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Love Sonnets: Things Women Say

by CHARLES L. MEE

Monologues from the plays.

I Know a Man

THYONA

I know a man who will say I want to take care of you
because he means he wants to use you for a while
and while he's using you
so you don't notice what he's doing
he'll take care of you as if you were a new car
before he decides to trade you in.

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
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.

these cheap pikers,
these welchers,

these liars,
these double dealers,
flim-flam artists,
litterbugs,
psychiatrists!

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

You Are a Typical Male

ARIEL

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

How Could You?

CATHERINE

How could you?

And yet
there it is.

And one day I will die
and so will you.

And yet
you could leave me.

I don't understand.

I will never understand
how it is if you have only one life to live
and you find your own true love
the person all your life you were meant to find
and your only job then was to cherish that person
and care for that person
and never let go

but it turns out
you can still think

for some reason
because this or that
you end it

you end it forever
you end it for the only life you will ever live on earth.

Maybe if you would be reincarnated
and you could come back to life again and again a dozen times
then this would make sense
to throw away your only chance for love in this life
because you would have another chance in another life
but when this is your only chance
how can this make sense?

Do you think
there will ever be a time
when we could get back together?

If You Go to Law School

SALLY

You'd think
if you go to law school
you'd learn to think clearly

and think things through
you'd see your starting points
and you'd be able to reason your way
through to the end.
And then it turns out
you can't.

And now I think
I can't imagine ever beginning to want to have an affair with anyone,
I'd rather be left alone in peace.
I don't see how it's worth it.
I can masturbate.
I can get a vibrator.
They have the most wonderful vibrators these days,
like saddles, you can sit on them like a horse
and ride and ride all you want to;
it doesn't buck, it doesn't whinny,
it doesn't talk,
you turn it on whenever you want,
and when you're tired of it,
you just push its button and it stops.
If you like you can get a little one
that fits right in your undies,
and you make it go with a little remote control
you can carry in your purse
so that while you're out to lunch
or at a wedding party
you can be masturbating
while you're in the middle of a conversation,
and when the conversation's over
no one has any hard feelings.

I Don't Understand

CATHERINE
One day I will die
and so will you.
And yet
you could leave me.
I don't understand.
I will never understand
how it is if you have only one life to live
and you find your own true love

the person all your life you were meant to find
and your only job then was to cherish that person
and care for that person
and never let go
but it turns out
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to throw away your only chance for love in this life
because you would have another chance in another life
but when this is your only chance
how can this make sense?

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 coccyx
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, just 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

Romeo and Juliet

EDITH

Sometimes in life
you just get one chance.
Romeo and Juliet
They meet, they fall in love, they die.
That's the truth of life
you have one great love
You're born, you die
in between, if you're lucky
you have one great love
not two, not three,
just one.
It can last for years or for a moment
and then
it can be years later or a moment later
you die
and that's how it is to be human
that's what the great poets and dramatists have known
you see Romeo and Juliet
you think: how young they were
they didn't know
there's more than one pebble on the beach
but no.
There's only one pebble on the beach.
Sometimes not even one.

I Love You

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 bull's-eye
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.

The Life I Have in Mind

TILLY

I would eat tarte tatins
and drink Chateau Neuf du Pape
and sometimes a glass of rose
sitting in the garden in the afternoon
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 every day
or even one every other day
with an espresso, in the café
one of the cafés
and then I'd drive out to the hospital
where Van Gogh spent that year
painting the cypresses and the olive trees
and you think:
he was crazy
and pathetic
what a tragedy
how he suffered
but you know
he turned out a hundred a 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
you just get up in the morning
and you get your cup of coffee
and you wander into your studio
and whatever catches your eye is what you do
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
and then a little yellow
some green here over on the right
you think
okay
I could put a sailboat up there in the sky
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
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
adding a little picnic table to the landscape
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
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.

I Don't Think It's Wrong

OLYMPIA

These men!

These men!

All I wanted was a man who could be gentle
a man who likes to cuddle
a man who likes to talk
a man who likes to listen

And I don't think it's wrong

to lie in the bath

and curl my hair

and paint my nails

to like my clothes

and think they're sexy

and wear short skirts

that blow up in the wind

I don't think it's wrong

for a man to love me

to like to touch me

and listen to me

and talk to me

and write me notes

and give me flowers

because I like men

I like men

And, I like to be submissive.

Some people go on honeymoons, too.

They go to places where there are hammocks and white sand

and people hold them by the waist

and lift them up out of the water

splashing and laughing

and they dive underwater

without the tops to their swimming suits

and the sun sets

and people drink things through straws

and they listen to the waves

and even make love in the afternoon

and even like Giuliano says to be submissive

because, to me,

submission is giving up your body,

and your mind and your emotions

and everything
to a someone who can accept all the responsibilities that go with that.
And I myself enjoy the freedom that submission gives me.
I like to be tickled and tortured
and I like to scream and scream
and feel helpless
and be totally controlled
and see how good that makes someone else feel.
It is for me the most natural high.
It is so much better than taking drugs.
You can just relax and enjoy yourself
and feel alive and free inside.

Sometimes a Woman Likes Sex

MARIA

Sometimes a woman likes sex,
and not always something gentle and considerate
sometimes a little wild or it could be ridiculous
like a ride on the handlebars of a bicycle
and therefore she will do something wrong to have this
and not be very proud of having done it
but not be needing a lecture afterwards
from a person pretending to be a sort of moral authority
or even actually being a sort of moral authority
but even if he is
being a little boring and depressing because of it
a little like a heavy thing
as much as she hates to say it
because she may feel this person is a really good person
deep down
deeply good and kind and considerate
and deserving real love in return because of that
not just some stifling person who ought to be snuffed
but in his own way
even if it is not her way
in his own way even lovable
but possibly lovable by someone else.

The Wedding Guests

MERIDEE

there are people who still want to love each other
and be together
and not just halfway,
not just keeping one foot out on the river bank
ready to say at any moment
ok, forget it,
I guess we grew apart
save yourself, I'm out of here
but they want to say
no, I'm going all the way with you
I'm here with you forever
I want to make this commitment to you
people still want to do this
because
no matter what we've seen in our lifetimes
this is still a universal human desire
the desire for love forever
and people still want to give themselves to that
and notice it
and mark it with a special occasion
so that when they die
it doesn't seem like the most important thing in their lives
was—what?—having their appendix out?
because everyone made such a big deal about that?
and love IS an important thing
it may be a necessary thing even
for the world to go on
and so, the wedding guests are there
because when people make this promise to one another
it's a happy occasion
and the most important one
and people like to share it.
And leave town before the misery begins.

The Next Big Event of My Life

MERIDEE

I thought the next big event of my life
would be getting married
but now I see

the next big event will be dying.
Because it's over and
you went so fast
in the arms of someone else
how could anyone ever trust love again
when it can disappear so fast
and leave me all alone forever

I was thinking all this time:
we're so important to one another
and it turns out I was wrong about the biggest thing in my life
how can I think I can be right about anything else?
the time you came home from being away
I said to you, "you've come home"
and you said yes
and I said but I don't think so
I think you left two months ago
and you are never coming back because
when I called one time
I felt something had happened
I heard it on the phone
and you said
I don't know
What don't you know?
I don't know if I can come back.
Because you've fallen in love, I said?
What?
Because you've fallen for another woman?
Don't trivialize it, he said.
it felt as though all at once the city had been bombed out
the house had been burned down
I asked him: Have you had a love affair?
He said no.
You've fallen for someone else
He said no.
You've had a fling. A one night stand.
My heart had stopped.
No, he said.
I said I don't believe it.
Believe what you want, he said.
And now I've stopped breathing.

And I think the truth is
I always came last
and I hate you for that
and now I see I'm dying

the only person I've ever loved in my life
my life itself
and now you're gone
and I will never have you back
and if you do come back
I will say to you
just go
just go
because you are always just leaving me
every time you go away and come back
you say you can't come back to me
and I always felt from the very first,
from the first night we spent together,
the pain of your rejecting me.

so go this time
you are going to leave me eventually
I have always known it,
so leave me now
I've pursued you and pursued you and pursued you
in every way for all these years
and you have rejected me and rejected me and rejected me
I have to rip you out of my heart
but it just tears me apart like a rag
you say I say these things
to manipulate you
but how can I manipulate you?
when you stick a knife into an animal
it will kick and jerk and cry out
before it dies
it can't help itself
I keep waiting for my love for you to stop, to stop
but it won't end
and I can't bear it
I miss being with you,
just hearing you breathe
holding you through the night if I would dare
I couldn't help myself either
pretending I didn't care
turning over myself in bed, turning my back to you
hoping you would see my behavior as a mirror of your own
seeing you should turn back to me
not giving you everything I could
everything you wanted
every single thing because you sweet sweet soul
you had deserved every single thing in life you wished
And I so regret

not finding a way
to find you,
instead of withdrawing from you—
and so making you feel, I suppose,
not loved, not pursued, not treasured
not precious as I felt you were.
Not giving you all the things I felt for you
And so I keep trying over and over
to let you go,
and even as I say that
it takes my breath away
to think that I would let go
of the only person in my life I have ever loved so completely,
you've been my life itself to me,
that's what I find so hard to let go of
and why, when I come close to letting go,
it feels like the only death I'll die.
And is this the way I'm going to feel the rest of my life?
Or will it go away like a single breath?

You Might Say I'd Never Do Such a Thing

SALOME

I had a friend:
when she first met her husband
he was preoccupied with young girls.
All the time.
Paul. His name was Paul.
Looking at pictures of them.
Looking at them on the street.
To her it seemed strange.
And, then, the first time she helped him get a young girl into the car
to take her home,
she was,
my friend was,
well,
quivering,
a knot in her stomach,
that sick excited sensation.

After that it was easy.
I don't mean she doesn't still get excited,
but it was never again like the first time.

The first time is always different, with everything.
I mean,
obviously.

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

[she smiles]

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

As a child
I thought about numbers a lot.
First there was the question
could a woman have several husbands all at the same time
or only one after the other?
And then, as the years went by,
I thought about how many children a woman might have.
And then,
a few weeks after I lost my virginity
I had group sex.
There were five of us altogether,
three boys and two girls.

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

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

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

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

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

I won't say how many shoes I've got
but I have no regrets about any of them.
In fact, there are some shoes I love so much
that I'll go out and buy double colors.
Because if it's like a great red shoe that's fabulous for the summer
and I love it
and it's the right color red

then I've got to have two—
because I know I'll live in the shoe
and it will get destroyed
and I'll need a new one.
And men don't understand this.
My husband used to say
darling what have you done?
It looks like you've been to a fire sale!"
And I would think, "honey, you wish!"

How a human will turn out
well
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 Elizabeth Taylor was going to turn out
you didn't know how Simone de Beauvoir was going to turn out
you didn't know how Celine Dion was going to turn out
neither did her mother
because, if you did, you would have been able to predict feminism
which you didn't
or Brigitte Bardot or Saddam Hussein
which you didn't
because you didn't know

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

[she smiles]

One time I was offered to my masters
I was going to be whipped in that humiliating position—
arms and legs spread—
and I was perspiring

my body was taut with the pain
but pain turning into pleasure
and then when Pierre began to put the pincers on my breasts
well that always makes me suffer a great deal
and I thought I couldn't endure it
but when I was suspended by the handcuffs
and I felt the pain in my thighs
and I couldn't turn my head to see anyone in the room
and Fiona put something on me
I don't know what it was
an electric drill and miniaspirator of some kind
while she was touching me with such a soft hand
and the sugar-sweet smell of her perfume filled my nostrils
so that it was very sweet and unbearable at the same time
this dizzying shiver shot through me
and I was afraid I was going to piss myself with pleasure
like a stark beginner
my thighs were trembling
I was soaked
I was soaked
so that I thought for a moment that the juices ran as far as my thighs

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

but then you do it again

What Is a Man after All?

ESTHER
Go home and wait for him
to come home
because of what?
Because he's gotten hungry at last?
Because he needs to do his laundry?
Because what is a man after all
if not the most dependent sort of creature in the world?

Useless and pathetic.
Who has no need greater than to be
protected and admired, guided, and sheltered
by Mama
to be at home, at home
where he can spend his time
wallowing in basic animal activities:
eating, sleeping relaxing
and being soothed by Mama:
passive, rattle-headed
Daddy's Girl,
ever eager for approval,
for a pat on the head,
for the "respect" of any passing piece of garbage
mindless ministrator to physical needs,
soother of the weary,
booster of the puny ego,
appreciator of the contemptible,
a hot water bottle with tits.

And then a man will make a society that is not a community
but merely a collection of isolated family units.

Why?
desperately insecure,
fearing his woman will leave him
if she is exposed to other men
or to anything remotely resembling life,
the male seeks to isolate her from other men
and from what little civilization there is,
so he moves her out to the suburbs,
a collection of self-absorbed couples and their kids.
And there is yet another reason
for the male to isolate himself:
every man is an island.
Trapped inside himself,
emotionally isolated,
unable to relate,
the male has a horror of civilization, people, cities,
situations requiring an ability to understand
and relate to people.
So, like a scared rabbit, he scurries off,
dragging Daddy's little asshole along with him
to the wilderness, the suburbs,
where he can fuck and breed undisturbed.

Men cannot co-operate to achieve a common end,
because each man's end is all the pussy for himself.
The male cannot progress socially,
but merely swings back and forth
from isolation to gangbanging.

The Man I Used to Love

ZIYI

The man I used to love
would say to me from time to time
don't you think you should go home now for a while
to visit with your parents
because he didn't think where he and I lived was our home
and because he wanted to have a fling
and even to have his fling in the bed we slept in

because he wasn't afraid of anything

and sometimes I would come home—
because it was home to me—
and he would be there with a mistress
and I was expected to make conversation with her
and I did because—what did she know?
she must have been as confused as I was—
and sometimes he would even expect me to take his mistress out for a walk
because he was expecting another lover
and so his mistress—is this what people say,
these days still: his mistress?—
his mistress and I would go for a long walk
and sit in a cafe drinking coffee
while my husband was making love with someone else
who could do this now that you think back on it?—
why would I live like that?
but the one thing that is for sure is
if I am so untrustworthy a person
so unable to look out for myself
for sure I don't want to get mixed up with another man
before I know what I am doing
and what just happened if it wasn't that?

Older Men

ZIYI

I mean, not that I have anything against older men
quite the opposite in a way
only I was married to an older man
and he took such a patriarchal position
and then I
I found I liked it
I invited it
so we had almost a sado masochistic relationship
which I found I just loved
he had other lovers
he treated me like dirt
he wanted always to handcuff me to the bed
and it seems I not only fell into a sort of dependent role
but I had sought it all along
so now
I'm trying to go straight
you know
grow up
have a relationship with another grownup person
as a grownup person
if I have any relationship at all
and at the moment I don't have one at all
and don't want one
because I'm still recovering
and you?

Why Am I Doing This?

ANOTHER GIRL

i pop too many pills my boyfriend says.
he confiscated a bottle, but i have others.
I take more then he knows behind his back.
it was already a huge trust issue when he found out
i had been taking one drug behind his back,
if he were to now discover that i've continued doing this
with not one but several drugs, he may never trust me again.
and he loves me so much it would destroy him.
why am i doing this?
am i trying to sabotage my relationship?
that can't be,

i love him more than my own life and i can't imagine a life without him.
i know we'd both contemplate suicide if we were to break up,
and worse,
i'm his first real love,
he's never had a serious relationship before me.
i don't know how he'd handle it if it did end.
that's one of my worst fears, hurting him. and i have been recently.
things were so rough yesterday, this has never happened to us in 2 years.
so why can't i stop lying to him?
i'm a deceitful, manipulative, and undeserving little cunt.
he's this best thing that's ever happened to me,
why am i throwing a wrench into a beautifully functioning machine?
god i need to get a grip on myself.
i can see disappointment and sadness in his eyes sometimes now.
it's killing me
i don't think i love him anymore.

How Would You Kill a Rat?

THYONA

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

cut out to be a psychologist.

How would you kill a rat?

I don't know.

If you had to.

Hanging by the wrists,

burning with cigarettes

burning with an iron

hosing with water

hitting with fists

kicking with boots

hitting with truncheons

hitting with whips

exposing to cold showers

depriving of sleep

depriving of toilets

depriving of food

subjecting to abuse

beating with fists and clubs

hitting the genitals

hitting the head against the wall

electric shocks used on the head

on the genitals

on the feet

on the lips

on the eyes

on the genitals

hitting with fists

whipping with cables

strapping to crosses

caning on the backside

caning on the limbs

inserting sticks

inserting heated skewers

inserting bottle necks

pouring on boiling water

injecting with haloperidol

chlorpromazine

trifluoperazine

beating on the skull

cutting off the fingers

submerging in water
breaking of limbs
smashing of jaws
crushing of feet
breaking of teeth
cutting the face
removing the finger nails
wrapping in plastic
closing in a box
castrating
multiple cutting

The Point Is

ELLA

The point is, you came on way too strong.
That's not the sort of thing you can take back now.
The damage has been done.
That's why people, when people play bridge,
they lead with the three of clubs,
they feel it out
and then they can build from there.
But when you throw down the ace of spades,
what is it?
You're going for a grand slam or what?

I've been thinking of us being together
and what I thought was
the mental picture that came to mind was
I walked into Dean and Deluca
and I saw that the man in front of me was sweating and
twitching
and just then all of the automatic doors slid shut
and the lights started blinking.
The man was shooting at the produce
and screaming instructions in Arabic which no one understood.
So I started interpreting for him
because I could tell what he must have meant.
And everyone got down on the floor on their stomachs
and crawled toward the corners.

They were sleeping in the stairwells and the hallways and
on the bathroom floors.

People started to get sick.
Each night 10 or 15 of the sick old men
were taken to the spare bedroom
and told to lie down in a clump.
The men with machine guns said
that they would fire one bullet per person into the clump
and if anyone managed to live they could live.
But when they opened fire
they just kept on shooting until everyone was hit.

You came in and led me to the bathroom.
You sat me down on the toilet and gave me 10 punchlines
and told me to come up with the jokes that went with them.
I matched them up correctly
and then you added in some homeopathic remedies
where you said the herb
and I had to say what it cured.

I ran through the back wall into the garden
where all of my theatre friends were having a lingerie dinner party.

Everyone was dressed in long silk gowns.

The tables were covered with silk pajamas and robes sewn together.

And then it started raining
and everyone ran around grabbing the silk and disappearing.
So I ran for the elevator
but when the doors closed we saw the elevator rolling away
and we were on an Amish school bus.
All of the kids and teachers were smiling at us and clapping.

The driver let me off at the elephant trainer's
and he said he would take me back on his elephant.

So I climbed up on his back
and he started walking
and just a few steps down the road
he turned his head around and wrapped his trunk around my waist
and said that he had fallen in love with me
and he wouldn't ever let go.

What do you think that means?

Feelings Are Feelings

SUSAN

I'm a person who is looking for true love
like anyone else
except the difference is
I am trying not to be afraid of my feelings
and censor things
and lie and lie and lie all the time
pretending I feel like this or that
going with some guy because I couldn't be sure any more
how I felt about him
because he had some things I liked and other things I didn't
and trying to talk myself into not caring about the things I cared about
and caring about the things I didn't care about
because I've done that a lot in the past
so I am trying to let my feelings lead me through life
And
feelings are feelings
they come and go.
So probably I'm just as disoriented as you are
and left in the lurch
suddenly dropped
or thrown down the stairs
it's not as though this is not a struggle for me too
but the one thing you can be sure of is
if ever I am sure of how I feel
in a way that is the kind of feeling that I know will last
then when that time comes
if it so happens that I do tell you I love you
then you can be sure of it.

To Lie in Bed with You at Night

CATHERINE

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 coccyx
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, just 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

I've Been Looking for You

JUNE
And you
now I know why I haven't been married
because I've been looking for you
all these years
I knew I was right
even though I had no idea
I would be happy just to sit with you
in an airplane for the rest of my life
my shoulder pressed against yours
and to hear you laugh
because more than anything
I love it when you laugh
because nothing is more important
than the things that make a person laugh or smile
because your sense of humor
that's something you can't help
you can pretend you know something about novels
or you can pretend to be considerate
but a sense of humor is something you can't fake
what gets to you
what strikes you in a certain way
it's just spontaneously how you are
when you're not thinking
and I saw you

all the way from Los Angeles to New York
smiling and smiling
and I knew
I had to have you.

The Desire for Love Forever

MERIDEE

there are people who still want to love each other
and be together
and not just halfway,
not just keeping one foot out on the river bank
ready to say at any moment
ok, forget it,
I guess we grew apart
save yourself, I'm out of here
but they want to say
no, I'm going all the way with you
I'm here with you forever
I want to make this commitment to you
people still want to do this
because
no matter what we've seen in our lifetimes
this is still a universal human desire
the desire for love forever
and people still want to give themselves to that
and notice it
and mark it with a special occasion
so that when they die
it doesn't seem like the most important thing in their lives
was—what?—having their appendix out?
because everyone made such a big deal about that?
and love IS an important thing
it may be a necessary thing even
for the world to go on

A Glass of Wine

MARIA

It turns out life is nothing but loose ends.
It's not that, just because one has many love affairs
or love affairs with people one shouldn't
that that makes you a person incapable of love
or a person who has no feelings
I myself
I pray for a better world
a world where there will be no such thing
as unrequited love and pain and suffering
and women can return the love of any man
where people live in peace
where the whole world will be like Tuscany
the evening sunset on the vines
and olive trees
a golden glow
roses growing up the sides of farm houses
a glass of wine in the lingering twilight
grandchildren playing down by the arbor
reading by the pool
the circus performers from the village
coming out to the house for lunch
entertaining the children with their clowning
and juggling
the family in the kitchen
making dinner together
the children picking fresh vegetables
the neighboring farmer holding forth
reciting Dante by heart
stanza after stanza
and bursting into song
arias from Verdi
the mother sitting at the hearth
giving her breast to her baby
fresh herbs
the fennel and the basil
the roasted garlic and the fish stew
we'll have our own wine
from the vines nearby the house
our own olive oil
from the trees on the nearby hillside
we will laugh and cry and tell stories
we will have love affairs
and no one will be hurt

aunts and uncles will gather every Sunday
to take care of the children
while we have a nap in the upstairs bedroom
oh Tuscany Tuscany
how I long for you and love you.

Of All Human Qualities, the Greatest Is Sympathy

BELLA
In the end,
of all human qualities,
the greatest is sympathy—
for clouds even
or snow
for meadows
for the banks of ditches
for turf bogs
or rotten wood
for wet ravines
silk stockings
buttons
birds nests
hummingbirds
prisms
jasmine
orange flower water
lessons for the flute
a quill pen
a red umbrella
some faded thing
handkerchiefs made of lawn
of cambric
of Irish linen
of Chinese silk
dog's blood
the dung beetle
goat dung
a mouse cut in two
In spring the dawn.
In summer the nights.
In autumn the evenings
In winter the early mornings
the burning firewood

piles of white ashes
the ground white with frost
spring water welling up
the hum of the insects
the human voice
piano virtuosos
orchestras
the pear tree
The sunlight you see in water as you pour it from a pitcher into a bowl.
The earth itself.
Dirt.

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