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# The Rules

by CHARLES L. MEE

Originally produced under the title of *The Constitutional Convention:  
A Sequel*

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I

(Overture. A long loud crashing wonderful piece followed by silence. Darkness. The sound of water, as of a trickling stream or little fountain, and the occasional sound of a plucked string or other beautiful musical sound. A scrim fills the back of the stage. The scrim is a delicate pink at the moment. A stuffed deer stands upstage. Through the scrim are projected such rules of civility as these: THE POLITE DINNER GUEST ALWAYS SPEAKS WITH RESTRAINT; THE REFINED SMOKER ASKS PERMISSION BEFORE HE LIGHTS UP; THE GENTLEMAN DANCER IS CONSIDERATE OF HIS PARTNER; THE LADY WHO RIDES SIDE-SADDLE MAY WEAR GREEN IN-FORMALLY; THE WELL-REARED CHILD APPRECIATES THE VALUE OF PROPERTY.

The occasional sound of a croquet match. A Louis XVI chair rises slowly from beneath the stage. Arthur sits on it. Over a loudspeaker, we hear several different voices narrating these stories, speaking very quietly, and very slowly, with very long silences between each sentence:) I don't know myself whether it was true or not, but Denys always said that Vera had eaten human flesh when she was in Borneo.

I wouldn't know.

No.

(The shriek of a hyrax, the sound of hoopoes and nightjars.)

But I do remember when the Prince of Wales came down for the weekend, and we were having dinner at the Muthaiga Club, and Vera began to bombard him from across the table with big pieces of bread. I remember it quite clearly in fact, because I was sitting right beside him and one of them caught me in the eye and gave me a black eye, and after the meat course she got up and rushed around to our side of the table and overturned his chair and rolled him around on the floor-- not in the least amusing, I thought, and stupid to do at the club.

Yes.

But that was the evening they pitched the records out of the window.

No, that wasn't Vera. That was Alice.

Have I got this all wrong?

Broke all the windows.

And all the records.

Yes, that was Alice. Always bathed in front of her guests.

In that vast bathroom.

Yes.

No, that was Idina. Bathed and dressed while the guests arrived, and then handed out the keys to the rooms, two keys to each room, handing them out at random, mixing up the couples in all which ways. That was Idina.

Oh, but it was fun, though. I've never had such fun.

(Continuing birdsong. The sound of the musical tapping of ground hornbills.)

Of course the staff had to stay up all night, but Joss was extraordinary, I thought, the way he could swear at the servants in Swahili. And of course he was wonderful at telling them about such things, you know, as spitting. You know, it is very ill-mannered, he would say to them, to swallow what should be spat. This can nauseate others, and so you shouldn't abstain entirely from spitting. Nevertheless, you should not become accustomed to spitting too often, and without need. This is not only unmannerly, but disgusts and annoys everyone.

When you are with well-born people, and when you are in places that are kept clean, it is polite to spit into your handkerchief while turning slightly aside. It is even good manners for everyone to get used to spitting into a handkerchief when in the houses of the great and in all places with waxed or parquet floors. But it is far more necessary to acquire the habit of doing so when in church.

#### VOICEOVER

After spitting into your handkerchief, you should fold it at once, without looking at it, and put it into your pocket. You should take great care never to spit on your clothes, or those of others. If you notice saliva on the ground, you should immediately put your foot adroitly on it. If you notice any on someone's coat, it is not polite to make it known; you should attempt to remove it without being noticed. For good breeding consists in not bringing to people's attention anything that might offend or confuse them.

(Another Louis XVI chair rises from beneath the stage, with Susan sitting on it. During the ensuing dialogue, this sentence-in diagram form, one word coming on at a time-is projected on the rear scrim: "No, Sam, I know the pressure that we are putting on them and I know the gains that we have made but we know that there is still a long way to go but I think that to put it that way that they were simply killed and that the violence was totally coming from the law-and-order side ignores the fact that the rioting on behalf of others there was going on there and it is tragic and again we hope that this can be corrected but I think also that it is significant that on the officer side or the police side whether they were military police and I think that they were police that it is significant that of those who were enforcing the law some were black policemen.")

#### SUSAN

It's impossible to get mincemeat.

ARTHUR

Well.

(Silence.)

I'm not surprised.

SUSAN

Oysters are easy enough to get, fish wrapped in banana leaves, that sort of thing, but the traditional things are harder to come by. It's a difficult time, but people have no sense of it.

ARTHUR

No.

SUSAN

They have no sense of restraint.

ARTHUR

No.

(Silence.)

I remember the first Thanksgiving-Captain John Smith had gone back to England for help. A boat came over. There was a terrible storm. The ship was wrecked, on the shore of Bermuda. You knew about that.

SUSAN (Vaguely.)

Sort of local gossip.

ARTHUR

Yes.

(Pause.)

So they ate rats, I think.

(Silence.)

SUSAN

Rats?

ARTHUR

Norwegian rats.

SUSAN

No, I don't think that could have been the first Thanksgiving.

ARTHUR

Caught them with their bare hands sometimes. Beat them to death against the dirt or against the stockade wall. Hardy people. Well, they had to be. And then they took to digging up the dead.

SUSAN

Dead what?

ARTHUR

The dead bodies of the settlers who had already died of starvation. Dug them up and ate them. No other food.

SUSAN

This isn't the story I remember.

ARTHUR

And then there was that one fellow who killed his wife-you've heard that story I'm sure, killed her and salted her down for dinner.

SUSAN

No, I hadn't heard that.

ARTHUR

The first Thanksgiving.

SUSAN

No, I don't think that can have been it.  
(Silence.)

ARTHUR (With complete indifference.)

Maybe not.

(Silence.)

I don't remember.

(Long silence.)

(Another Louis XVI chair rises from beneath the stage, with David sitting on it. He wears a pair of white gloves, holds an open newspaper, and is looking away from his paper.)

DAVID

Do you wear rubber?

SUSAN

Rubber?

DAVID

You know, rubber, like rubber skirts, or, in the summer, rubber shorts or rubber stockings, or even-you know, rubber underwear.

SUSAN

No.

DAVID

I thought you might.

(Silence.)

Most people, you know, try to repair their rubber with superglue, which is fatal, because it destroys the material.

SUSAN

No. I didn't know.

(Silence.)

DAVID

I use Copydex for temporary repairs, but then I always take it in to a professional.

SUSAN

Uh-huh.

DAVID

You know, to get leather or rubber on, you have to make sure you're dry from head to toe, and then talc yourself...

SUSAN

Life is more complicated now than it used to be. People have relationships these days with their objects, and sometimes just with pictures of their objects. It's been a difficult time, really. When we first came there were flowers here, there, and everywhere.

ARTHUR

Of course there used to be rules.

DAVID

There are now.

ARTHUR

Oh, sure, but now everyone knows they're just made up.

SUSAN

It was like a fairy tale. We would leave and everything would be green, and when we came back everything was pink, as if a fairy had done it with a touch of her magic wand. When you walked into Florence Gould's salon, there were twelve Bonnards on the walls-these are things one can never forget. In the dining room were only English artists, Sargent and Romney, well, English in a way, you know. The porcelain was breathtaking-she used to give a dollar to each servant for every dish they didn't break. Prince Troubetzkoi had an air conditioned grotto for his penguins.

ARTHUR

These days, Cardin, with all that money, lives like a pauper. The cuff link is missing, the pants are gone.

DAVID

I must admit, I myself like the Ritz Cariton in Boston.

ARTHUR

I like an old Daimler.

SUSAN

Mahogany toilet seats. Mother Teresa. Viscount Linley.

DAVID

The Queen Mother.

SUSAN

And people who surprise you in the way they talk, the way they dress, as though everything they say seems to be something they just thought of. We all like it really, the way we like the Egyptian pyramids—they're so wonderful under the full moon, Magritte is nothing in comparison. And yet I get so impatient with things sometimes that I have the urge to shoot someone. When I went into the Mutaigha Club for a fitness evaluation, Kenny said to me, well, how many push-ups can you do, and I said I don't know, fifteen or twenty I suppose, and he said OK let me see you, and I got down on the floor and I did one, one push-up, and then I collapsed, and he said as he wrote on my chart, upper body dangerous, and he said well, how do you rate yourself cardiovascularly, I said cardiovascularly, I wouldn't know, I wouldn't know how, and he said, on a scale of one to ten for instance, I said well let's say five I suppose, and he said five, that would mean someone who runs five miles several times a week, I said, well I don't know, let's say three then, or I don't know, two, and he wrote down on my chart, cardiovascular dangerous and I thought, well, my body is a bomb, that's all, just waiting to go off.

ARTHUR

Really?

SUSAN

And then sometimes I go out to take photographs so I feel I have something to do, but then I just feel the same way all over again, a voyeur, really, at a distance. It makes me feel so violent. And when I point my camera at the people in the streets, I think, no, I don't want to turn these people into: specimens. There's a transvestite. Her name is ...

(Beat, to Arthur.)

What's her name?

ARTHUR (Looking up from his paper.)

Whose name?

DAVID

What's the point?

SUSAN

Well, I'll tell you. She told me, "I've been a woman for ten years." She's really a man, you know, and I said, "That's nothing. I've been a woman for thirty-six years."



(Silence.)

Sometimes I think I ought to sell the rights to my life story. (Silence. We hear the sound of sobbing, as their chairs descend beneath the stage, and:)

II

(A performance piece by The Alien Comic. This can change from evening to evening so that a number of different performance artists are used, but it ought to be a humorous monologue without any political content, sheer amusement, with a trashy, alienated attitude. The sobbing can continue under this. A deafening piece of rock music slams into the end of the performance piece, and, as the music continues, the chairs with Arthur, David, and Susan ascend again—but at different places on stage.)

III

VOICEOVER

The Superior ought never to lie down in the presence of the slave unless she is fully dressed.

The experienced practitioner will use the spread eagle restraint to prevent the subject from twisting the lower body away.

The use of nylon or cotton rope, fine copper chain or a steel chain and shackle, handcuffs or thumbcuffs, is entirely up to the sensuality of the Superior.

The basic nipple torture involves first an oiling and light touching of the area.

From there may follow pricking, piercing, or slashing with pins and razors.

If a punishment is to be well-administered, it ought never to be done in the heat of passion.

Paddles are available in sex-novelty shops in all major cities, as well as through mail order.

(Possible projected sentences during the voiceovers above:

CAN YOU TALK?; DOES HE EXAMINE YOUR HAIR WHILE IT'S DRY?; DO YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE A REAL RAPPORT?; DOES HE BAD-MOUTH THE OTHER OPERATORS?; ARE YOU COMFORTABLE IN THE SALON?

Birdsong.)

SUSAN

I think that what happens is that we are put in places and situations in time, either Cleopatra on her barge, or someone in the galley rowing the barge, or out in New Guinea or in a space colony. We know where we're going, or we feel it, so it's not something we dwell on. There are certain people who, in earlier times we might think: well, these people are confused, they can't make up their own minds in a healthy way, we must stop them. Now, we think: no, if that's their way of thinking, what right have we to say ours is superior? We may think they are confused, but they have the facts as we do and they have their own way of reasoning, and they have to live with themselves, so it is up to them, really. The same thing with euthanasia: we say, well, if a person is suffering and would rather be released from the suffering, that seems only right. And, take for instance the example of a person suffering but in a coma, a person who would decide on suicide if he or she were fully conscious, and if life in the future is going to be nothing but suffering: well, then, we say, the family ought to be able to make the decision for that person, to put her out of her suffering. We all accept that now, and I can see why. Or, take hookers. We all think that's a terrible thing to do, from our own point of view, but there's nothing less terrible, really, about putting your mind at someone else's service, even, when you think of it, it might be worse, but certainly a person ought to have control over her own body, to do what she wants with it. You can't despise it if that's what she has to use, you know, and not even for necessities, really, but even if she wants to use it for getting some luxuries or pleasures or comforts. And I can see the point of view of terrorists, too. I don't happen to think you can say terrorists are all bad or that their actions aren't, really, in some sense, a form of political expression, who are suffering enormously and have no alternative, no way to get what they want, usually, and it seems to me that they are really, though they may not quite know it, in the same position as the terminal cancer patient, that if they were fully conscious that they would recognize that, and that since they aren't fully conscious, we ought really to make that decision for them, just as we do for others who are in pain, because these people are in pain, this is something I know, because I've felt pain myself all these years, and I know how they feel. And they ought to be put out of their suffering. I don't know what you think: if you can sell your body, should you be able to sell parts of it? For instance, would it be good for

people in starving countries to sell fingers and toes to others for food? Or for useful parts. For instance, could you sell your liver for transplant while you were still living, if that's what you have? In other words, if you reason that hookers have the right to sell their bodies because that's what they have to sell and others may sell their talents or their minds, who's to say it's wrong to sell your fingers if that keeps you alive another week- given, for instance, the scarcity of meat in some places. Say you would like to have a frontal lobotomy, what's to prevent you from selling that piece of your brain. Is there really a legitimate point in having it belong to the hospital when people are starving all over the world? If you grant that these are hard times, what would you say, for example, about fat people who have some of their intestines removed sending those intestines over to foreign countries where there is a food shortage.

(Silence. The sounds of a tennis game-the sound of ball against racket, possibly occasional polite applause. They watch a movie: a recreation of the landing of the Mayflower, or an old Katharine Hepburn film. During the following speech, the three chairs descend.)

#### WOMAN'S VOICEOVER

It would be easy to say that this is going to be a month of conflicts, trials and even separations, because decidedly adverse aspects signify emotional upsets, discord and challenges. However, that would be to imply there is no such thing as free will. Also, since you were born under one of the most determined, practical and long-suffering signs of the zodiac, no doubt you will quite rightly conclude that a friend or a loved one is confused, insecure or under someone's influence and therefore cannot be judged by his or her statements or actions. Finances are your strongest card this month. Play it for all it's worth, and let others see that although you may be prepared to wait, watch and remain silent over many issues. you are not about to allow anyone to take advantage of your generosity or undermine your long-term security.

#### IV

(A second performance piece. Or the guy who makes machines that war and destroy one another.)

## **Va**

(Another loud and raucous piece of music. Behind this music, on a scrim, is projected a "body map" of a woman, labeled with exercises to be done to shape and tone different parts of the body. Or: a set of four photographs of a young woman, seen one at a time, in tights, in tuxedo pants, in loosefitting pants, and in tailored trousers, with the following captions:

WRONG. SKINTIGHT ISN'T OFFICE RIGHT. Clingy leggings are way out of place in the workplace—they're too tight and too suggestive. Even with an oversize boxy jacket [that might top them off right on weekends], leggings won't be taken seriously at work.

WRONG: DRESSY SLACKS CAN SACK YOUR CORPORATE IMAGE. Tuxedo pants, so sophisticated, are inappropriate for on-the-job house...better suited for after hours. Even worse: dressing down the dressed-up look with a casual oxford shirt with rolled-up sleeves.

WRONG. SAVE THE BAGGIES FOR LOUNGING AROUND. Baggy pants aren't for work. Their shapeless [too casual!] look won't look like you're looking for a promotion. The billowy bottoms are also out of sync with a trim turtleneck top—the proportions are wrong.

RIGHT: TAILORED TROUSERS ARE TERRIFICALLY TAILORED FOR 9 TO 5. Perfectly work worthy: pleated wool trousers—they're polished, professional...comfortable, too. The proper toppers: a crisp white blouse and collar pin, blazer and leather studded belt.)

## **Vb**

(A third performance piece.)

## **Vc**

(Again, a deafening piece of rock music slams into the end of the performance piece as the three chairs ascend once more at a different place on stage.)

## VI

(Silence. The sound of a croquet match.)

DAVID

What is a woman, finally? A woman is a sort of package of gesture, clothing, voice, and ice. You send your linen out, I suppose.

SUSAN

To the laundry.

DAVID

Yes.

SUSAN

You mean personal linen.

DAVID

Underwear.

SUSAN

Yes.

DAVID

Of course you know what they do with it.

SUSAN

I think I do.

DAVID

I mean that they rent it out.

SUSAN

Rent out underwear?

DAVID

To the locals. The underwear of most of the people who patronize the laundry is so clean when it gets to the laundry that the launderers rent it out to the locals and then, when they get it back dirty, they wash it.

SUSAN

Do you mean my underwear is rented out when I send it to the laundry?

DAVID

Well, if it's clean it is.

ARTHUR

In general life here seems so agreeable, it's like England was thirty years ago. It's a service oriented place. You leave your keys in the car and the door unlocked at night. That to me is quality of life.

SUSAN

I feel as though I'm coming into my own, that's the main thing, that I have this marvelous sense of myself, of myself growing and taking pleasure in life instead of constantly worrying, you know, and thinking about, I don't know, you may say, well, it's my age, this is how one feels at my age, but I'm not at all certain of that, at my age, certainly, my aunt Delia was-very distressed- and often I would feel, well, if you live in a medieval tower you can't live in it as though it were the thirteenth century, and I thought, why must you deprive yourself of pleasure, after all, do you think it does anyone else any good? And I thought, think of your name: it's a 22-7. You ought to consider your good fortune. Often when I read in the papers of someone who's been murdered, I think: well, they were a 16 or an 11-9. But I am a 22-7, for an 11. In fact, one day I was sitting idly at my writing desk, and I realized that if I used my middle initial—because I have a nickname with the initial F.—then instead of having ten letters, it gave me eleven letters in my name, a double twenty-two. That F made it 16-6 for a 22, so instead of a 22 and a 16, that was a 22 and a 22, and I think that was the moment, really, that I felt at last I had come into my own.

## VII

(Soap bubbles fall gently. A pile of clothes rises from beneath the stage. A boy crosses. Tosses a match onto the pile of clothes. It bursts suddenly into flame. It raises its head, turns to look out, falls over onto its side and, the moment it hits the floor, music slams into the scene, accompanied by the following projections:

MERMAID BABY BORN TO TEEN; MOM WASHES INFANT GIRL IN WASHING MACHINE; BOY'S HAIR GROWS ONE FOOT A DAY; PRAYERS TO BING CROSBY

MAKE BLIND MAN SEE; THIEF, 70, TRAINS DOGS TO BECOME PURSE SNATCHERS; UNDERTAKER CHOPS OFF MAN'S FEET TO MAKE BODY FIT; YOU CAN BE FINED \$10,000 FOR SINGING HAPPY BIRTHDAY.

This segues into:

THE INTERROGATION.

Arthur alone on stage, seated [wearing a dress?]. A voiceover asks questions of him. He is taut, like Jack Henry Abbott in the opening scene of Robert Woodruff's production.)

VOICEOVER

Do you have any real connection with Hollywood or America?

ARTHUR

I do have connections, but not connections that would be put into film projects. I have not worked with American companies—with one exception, and there was an advance guarantee from 20th Century Fox, and it worked out well.

VOICEOVER: Do you still enjoy Paris?

ARTHUR

Oh, yes, in a sense, you know. I think of Paris as a suburb of Africa.

VOICEOVER

Has it been different for you, doing this?

ARTHUR

It's amazingly difficult to work with insects. At first we tried to work with mechanical insects, but it's impossible to produce large quantities of life-like mechanical insects. After a month's work, we decided to use real insects. But this posed problems, too. The smell of gasoline upset some of them. What was it like, working with your father?

FEMALE VOICEOVER

Well, he's the wisest, kindest, cleverest, most adorable, most understanding man I've ever known and I don't think I could have worked with anyone else in the same way. We worked mostly in the British Museum or the London Library. He'd ask me to find out things and if I couldn't find them he's so sweet that he'd just sort of forget—luckily. I mean, he never sort of came up and said, "Look, where's this bit

of information?" He just sweetly would forget he'd asked and press on with something new. I did all the nineteenth-century research and he pretty much wrote it up, and most of the later bit, the contemporary stuff, came out of his head. We had a lovely time together and, of course, I was getting married at the time, so that took up a lot of my energy.

VOICEOVER

How often do you think about sex? Would you say always, sometimes, or never?

ARTHUR (After a pause.)

Oh, I'd say: sometimes.

VOICEOVER

Isn't it strange, what happens in America?

FEMALE VOICEOVER

Where? In Alaska?

VOICEOVER

I don't know. But don't you sometimes feel the end of the world has already occurred?

ARTHUR

I feel that we're ready for people once again to be identified with their fragrances, the way it used to be said of movie stars, you know: She left a trail of Bal a Versailles....

VOICEOVER

What does a man really mean when he says: what do you want from this relationship?

ARTHUR

He means: you're really a good person.

FEMALE VOICEOVER

Who is speaking here?



## VOICEOVER

A final question. The French philosopher Lacoue-Labarthe has phrased the paradox of late capitalism in terms of "disappearance of every 'political specificity' in the very domination of the political." It seems to me that a similar paradox becomes problematic in terms of your attitude toward feminism. On the one hand, you would berate feminism for its statism, for its playing into an economy of equivalence, while on the other hand, accusing it of a valorization of "difference," of a failure to honor the community exigency. If this communitary exigency to which you appeal in various ways (in terms of the interest of the "species," for example, or a Thomastic "common sense") would necessarily have as its telos a transparency of human relations, what Blanchot calls an immanence of man to man, how is it to be distinguished from that dissolution of the distinction between public and private which you call the therapeutic state? Would the community not have, as a kind of limit which it must endlessly restrict or contest, this apocalypse of the political, this nightmare of "care" and surveillance?

(Susan is seen behind a scrim, naked, accompanied by two dressers who dress her in many layers, beginning with perfume, powder, through many layers of camisoles, scarves.)

## SUSAN

Some people think I look like a chicken. But all I ever had in mind was to do the right thing. I got one or two things at auction, thinking they might be all right, a chest of drawers, you know, a chair, and a few little paintings, nothing special. I hadn't even thought it might be a Constable, I hadn't meant it to be, I only thought it was pretty, and this man Keating came to dinner and absolutely berated me for it. I can tell you, he said, beyond the shadow of a doubt that this painting has nothing to do with John Constable. Well, I said...Nothing whatever, he said. If it were a Constable, it would be worth five or six million plus. But no, it's not a Constable. It's not even an F. W. Watts. It's not even a John Paul! Well, maybe it's a Paul. But I hadn't cared until then, and then I began to cry, thinking I can do nothing right, not even when I'm not trying I must just be incorrectly positioned, I think I always was, from the start, the way it is when you can never get the right grip on anything because you're at the wrong end, or on the wrong side of it! And I did so want everything to be fragile.

(Music, with something of the flavor of the industrial rock music of Einsturzende Neubauten, slams into the middle of the verdict, continues as the three chairs descend, and leads without pause into the running section that follows:)

## **VIII**

(Arthur runs. He has microphones all over his body [under his clothes, in his shoes] so that whenever his foot hits the floor or he touches himself the sound can be amplified into an explosive sound, and those explosive sounds can be manipulated to different frequencies, pitches, and so forth to produce thuds, pings, explosions, and other sounds. He runs in place. Rhythmical running. [Quasi-soft-shoe moves.] Rhythmic chest pounding, double arm slapping [as though to keep himself warm]. Violent slapping and stomping and kicking, sustained. More running, kicking, and so forth—sustained for a very long time, to exhaustion. This segues to:)

## **IX**

(Gospel music. A heart-rending piece, perhaps with a large group, led by a black female singer comes up under the running and extends beyond the end of the running.)

END

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