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Love Sonnets: Stuff Guys Say

by CHARLES L. MEE

Monologues from the plays.

It's Not Easy to Be a Man

CONSTANTINE

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.

I've Always Liked You, Lydia

NIKOS
I thought,
I've always liked you, Lydia
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.

Cicadas

EDMUND

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.

Would You Marry Me?

HENRY

I wonder:

would you marry me

or

would you have a coffee with me
and think of having a conversation
that would lead to marriage?

Or late supper.

Or breakfast tomorrow

or lunch or tea in the afternoon

or a movie

or dinner the day after

Thursday for lunch

or Friday dinner

or perhaps you would go for the weekend with me

to my parents' home in Provence

or we could stop along the way

and find a little place for ourselves

to be alone.

Or just we could

have coffee over and over again

every day

until we get to know one another

and we have the passage of the seasons

in the cafe

we could celebrate our anniversary

and then perhaps you would forget

that you are not married to me

and we can have a child.

You know, I have known many women.

I mean, I don't mean to say....

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.

What Is It Women Want?

CONSTANTINE

What do you think?

You think you live in a world nowadays where
you can throw out a promise
just because you don't feel like keeping it?
Just because
drugs are rife
gambling is legal
medicine is euthanasia
birth is abortion
homosexuality is the norm
pornography is piped into everybody's home on the internet
now you think you can do whatever you want
whenever you want to do it
no matter what the law might say?

I don't accept that.

Sometimes I like to lie down at night
with my arms around someone
and KNOW she is there for me
know this gives her pleasure—
my arms around her
her back to me
my stomach pressed against her back
my face buried in her hair
one hand on her stomach
feeling at peace.

That's my plan
to have that.
I'll have my bride.
If I have to have her arms tied behind her back
and dragged to me
I'll have her back.

What is it you women want
you want to be strung up with hoods and gags and blindfolds
stretched out on a board with weights on your chest
you want me to sew your legs to the bed
and pour gasoline on you
and light you on fire
is that what I have to do to keep you?

The future is going to happen, Thyona,
whether you like it or not.
You say, you don't want to be taken against your will.
People are taken against their will every day.
Do you want tomorrow to come?
Do you want to live in the future?
Never mind. You can't stop the clock.
Tomorrow will take today by force
whether you like it or not.
Time itself is an act of rape.
Life is rape.
No one asks to be born.
No one asks to die.
We are all taken by force, all the time.
You make the best of it.
You do what you have to do.

Why Was This Idea of Marriage Ever Invented?

WILLY

Do they think something is going to change
because they've had a wedding?

And then everybody has the same boring thing,
with the same boring speeches,
the same boring white dress,
the same boring food.
I would rather go to a funeral than a wedding.
At a wedding
everyone is supposed to have the greatest day of their lives
and they never do.
At a funeral no one expects to have a wonderful day
and so usually it turns out to be really nice.

why was this idea of marriage ever invented?
because women
because they have menstrual periods
are subject to chronic shortages of iron in their systems
and so they require constant infusions of meat
but because they were not hunters
they were never hunters
they had to find a way to manipulate men
with sexual favors

into bringing home blood-soaked dinners every night
and if they were good at it
to marry them
to have a steady supply of meat

Who Would You Want?

HAROLD

Who would want you?
You crazy needy person
grabbing grabbing whatever you see
a bottomless pit of wishes and longings
a man could work and work and give you all he has
and you would be asking what's next what's more
and all the while telling him he is clumsy and ignorant
withdrawn graceless brutal insensitive confused
This is why men drive naked women into a pit with bayonets

This is why
everywhere a man finds a house
he will leave rubble
smoldering woodpiles.

This is why a man will smash his way into crowds
of women
raging and beating and hunting;
drive them across the fields
like frightened horses;
set fire to their houses;
hurl their corpses into wells.
This is why a man pulls the hair out of his head
and hopes to die of a heart attack

weeping
always weeping
with his head in his hands
his knees around his shoulders.

They say
there are places in the world today
where the houses are all collapsed as far as the eye can see
the father of one family standing outside his door
almost naked
his skin peeling off the upper half of his body
and hanging down from his finger tips
standing outside the door
looking for his family.

It can take generations to recover.
And sometimes you never recover.

You feel the chill in the countryside,
the low-lying white mist,
shards of farmhouses in the haze,
shattered stones,
empty streets,
and silence
no living thing
no bird, no animal breaks the silence
no dogs,
no children,
not one stone left standing on another,
rather a wilderness of stones.

Where I Had My First Kiss

BARBESCO
This is the Jardin du Luxembourg
a very important place
this is where I had my first kiss
Mademoiselle Beart
She was my teacher.
I was nine years old.
And so:
she kissed me.
And there, by the pond

where the woman rents the little sailboats
my first time to put my hand on a woman's breast.
It was Annette.

Uh,

very nice.

Over there

next to the marionette theatre

it was Chantal

the first time I was dumped big time

I don't know what I did

she left me standing right there.

I think I did nothing wrong

but she never explained

and so

I will never know.

And there

where the woman takes the little children for the ride

on the pony

it was Simone

my first time my hand up a woman's skirt on her ass

it was

extraordinary

she kiss me

she was a lovely person

I miss her.

She could have been my wife

but she wasn't.

It was her choice.

Over there, by the tennis court,

it was Gabrielle

behind these trees

we made love

in the late evening

dusk

like a dream

that's all

like a dream.

Gabrielle.

Up there

next to the ice cream kiosk

it was Sylvie

we made love standing up

in the middle of the day

I don't know

I think there were many people around us

they didn't seem to notice

or else
they thought it was normal.
Sylvie and I
we made love everywhere
not just here in the Jardin de Luxembourg
but you know
on the bank of the river
in the taxi
in the women's room at Cafe de Flore
she is my wife
we are married 22 years
I am completely faithful to her
and she is to me
And we come here every Sunday
almost every Sunday to the park
just to take a walk
that's all
because
we remember.
And now, if you will follow me,
we will come this way
and walk just to the Café de la Mairie.
I will show you the Church of St. Sulpice
where I had my first encounter with a man.

Mother Earth

HAROLD

I listen to your voice, I think
I could nestle right into it,
I could crawl right up inside it
you take me to a world that frankly
seems not altogether rational to me
more a world of tarot cards and chakras and the I Ching
mystical stories and folk tales
I guess I'm saying stories from the heart
I could get happily lost in your world
just letting go of my mind
and feeling your sweetness and your vulnerability
your tenderness and frankly your generosity
your lack of judgment of me
even though
or even at the same time really

that you were raking me over the coals
at the same time not holding it against me
as though it were some final judgment
sending me to hell
but just speaking the truth
that seems so generous to me and ultimately loving
in the deepest and truest sense
that I have to say
I've come to think of you almost as a mountain.

Like a mountain rising up from a lake
smooth and soft
covered with fuzzy fir trees
but solid rock underneath
strong and everlasting
the valleys and crevices
the swelling softness
the little village on the shore
nestled into the mountainside
secure, protected
settled there for eternity
on the breast of the earth.
I look at you, I think
Mother Earth.

Why Do People Kill Each Other All the Time?

BOB
Because the thing that starts everything is:
Helen
falls in love with Paris,
and he takes her
to Troy,
and then Helen's husband,
to get her back,
starts the Trojan war,
and then Agamemnon,
to get the favor of the gods for the war,
has to sacrifice his own daughter,
as a result of which Agamemnon's wife
Clytemnestra
kills him,
and their son Orestes

murders Clytemnestra—
all the murders and wreckage and ruin of Greece
comes from a love story.

Why do people kill each other all the time
if it isn't because of love gone wrong
or hurt feelings
feeling someone was disrespected
or despised
or deprived of what should have been his
treated fairly
as a good person, given in return what he himself gave
to the other person
then maybe it would be something bad would not have happened.
Or you could say in a more general way
if society itself had provided
which is to say, been more generous,
which is to say, loving
maybe you would not be seeing certain social behaviors.
You could say
economic exploitation itself is a lack of social love
where selfishness has made love difficult to give
or possessiveness or a fear of loss has overpowered love
and when you see a person dying of poverty
of the lack of medical care
this is a symptom of perversion
of the withholding of love
or the positive imposition of sadistic impulses
and thus, as you can see,
it is not just the whips and chains of sadists and masochists in nightclubs
that you might call perverse
but the practice of politics altogether
when it deprives people of the life-giving sustenance they need.

The Tortoise

A MAN

There was once a man named Frederick
who had a small son,
and the son had a pet tortoise.
One day the father decided to roast the tortoise,
so he put a burning stick against the tortoise's belly.
The tortoise kicked

and jerked his head
and urinated,
and the heat of the stick
caused the shell on the tortoise's belly to split.
So the father put his hand up inside the shell,
and,
while the tortoise struggled,
the father slit its belly with his knife
and pulled out its intestines.

By this time,
the tortoise had pulled a little into its shell
and was trying to hide there,
with his head between his knees,
looking out.
And meanwhile
the little boy had come to see what his father was doing.

And when the boy saw the tortoise,
he put his own arms up beside his head
and looked out—
just the way the tortoise looked out of his shell.

And now the father reached in and took hold of the tortoise's heart,
which was still beating,
and flipped the tortoise over onto the ground,
and while the man pulled out its heart,
the tortoise jerked violently.
And the father said to the son,
you see,
the tortoise—
like the earth itself,
or like a man—
is a slow, tough creature
that can live on a while
even after its heart is gone.

Because I Have a Collection of Barbies and Kens

GIULIANO

The wedding presents have come
now that everyone knows where to find you.
Frankly, I've never seen so many gifts

so much silver
so many white things
so much satin ribbon.
Do you think
we could save the ribbon?
Because
I wouldn't mind having the ribbon
I haven't taken any yet
I was going to ask you
if you don't want it
because I have a collection of Barbies and Kens
and this ribbon would go with the whole ensemble
so perfectly
this ensemble that I have
they are all arrayed together with their hands up in the air
because they are doing the firewalking ceremony
and Barbie has her pink feather boa
and her lime green outfit with the flowers at the waist
and the gold bow at the bodice
and Ken is doing the Lambada
so of course they all have mai tais
and they're just having a wonderful time
and their convertible is parked nearby
so you know they can take off to see the sunset any time they want
and when people come over and see my collection
they just say wow
because
because they can't believe I've just done it
but I think if that's who you are
you should just be who you are
whatever that is
just do who you are
because that's why we're here
and if it's you
it can't be wrong.
Some people like to be taken forcibly.
If that's what they like, then that's okay.
And if not, then not.
I myself happen to like it.
To have somebody grab me.
Hold me down.
To know they have to have me
no matter what.
It's not everyone's cup of tea.
Everyone should be free to choose for themselves

Freud Never Explained That

HAROLD

People are unique, each one of them.

I knew a fellow
who used to go to a bar in Oregon
where he knew a couple of women
who were willing
to go up to his hotel room with him
watch him strip naked,
get into a tub of bath water,
and walk back and forth.
His only request was that the women
would throw oranges at his buttocks
as he walked back and forth.
Then he would get out,
pick up the oranges,
put them in a paper bag,
get dressed,
and leave.
That's simply how it was for him
how he was able to connect to another human being
in an affectionate way.
This went on for some years
this relationship among the three of them.
In a sense, you might say,
this is the way in which they were able to constitute a human society
in which they felt comfortable.
Freud never explained that.

I Knew a Man Once

GIULIANO

I knew a man once
so kind and generous.
I was a boy
I was on a train going to Brindisi
and he said, I'm going to marry you.
He asked how far I was going.
To Rome, I said.
No, no, he said,
you can't get off so soon,

you need to go with me to Bologna.
He wouldn't hear of my getting off in Rome
or he would get off, too, and meet my family.
He gave me a pocket watch
and a silk scarf
and a little statue of a saint
he had picked up in Morocco.
He quoted Dante to me
and sang bits of Verdi and Puccini.
He was trying everything he knew
to make me laugh and enjoy myself.
But, finally,
he seemed so insistent
that I grew frightened of him.
He never touched me,
but he made me promise, finally,
that I would come to Bologna in two weeks time
after I had seen my family.
I promised him,
because I thought he might not let me get off the train
unless I promised.
He gave me his address, which of course I threw away,
and I gave a false address to him.
And when I got off the train,
I saw that he was weeping.
And I've often thought,
oh, well,
maybe he really did love me
maybe that was my chance
and I ran away from it
because
I didn't know it at the time.

I Could Live Forever with You in the Woods

DEBARGO
I've thought about it before
living in the country
because that would be beautiful
and I've always found it frightening
cut off from the world
as it seems to me
all alone

and
with nothing to do
but wait to get to be eighty years old
or ninety
and die.
You know, you might have thought you were going to be a doctor
or go to the moon
or just have a nice civil service job
a career and all the ordinary stuff of life
not throw it away on a great sort of romantic gamble
like you think
oh
I'd like to go to the country for the weekend
but to just fling myself out into the universe
and drift among the stars
and have this be my destiny
take the gamble that this would be a meaningful life
and one you would really like forever
the only life you have.
I mean, not that I'm a morbid person
but, you know, it seems to me,
if you're out there alone
maybe with a farm and fields and trees
and the night sky, the stars
you start to think pretty quickly
how you're all alone
and you just have your life on earth
and then it's over
and it hasn't been much more than a wink
in the life of the stars
and you haven't done anything
that you think is worth an entire life on earth
so I've always felt a lot safer living in the city
where you can't see the stars at night.

There you have your friends and things to do
you get all caught up
and it's fun
I'm not against having fun
what I mean is
going to movies, having dinner, hanging out
you can forget entirely that you're a mortal person
it seems: this could go on forever
until, I suppose, you meet someone, and you think:

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

All You Ever Wanted

VIKRAM

I wonder:

How can a person set out in life
not knowing at all what he might do
and then end up with something he does
that becomes almost an obsession

because he is trying to attract women
because all the time
he was never trying to do anything
other than attract women
or men it may be
if he was attracted to men
and so
he might have been strong and handsome
or very rich
or glamorous
he might have had a charismatic personality
he might have had great power
or
if he had none of these
he would have gone into the arts
where he would meet loose women
and prostitutes
or not
not prostitutes at all
but women who were drawn to bright colors
or drugs
or excitement of some other sort
late hours
dirty talk
and if he could paint these women
if he could bring them home
and have them take off their clothes
and they would look at his paintings
and think
oh, my
this is different
then he might be able to take them to bed
after a while
in spite of yourself
you become distracted by the bright colors yourself
you become interested in abstract things
the nature of light itself

flat colors and sharp angles
and then even
pain
and despair
desolation and loneliness
hard work
mortality
you don't remember any more
what it was that drew you to this life
until
again
suddenly you see a young woman
you might see her dance
you might see her step onto a tightrope in the circus
and then you remember again
all you ever wanted
was to hold her
and to have her hold you

Insane

WILSON

So
it turns out
you come to me
to be with me
and then
as soon as you feel reassured that I love you
you go back to your husband
and then if you talk to me on the phone
and I seem to be slipping away from you
if I seem anxious or uncertain
then you come back to me and make love with me
and stay with me
until you know you have me again
I can't help myself loving you
and then you go back to your husband again
so it turns out
the only way I can keep you is by making you feel anxious
keeping you on edge
making you feel I'm about to drop you
so the way to have you
is to reject you

and if I don't reject you
then I don't have you
we are in a relationship that is sick
where you show love by showing aversion
you show aversion by showing love
so that you live a backwards life
and the one person you want to love and cherish
and show how much you care
is the one person you will drive away by doing any of those things
how can we go on like this?
this is insane
this will make us both insane
this is how people go insane!

I Had a Ringside Seat by the Window

JOSEPH

I had a ringside seat by the window
at Bickford's cafeteria today
the June Dairy truck
unloading into the basement in front of the plate glass window
a girl fixing her white kerchief and hair
a girl with a red scarf, well groomed
a Chinese girl in a striped sweater, with an exquisite profile
a girl in a white blouse on the escalator
a girl in a pink linen skirt reading a thick tome on Freudian theory

and out the window:
a blonde child looking from out of the window of a taxi
up 8th avenue—

on the sidewalk
a woman with chestnut hair worn down her back—
a light blue sweater—
high cheek bones
boney frame
wan
emaciated

I felt a graciousness and wonder all over again
at the impact of these "meetings"
their sudden significance

the face in the driveway across the street
the sudden surprise and
happy confusion
trying to place it

a surprise blue skirt
white blouse
graceful simplicity with that impact of surprise

Beth—do you remember the girl I call "Beth?"
walking up Lexington avenue about 56th
with a friend
almost sunny

A sunny Tuesday
high noon
the face in the crowd beaming across an intersection
one's own steps turned back

three different appearances of Joyce
in baby blue dress
from endearing to mocking

a group of older girls
and some baby lambs

Courtesy Drugs checkout girl
also seen in Food Shop
piled up hair again
warm light brown corduroy slacks
no socks but the same dreamy docileness
the immense innocence
and beauty of expression
warmth in her contacts in Food shop

An Unfinished Game of Solitaire

ASTRONOMER
There was a time
when you came indoors from the fields
you would expect to see
traces of human occupation everywhere;
fires still burning in the fireplaces

because someone meant to come right back;
a book lying face down on the window seat;
a paintbox
and beside it
a glass
full of cloudy water;
flowers in a cut glass vase;
an unfinished game of solitaire;
a piece of cross-stitching
with a needle and thread stuck in it;
building blocks
or lead soldiers
in the middle of the library floor;
lights left burning in empty rooms.
This was the inner life.

We miss it.

A Christmas Card

JOSEPH
do you know Anne Hoysio
she works in a factory where I work
and I gave her a box that I had made
a box containing
a picture of a dog
a young girl
skyscrapers
a dark blue night sky
Lauren Bacall behind a glass frame
a ball
and I think she may have liked it
although
the truth is
she has hardly noticed me
before or since
she gave me a Christmas card
which I have saved in a special place
and I take it out from time to time to look at it
because
she was important to me
and her card is signed, you see,
it is signed

"Anne (tester) (Allied)"
tester in parentheses
and Allied in parentheses
because
you see
she thought she needed to identify herself to me
she thought our friendship was so insignificant
that I wouldn't know who she was
unless she reminded me
that she was a tester in the factory at Allied
where we worked
her Christmas card was
a sort of business Christmas card
that's how I guess she thought of it
but to me
I've saved it all these years
and I take it out from time to time
not just on Christmas
to look at it
to remember her

What I Do Every Morning

HENRI
This is what I do every morning
I get a cup of tea
and I step through the door into my studio
and whatever catches my attention
that's what I do.
I go to that, whatever it is.
I look at it and see if it needs a little more red somewhere
or a little blue on the top
and I do that
until something else in the studio catches my eye
something else that might need a little blue
or another tree painted in
or a sailboat sailing up in the sky.
This is what I do,
and this is a perfect life,
and I love it.

I go from painting to painting
and sometimes to a piece of pottery

that I was painting the other day
or over on the other side of the studio
to the architect's drawing table
where a piece of paper needs a little more pen and ink.
I wander.
Taken from place to place by whatever catches my eye
whatever feels good.
And
usually
by the time I get to the far end of my studio
it's time for lunch
so I open the door at that end of the studio
and step out onto the little terrace
where there is a small table and a few chairs
overlooking the vineyards
and my wife will join me for lunch.
Well, let's be honest,
she will usually bring lunch out onto the terrace,
and we will have lunch together
and then
we will make love in the afternoon.

Never Mind

HENRI
I always thought the main thing was to practice.
And so, when no one else was interested,
I just painted my own portrait over and over and over again.
And then my wife.
And she didn't seem to mind
if I asked her to take off her clothes.

At first
when you start out
you worry if you can make a living
or how you will pay the rent if you never make a living
and so
as time goes on
sometimes even for a year or two
you are awakened early every morning
at 4:30 or 5 o'clock
by anxiety about money
and you have to talk yourself back to sleep

because you know
if you don't get your sleep
you won't be able to do anything useful
you worry about money
and fame
you think if you were famous you would have money
and even if you didn't have much money
you would have fame
and that would make you feel good
although
in time
finally
all you worry about is immortality
what's the use?
what was the point?
will it all have been worth anything at all?
will it just disappear when you do?
or will it last?
and this is the sort of thing
that drives most people,
at last,
to believe in god and heaven.
Because, if this life is meaningless,
at least you can count on heaven.
Never mind fame and fortune and immortality
meaning and significance
never mind even having any point at all to your life
if you are aiming for heaven
and you have some small chance of getting there,
that's all you need.
Until you think
if I attach myself to god and heaven
does this mean I've just given up on my own life on earth?
And so
you are sent back once again
to thinking:
never mind about money or fame or immortality
or heaven
I will do what I love.
I will do what I love.
And that will be a rich and wonderful
and glorious life.
That's all I can hope for.

After the World Comes to an End

THE GUY WITH THE GAS CAN

People forget,
but
about a thousand years ago
they thought the world was coming to an end
so people sold their worldly goods
and gave away their money
and went to the top of a mountain
wherever they happened to be
to wait for the end of the world.
And they waited and waited.
Some of them may still be there.
The millenarians.
That's what they were called.

What they saw, finally,
was that
after the world comes to an end
life goes on.
That's how it was for the Greeks and the Romans.
That's how it was for the Millenarians.
Then, later on, a couple hundred years later,
people in 1200
they didn't even realize the world had come to an end.
They just grazed their sheep amid the ruins
and got on with stealing and fornicating.
When you go to Arizona
you see the levels of sediment in the rock
in the mesas that come up out of the desert
all dried out for thousands of years
hundreds of thousands of years
and that horizontal stripe of red in the rock
that was where the sea came up to
where you're standing now
it was nothing but underwater animals
and then the water levels fell
the fish all vanished
and here you are
sitting at a picnic table
thinking
how beautiful this is
like heaven.

One Time Long Ago

HOMER

One time
long ago
not far from here
the poet Simonides
was gathered with his friends
for dinner at a palace in the hills
across this valley.
Simonides stepped outside onto the terrace
for a moment
for a breath of air,
and in that moment
an earthquake
shook the villa
and brought it to the ground.
All Simonides' friends were crushed to death,
their bodies mangled and torn apart,
not even their own families could recognize them.

But Simonides could picture in his mind's eye
just where each one of his friends had been sitting,
and as he recalled them one by one
their bodies could be
pulled out from the rubble and identified.
And from this moment
came the beginning
of mankind's desire to remember
exactly
how the world has been
at one moment or another.

And so Simonides
instructed his friends
how to build their own palaces of memory,
how to build each room
how to furnish these rooms
with the faces and figures of their friends,
events of their lives,
their treasures,
books, poems,
each room given things of singular beauty
or distinctive ugliness,
to make them vivid
unforgettable

memories disfigured,
faces splashed with paint
or stained with blood
each moment suspended
in this geometry of memory, thought
and feeling.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher
and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.