who doesn't want to be a bad guy
and you try not to be a bad guy
it doesn't matter
because even if it is possible to be good
and you are good
when push comes to shove
and people need defending
then no one wants a good guy any more

then they want a man who can fuck someone up
who can go to his target like a bullet
burst all bonds
his blood hot
howling up the bank
rage in his heart
screaming
with every urge to vomit
the ground moving beneath his feet
the earth alive with pounding
the cry hammering in his heart
like tanked up motors turned loose
with no brakes to hold them

this noxious world

and then when it's over
suddenly
when this impulse isn't called for any longer
a man is expected to put it away
carry on with life
as though he didn't have such impulses
or to know that, if he does
he is a despicable person

and so it may be that when a man turns this violence on a woman
in her bedroom
or in the midst of war
slamming her down, hitting her,
he should be esteemed for this
for informing her
about what it is that civilization really contains
the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness
the use of force as well as tenderness
the presence of coercion and necessity
because it has just been a luxury for her really
not to have to act on this impulse or even feel it
to let a man do it for her
so that she can stand aside and deplore it
whereas in reality
it is an inextricable part of the civilization in which she lives
on which she depends
that provides her a long life, longer usually than her husband,
and food and clothes
dining out in restaurants
and going on vacations to the oceanside
so that when a man turns it against her
he is showing her a different sort of civilized behavior really
that she should know and feel intimately
as he does
to know the truth of how it is to live on earth
to know this is part not just of him
but also of her life
not go through life denying it
pretending it belongs to another
rather knowing it as her own
feeling it as her own
feeling it as a part of life as intense as love
as lovely in its way as kindness
because to know this pain
is to know the whole of life
before we die
and not just some pretty piece of it
to know who we are
both of us together
this is a gift that a man can give a woman.

EDNA

You

are an ignorant shoot from the hip cowboy
with your boots in cowshit

like a cow puncher savage
thinking you are such hot stuff
rolling your cigarette with one hand at a full gallop
but in reality you are a baby
a baby dude ranch greenhorn dweeb
who knows nothing
nothing
nothing about whatever
nothing about life
nothing about women
nothing about men
nothing about horses
you are a guy that's all
you are just a guy
I could spit at you
[she spits]
I could spit at you and spit at you
[she spits and spits]
because what you are is a typical male
I'll say no more
a typical male
you are a
typical
male
which is to say a shithook
and a dickhead

ELLEN

The male
the male is a biological accident
an incomplete female
the product of a damaged gene
a half-dead lump of flesh
trapped in a twilight zone somewhere between apes and humans
always looking obsessively for some woman

EDNA

That's maybe a little bit extreme.

ELLEN

any woman
because he thinks if he can make some connection with a woman
that will make him a whole human being!
But it won't. It never will.

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

[a guy breaks a dozen wine bottles
by throwing them into a wooden box one after another,
and then, finally, he puts his face down
into the pile of broken glass in the box,
and he has another guy stand on his neck
to press his face down into the glass—
and, while we were all expecting some miraculous trick to avoid being cut,
he stands up
with a lacerated forehead—
note for the actor:
there is a trick to this to avoid real injury—
an invisible brace inside the box to support the forehead above the glass]

EDMUND

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.

JIM

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

EDMUND

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.

JIM

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.

EDMUND

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

FRANK

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.

EDMUND

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.

FRANK

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.

FRANK

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.

A MAN AT THE DINNER TABLE, speaking to one of the other men
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SECOND MAN

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FOURTH MAN

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EDMUND

You have to wonder
if there has ever been a civilization as advanced as our own
because, you know, there could have been
and we would never know
because after they have brought themselves down to ruin
and
after the records have disintegrated
after the clothes have turned to dust
after the bones have turned to ashes
after the buildings have fallen back to earth
what lasts longer than anything else is red pottery
it is the only evidence we have of the very oldest civilizations
and red pottery lasts only 30,000 years
so you have to ask yourself
do we, today, have anything that lasts as long as red pottery?
and the only thing we have that would last that long is:
styrofoam
whether anyone would think
30,000 years from now
looking at the little bits of styrofoam
that there had once been a civilization as advanced as their own
is anybody's guess
it could be we would vanish from memory
the way others have before us.
We don't know.

sudden deafening music slams in
all the men pick up their chairs in their hands and do a violent, violent chair dance
violent chair dance

violent chair dance
violent chair dance
slamming their chairs down to the floor, sitting in them,
dancing with their stomping feet only, getting up again
and picking up the chairs again,
slamming them to the floor,
dancing around them,
etc.

JIM

Last night I dreamed
my mother and I were in a white,
sun-filled summer house together,
and my mother was at the top of the stairs,
and I was at the bottom looking up at her,
and she said to me all of a sudden:
do you remember always to hold onto the bannister
when you go up and down stairs?
And I reassured her that I did,
even though I didn't.
Good, she said,
and yet, she didn't remember herself,
because one day she was carrying an armful of tulips
in the upstairs hallway,
and, even though she had lived in the house for thirty-five years,
she forgot to pay attention,
she let her mind wander for a moment,
and she walked right out through an open window
and fell to her death.

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.

FRANK

Everything that exists

destroys itself
when it comes to that.
The sun in the sky
like an orgy of frozen light,
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.

[a dead sheep carcass is dragged through
a wheelbarrow full of skulls comes through

demons with the heads of birds
and other animals come through?

a coffin is carried through
with a shroud-wrapped corpse in it

a giant fish head with a human leg
sticking up out of its mouth
is wheeled through on a platform]

[And now,
the playwright again exits
and the actors stand around
wondering if he will come back.
After a minute or so,
the playwright returns,
with his pants unzipped.
He somehow notices that,
and zips up his pants,
as he forgot to do just a moment ago
when he went to the bathroom.

Now he sits back down at his desk,
and looks at his computer
and starts typing.]

SUSANNAH
Of all human qualities, the greatest is sympathy.
AKIKO
Or compassion.

SUSANNAH
Or compassion.

AKIKO
For clouds even.

ARIEL
Or snow.

SUSANNAH

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.

AKIKO

Like the course of a boat across a lake.

ARIEL

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

ARIEL

I love a child eating strawberries.

AKIKO

An earthen cup.

ARIEL

A new wooden chest.

ELLEN

A white jacket over a violet vest.

SUSANNAH Duck eggs.

ARIEL

Or beach parsley.

AKIKO

Club moss.

ELLEN

The pear tree.

ARIEL

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

BONDO [moved to join in, almost ecstatically]

In spring I think the dawn is most beautiful.

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.

LEON

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 woods

in turf bogs

on the high 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

FRANK

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

EDMUND

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

JIM

a sitar
birds nests from China

EDMUND

prisms

JIM

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

FRANK

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—
enameled
an amber-headed cane
a tailor's bill
lessons for the flute
an almanac for the year 1700

LEON

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

BONDO

a piece of the stone of the oracle of Apollo

JIM

Bucharest salami
a Turkish powder horn
a pistol

EDMUND

a giant's head

LEON

a music box

EDMUND a quill pen

LEON

a red umbrella

BONDO

some faded thing
handkerchiefs made of lawn
of cambric
of Irish linen
of Chinese silk

LEON

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.

TWO PEOPLE SITTING IN A CAFE

For me
the happiest place to be
is sitting in a cafe

SOMEONE ELSE
watching all the people walk by

SOMEONE ELSE
and seeing how is their hair

SOMEONE ELSE
how are their glasses

SOMEONE ELSE
how are their clothes

SOMEONE ELSE
the pants and skirts and shorts

SOMEONE ELSE
and blue jeans with holes cut in them

SOMEONE ELSE
things they photograph with their phones

SOMEONE ELSE
things they are saying on their phones

SOMEONE ELSE
this is the perfect vision of the world we live in
without people pretending to think or feel things they say
when they are talking to someone who is listening
but just walking down the street
thinking there is no one else anywhere nearby
so they just are who they are
and it is their true selves they are living

SOMEONE ELSE
and I get to see them and hear them
and wonder about them

SOMEONE ELSE
and find them really interesting

SOMEONE ELSE
or boring

SOMEONE ELSE
or weird

SOMEONE ELSE
or scary

SOMEONE ELSE
or really fun and fantastic
and love them

[Someone brings in
two dozen fabulous socks
and everyone looks at them,
not knowing quite what to think.

And now
at the other cafe tables:]

JIM
To me
if I wanted to have a happy life
I would just want to have a life with you.

EDNA
What do you mean?
IF you wanted a happy life.
You mean you don't want a happy life?

JIM
I do want a happy life.
Yes, I do.
Would you live your life with me?

EDNA
Yes.
I would love to. I love you.

JIM
I love you.

EDNA

Do you think we can be together our entire lives?
Or things will change?
You will change?
Your feelings will change?

JIM

The way I feel feels more certain
than any other way I've ever felt about anyone
or anything
it feels forever.

I've never been more sure of anything.
I feel it so solidly within my whole self.
I love you.

EDNA

I want to live with you forever.

ELLEN [speaking to
FRANK] I know how I feel.
This is how I feel.

FRANK

And this is how I feel, too.

EDNA

And you can count on it forever
you can depend on it
so it will bring you total peace.

SUSANNAH

Could we be considered a couple? And tell people
when we introduce ourselves
that we are a couple?

JIM

It could be.

AKIKO

Or not.

If you prefer not.

SUSANNAH

I would like it. Because I love you
and just because of that

but also
just as a secondary benefit
it would make me feel so secure.

JIM
This is a feeling we like.

EDNA
Nothing better.

FRANK
Security is such a rare thing these days. I don't understand it.
It feels so good
so warm
so eternal.

EDNA
You would think it would be something everyone would hold on to
rather than just have a fling
have another fling
marry again and again
feeling always on the edge of the cliff anxious
and thinking it could all pass away
at any moment.

LEON
And that's why
when I say I love you
I want you to know you can count on it forever
so we both feel secure in our lives
at peace
centered
relaxed
warm comfortable at ease happy.

[Someone brings in
a dress mannequin
on a stand with wheels
and hanging from the sides
a pitchfork and a big cane harvesting knife,
and everyone looks at it,
not knowing quite what to think.]

SOMEONE
Sometimes I think
I would like to take you in my arms

and we would lie down on the back of a chicken
and fly up into the clouds.

SOMEONE ELSE
You could do that.

SOMEONE
And take you to the south of France
like they were saying
to St. Remy
with all the sunflowers
and the glass of rose wine
when we have lunch at that little restaurant
that has a children's carousel in the main dining room
and a toy car big enough for two kids to sit in together
and the camping trailer
you can sit inside and have them serve you lunch there
but we would sit outside
under the trellis
so that we could see the sheep
on the day that they have the running of the sheep
through the town?

SOMEONE ELSE
Yes.

SOMEONE ELSE
Would you take me in your arms
and lie down in that big overstuffed easy chair
in the shape of a fat man?

SOMEONE
Well, yes!

SOMEONE ELSE
Sometimes I feel like ten lightbulbs on the ends of the wires
twisting out from the ceiling.

SOMEONE
The lightbulbs with wings?

SOMEONE ELSE
Yes.

Or
I could be a bed filled with butterflies.

SOMEONE

I could be a little chair
made of metal strips
that make a little protective circle around a newly planted tree
where you could sit and enjoy protecting the tree.

SOMEONE ELSE

I could be a yellow haystack in a field for you.

SOMEONE

I could be a dog,
thirty feet tall,
made all of flowers.

SOMEONE ELSE

I could be an old wooden horse-drawn cart
with big spoke wheels
upended in a cobblestone street.

SOMEONE ELSE

I could be a boutique of antique corsets.

SOMEONE ELSE

I could be winged victory.

SOMEONE ELSE

I could be white birch tree trunks in a giant ice cube
melting in the sun.

SOMEONE ELSE

Did you ever have a peacock?

SOMEONE ELSE

No.

SOMEONE ELSE

I'd like to get a peacock for you.

SOMEONE ELSE

I'd like that.

[Someone brings in
a statue of an upside down elephant,
not standing on his head, but standing on his extended trunk,
his hind legs up in the air
Everyone looks at the elephant,
not knowing quite what to think.]

FRANK

You know, I have known many women.
I mean, I don't mean to say....

SUSANNAH

No.

FRANK

I mean just
you know
my mother, my grandmother
my sisters
and also women I have known romantically
and then, too, friends,
and even merely acquaintances
but you know
in life
one meets many people
and it seems to me
we know so much of another person
in the first few moments we meet
not from what a person says alone
but from the way they hold their head
how they listen
what they do with their hand as they speak
or when they are silent
and years later
when these two people break up
they say
I should have known from the beginning
in truth
I did know from the beginning
I saw it in her, or in him
the moment we met
but I tried to repress the knowledge
because it wasn't useful at the time
because,
for whatever reason
I just wanted to go to bed with her as fast as I could
or I was lonely
and so I pretended I didn't notice
even though I did
exactly the person she was from the first moment
I knew
and so it is with you
and I think probably it is the same for you with me
we know one another

right now from the first moment
we know so much about one another in just this brief time
and we have known many people
and for myself
I can tell
you are one in a million
and I want to marry you
I want to marry you
and have children with you
and grow old together
so I am begging you
just have a coffee with me.

SUSANNAH
OK.

JIM
I've brought you something.

EDNA
Oh.
What is that?

JIM
It's a tree stump.

EDNA Oh.
Yes.

[A decayed rotting beautiful tree stump from the middle of the woods
on a little red wagon.
Some of the other actors—seeing this—
begin to leave and return,
leave and return

with their own somethings,
6 or 7 things like these:
a three decker hamburger
with tubes of paint instead of burger in the bun

a giant wire insect.
A box of miscellaneous women's high heeled shoes
with a glass front on the box.

And other such boxes of
tea kettles and house painting brushes,
a box of trumpets with a glass front,
a box of monkey wrenches.

A perfect rectangle
made of crushed beer cans.
two stone pedestals
each about three feet tall
one with a rooster on top of it
the other with a chicken on top of it.

One big shiny ball
with another one placed on top of it kind of like a snowman
but pink or orange.
A vast assemblage of
giant red lips
the reins and bit for a horse blonde hair
a red sweater etc. etc. etc.
a kid's red wagon
with three tv sets attached to poles
that stick up from the center of the wagon
a cocktail bar and tv set
on top of a giant, bed-sized pillow
an orange body suit
made of bear's fur
with a ten foot "tail" coming out the front
and a brightly colored striped tie
and white shirt collar at the neck
a pair of black rubber rain boots, eight feet tall
a baby carriage with wire frames on top of it holding a boulder
a tower constructed of household furniture—
little chairs and bedsteads and guitars and
socks and women's high-heeled shoes
a mannequin
with a basketball head
and two little baseball bats for rabbit ears
a Christmas tree
with fork feet holding it up
and decorated with large silver fish
a section of ruined roman column
but coated in gold leaf
like the ruined fortunes of today and yesterday
a skeleton's skull
five feet tall
with an upside nose in the shape of a heart, painted red
and deep black curving lines defining various parts of his skull
a wooden beam

from which six slender four-foot-tall poles stick up.
On each pole is a painted cardboard cutout of a human figure—
a guy in a swimming suit, a guy in a business suit,
a woman in a fashionable dress,
a guy in work clothes wearing boxing gloves, etc.
And atop each of these figures is a head—
one head is a bunch of bananas,
one is a cluster of dark storm clouds,
one is a television set
with a human face on the screen,
one is a thick, u-shaped, wooden block, etc.
a naked body of Christ
holes are poked in it and blood gushes out

A guy who is just a metal cart on wheels
is brought in.

He has a lovely plastic head on one shelf
a shoe on another shelf
some bottles of cleanser fluid on another shelf
and there is a speaker in his head.

The actors arrange and re-arrange all the objects
until they look at what they have done
and are satisfied.

And then it turns out the metal cart guy/thing can sing.
And it sings
and sings

And when he finishes the song,
all the other actors look at one another.

And then, finally,
one of them steps forward:

I remember stories about razor blades
being hidden in apples at Halloween.
And pins and needles in popcorn balls.

I remember jumping off the front porch head first
onto the corner of a brick.
I remember being able to see nothing but gushing red blood.
This is one of the first things I remember.
And I have a scar to prove it.

I remember stories about what goes on in restaurant kitchens.
Like spitting in the soup.
And jerking off in the salad.

I remember laundromats at night
all lit up with nobody in them.
I remember being hit on the head by birdshit two times.
I remember loafers with pennies in them.
I remember my father's collection of arrow heads.
I remember potato salad.

I remember the chair I used to put my boogers behind.
I remember my first erections.
I thought I had some terrible disease or something.

I remember when, in high school,
if you wore green and yellow on Thursday
it meant that you were queer.

I remember that for my fifth birthday
all I wanted was an off-one-shoulder black satin evening gown.
I got it.
And I wore it to my birthday party.

I remember fantasies of someday reading
a complete set of encyclopedias
and knowing everything.

I remember the little thuds
of bugs bumping up against the screens at night.

I remember picnics.

[And now one of the actors enters
with flowers growing out of the top of his head,

and all the others look at him thinking he looks a little odd.
He speaks.]

LEON

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.
That's how it is for me.
That's who I am.

How a human will turn out
they just turn out how they do
and then you know
but you don't know before
and then, later on, maybe they change their minds
and they turn out another way
and then they turn out another way yet again
and you never knew
because the human creature is a surprising, fluid event

oh, you can say, bla bla bla

but I don't think so
you didn't know how Simone de Beauvoir was going to turn out
you didn't know how Oprah Winfrey was going to turn out
you didn't know how Hilary Clinton was going to turn out

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 like a butterfly.

[And now
a guy enters with an ultra white face,

wearing a fluffy pink skirt around his neck
and extra eyebrows of purple, red and blue.]

BONDO

I thought,
I've always liked you,

ELLEN

seeing you with your sisters
sometimes in the summers
when our families would get together at the beach.
I thought you were fun, and funny
and really good at volleyball
which I thought showed you have a well,
a natural grace
and beauty
and a lot of energy.
And it's not that I thought
I fell in love with you at the time
or that I've been like a stalker
or something in the background all these years.
But really, over the years,
I've thought back from time to time
how good it felt just to be around you.
And so I thought:
well, maybe this is an okay way to have a marriage
to start out
not in a romantic way, but as a friendship
because I admire you
and I thought perhaps this might grow into something deeper
and longer lasting
but maybe this isn't quite the thing you want
and really I don't want to force myself on you
you should be free to choose
I mean: obviously.
Although I think I should say
what began as friendship for me
and a sort of distant, even inattentive regard
has grown into a passion already
I don't know how
or where it came from, or when
but somehow the more I felt this admiration
and, well, pleasure in you
seeing you become the person that you are
I think a thoughtful person and smart

and it seems to me funny and warm
and passionate, I mean about the things
I heard you talk about in school
a movie or playing the piano
I saw you one night at a cafe by the harbor
drinking almond nectar
and I saw that happiness made you raucous.
And I myself don't want to have a relationship
that's cool or distant
I want a love really that's all-consuming
that consumes my whole life
and the longer the sense of you has lived with me
the more it has grown into a longing for you
so I wish you'd consider
maybe not marriage
because it's true you hardly know me
but a kind of courtship
or, maybe you'd just I don't know go sailing with me
or see a movie
I talk too much.
I'm sorry.
I do that sometimes.
I wish I didn't.
But I get started on a sentence,
and that leads to another sentence,
and then, the first thing I know,
I'm just trying to work it through,
the logic of it,
follow it through to the end
because I think,
if I stop,
or if I don't get through to the end
before someone interrupts me
they won't understand what I'm saying
and what I'm saying isn't necessarily wrong—
it might be, but not necessarily,
and if it is, I'll be glad to be corrected,
or change my mind—
but if I get stopped along the way
I get confused
I don't remember where I was
or how to get back to the end of what I was saying.
And I think sometimes I scare people because of it
they think I'm so, like determined just barging ahead—

not really a sensitive person, whereas, in truth,
I am.

[A woman enters
who is one immense piece of standing candle wax
with a half dozen tiny lit candles where her head should be.]

ARIEL

I love you, with all my heart.
I love your hands and your kneecaps
and your hair and your ears
and I love the way you are sweet when you are sweet
and the way you fuck up
because even when you fuck up
and it makes me so mad
you are actually so incompetent at it
such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you
because I think the reason you are such a loser
is that your heart is good
and so you can't hit the bullseye
when you are acting like a nasty shit
so that people don't have to take it seriously
and they can just wait till you realize
how wrong you've been
and also right
also right
because I don't think you are a pathetic loser
that people love out of pity
or because they want to be with some weak
useless guy they can manipulate
you really are a winner
because of your heart
which is always there
and when you come around
we all see it
and see you always were a good human being.

[A woman wearing a body dance tight
so it can be painted with random black and white splotches
light green here and there
with purple writing on her arms,
her face painted white with an oyster shell over one eye
and black X mark over her other eye
with a red splash over her mouth and part of her nose
and purple hair.
And she speaks to another woman.]

EDNA

There was a time long ago, in prehistoric times
when cicadas were human beings
back before the Muses were born.
And then when the Muses were born
and song came into being
some of these human creatures were so taken by the pleasure of it
that they sang and sang and sang.
And they forgot to eat or drink
they just sang and sang
and so,
before they knew it,
they died.
And from those human creatures a new species came into being
the cicadas
and they were given this special gift from the Muses:
that from the time they are born
they need no nourishment
they just sing continuously
caught forever in the pleasure of the moment
without eating or drinking
until they die.
This is the story of love.
If you stay there forever in that place
you die of it.
That's why people
can't stay in love.
But that's how I've loved you.
And how I love you now.
And how I always will.

[A man and a woman enter,
she with a face painted by Jackson Pollock
and clothes painted
in brightly colored squares and rectangles and triangles by Matisse;

He with nothing but flowers for clothes.]

AKIKO

Whose woods are these?

LEON

I don't know.

AKIKO

So.

I guess you could say we're lost in the woods together.

LEON

I guess you could.

AKIKO

I've never been lost in the woods.

LEON

Neither have I.

AKIKO

I'm glad I'm not alone.

LEON

So am I.

I like nature,

but I'm a little bit afraid of it.

AKIKO

Well, sure.

LEON

Of the dark parts especially.

I'd like nature better if it were better lit.

I think everyone is, you know,

basically afraid of the dark.

Even amoebas.

I mean, every life form,

you take them out of the light

and they begin to feel some anxiety.

I do.

AKIKO

I do.

LEON

Light, basically, is how you orient yourself
and a person without a sense of orientation

I mean, if you don't know where you are

and where you're going

and about where you are on the line of the place where you are

and the destination where you're going

a person begins to freak out.

I think that's why

in jazz
they always play the melody at the top
and then
once you know the tune
you think: right, let them riff
because I know where I am
and I know that, in the end,
they're going to come back to the melody
You know what I mean?

AKIKO
Well.
Sure.

LEON
It's like
a love story
you can just get lost in a love story because
we know
whatever happens along the way
we might get confused or we might get lost
or it's on again off again
and it goes down some blind alley
but that's how real life is
that's how it really is to be in love
sometimes you never know
sometimes it seems like it is just drifting
or it becomes hopeless
but it doesn't matter
because in the end
with a love story
you know
either they are going to get together
or they're not.

AKIKO
Right
[silence]

Do you think
you could ever live in the woods?

LEON
You mean, forever?

AKIKO
Well, for a long time.
Say, like five years.

[silence]

LEON
Five years.
[silence]
With you?
[silence]

AKIKO
Oh.
Oh.
Okay.
With me.
[silence]

LEON
Yes.
[silence]

AKIKO
Oh.

LEON
[silence]
I could live with you forever in the woods.
And that would be a life.

AKIKO
Shall we take a walk in the woods?

LEON
Good idea.
Let's do that.

[They get up and join hands]

AKIKO
I do.

LEON
I do.

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