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Falling and Loving

by CHARLES L. MEE

Spring

SCENE 1

BONDO

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.

SCENE 2

ELLEN

Hi.

BONDO

Hello.

ELLEN

Would you like a coffee?

BONDO

Thank you.

LEON

What brings you here?

STEPHEN

I'm just passing through.

BARNEY

Well.

Isn't everyone?

AKIKO

Whose woods are these?

BARNEY

I don't know.

STEPHEN

So.

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

LEON

I guess you could.

BONDO

I've never been lost in the woods.

ELLEN

Neither have I.

STEPHEN

I'm glad I'm not alone.

LEON So am I.

BARNEY

I like nature,

but I'm a little bit afraid of it.

AKIKO

Well, sure.

LEON

Of the dark parts especially.

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

I think everyone is, you know,
basically afraid of the dark.

STEPHEN
Even amoebas.

ELLEN
I mean, every life form,
you take them out of the light
and they begin to feel some anxiety.

BONDO
I do.

ELLEN
I do.

STEPHEN
Light, basically, is how you orient yourself
and a person without a sense of orientation I mean,
if you don't know where you are.

LEON
and where you're going

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

BARNEY
and the destination where you're going

STEPHEN
a person begins to freak out.

LEON
I think that's why in jazz
they always play the melody at the top

BONDO
and then
once you know the tune you think: right, let them riff

ELLEN
because I know where I am
and I know that, in the end,
they're going to come back to the melody You know what I mean?

BONDO
Well. Sure.

ELLEN
It's like a love story
you can just get lost in a love story
because we know whatever happens along the way we might get con-
fused or we might get lost

BONDO
or it's on again off again

ELLEN
and it goes down some blind alley

BONDO
but that's how real life is
that's how it really is to be in love

Summer

SCENE 3

BARNEY
I think I fell in love with him
and I mean I fell in love with him like
the first time I saw him
I just couldn't stop looking at him
he was a soccer player
and I don't go to soccer games

and I don't like jocks
but I was there because a friend had taken me
and blah blah blah never mind
but I was walking to our seats in the bleachers
and I saw him walking along the sidelines
and I just couldn't take my eyes off him
I was like a cartoon joke
I was looking at him and walking
and I could have walked right into a wall
and I think the reason I fell in love with him
is that he reminded me of a friend from high school
who reminded me of a guy I saw in a movie

SCENE 4

ELLEN

The fact is:

I've never been in love before

I thought I was but I never felt like this

BONDO

Things happen so suddenly sometimes.

ELLEN

Do you believe in love at first sight?

BONDO

No.

ELLEN

Neither do I.

And yet there it is:

I'd like to kiss you.

ELLEN

I think for me it took so long to be able to love another person

such a long time to grow up

get rid of all my self-involvement

all my worrying whether or not I messed up

BONDO

Right.

ELLEN

Or I thought

I need to postpone gratification and so I did

and I got so good at it

I forgot how to seize the moment

BONDO

you know damn well

you're not going to find the perfect mate

someone you always agree with or even like

ELLEN

you should be able to get along with someone

who's in the same ball park

BONDO

a human being

ELLEN

another human being

BONDO

because we are lonely people

ELLEN

we like a little companionship

BONDO

just a cup of tea with another person

what's the big deal

ELLEN

you don't need a lot

BONDO

you'd settle for very little

ELLEN

very very little when it comes down to it

BONDO

very little

and that would feel good

ELLEN

a little hello, good morning, how are you today

BONDO

I'm going to the park

OK, have a nice time

I'll see you there for lunch

ELLEN

can I bring you anything

BONDO

a sandwich in a bag?

ELLEN

no problem

I'll have lunch with you in the park

BONDO

we'll have a picnic

and afterwards

I tell you a few lines of poetry

I remember from when I was a kid in school

ELLEN

and after that nap or godknows whatall

BONDO

and to bed

ELLEN

you don't even have to touch each other

BONDO

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

ELLEN

just a touch, simple as that

BONDO

an intimate touch?

ELLEN

fine. Nice. So much the better.

BONDO

that's all: just a touch that feels good

ELLEN

OK, goodnight, that's all

BONDO

I'd go for that.

ELLEN

I'd like that.

BONDO

I'd like that just fine

ELLEN

I'd call that a happy life

BONDO

as happy as it needs to get for me

SCENE 5

LEON

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

AKIKO

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

LEON

You could do that.

AKIKO

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

LEON

Near that road up into the canyon.

AKIKO That's the one.

LEON

That would be pretty public.

AKIKO

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

LEON

Why would I be ashamed of you?

AKIKO

I feel ashamed myself.

LEON

For what reason?

AKIKO

Who knows?
Every fifteen minutes I feel ashamed of myself at least once.
And humiliated.

For no reason.
It just comes back to me over and over again.
Do you ever feel that way?

LEON
Every fifteen minutes I feel worried.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want to hurt someone?

LEON
No.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want to get even?

LEON
No.

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

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

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

LEON
No.
I usually don't feel that.

AKIKO
Do you feel you want more money?

LEON
Oh, sure. Everybody feels that.

SCENE 6

STEPHEN

Times have changed.

[Everyone else resumes what they were doing.]

BARNEY

Since when?

STEPHEN

Since, oh, I don't know.

BARNEY

I don't think they have.

STEPHEN

Of course they have.

BARNEY

Well, of course they have
in the sense that now you have electric lights
and so forth the internet
whatnot,
but otherwise I don't think times have changed.

STEPHEN

I think they have.

BARNEY Compared to what?

STEPHEN

My grandmother.

BARNEY

You wouldn't know.

STEPHEN

That's true.

I wouldn't know.
Maybe that's what changed.
But in Russia you know
they didn't have love affairs
for years all during the communists.

BARNEY
How do you know?

STEPHEN
There was a study.
They didn't even have sex
with their husbands and wives
not much.

BARNEY
Why not?

STEPHEN
They didn't feel like it.

BARNEY
Are they having sex now?

STEPHEN
Now! Well, sure. I suppose they are.
You know, things have changed in Russia.

SCENE 7

STEPHEN
Who's on first?

ELLEN
How do you mean?

STEPHEN
You know: who's on first?

ELLEN

In what sense?

STEPHEN

In the sense that you, you know
I'm trying to start a conversation with you.

Like:

Who's on first?

ELLEN

What the fuck do you mean?

STEPHEN

What the fuck do you mean's on second?

ELLEN

I beg your pardon

STEPHEN

I beg your pardon's on third.

ELLEN

What?

STEPHEN

No, what's on first.

ELLEN

This is what you call a conversation?
Because this is the kind of conversations people these days?
Because of
What?
Because of the internet and texting and shit
This is how people communicate with each other.

STEPHEN

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

FALL

SCENE 8

ELLEN

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.

SCENE 9

BARNEY

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!

SCENE 10

AKIKO

How can things happen so suddenly in life?

ELLEN

Things happen in life

STEPHEN

No one knows.

AKIKO

You think there is always time

STEPHEN

You think your life will go on and on
just the way it is today
and then

AKIKO

and then

ELLEN

but then

AKIKO

ELLEN

AKIKO

STEPHEN

poof
it's all gone
they happen so quickly
and then they're gone
the whole world
the universe
it's all gone

it could be you forgot to say goodnight
you might have had some difference of opinion
at the dinner table
or you might even have had an argument

AKIKO
and you don't have another moment of it

ELLEN
and then your grandmother falls into a coma
in the middle of the night
you wait by her hospital bed
hoping she will wake up again
just so you can say you are sorry
and then she dies
before they've ever quite landed
they're gone
and you think

STEPHEN
you think
it could be that she had a stroke
because of the argument that you had
and you can never speak to her again

AKIKO
and you can't say
oh but wait just another moment

STEPHEN
the times you had together
the stories she told you

AKIKO
you can't talk your way out of it
everything is changed all at once

STEPHEN

the advice she gave you
the walks around the block

ELLEN

all of it
it's over
it's evanescent

STEPHEN

all gone forever

AKIKO

and forever

ELLEN

like a breath of life

SCENE 11

STEPHEN

There is a kind of wolf
which is also a part of nature
whose brains grow larger and smaller with the moon
and whose neck is on a bone that is very straight
and won't bend.

So that when it wants to turn and look at something,
it has to turn its whole upper body.

And sometimes

it will eat a kind of earth
to make its body heavy,
so that when it attacks a horse

or an ox

or an elk

or some such strong animal

it will take the big animal by the throat
and hang there,

and it will be heavy enough
finally
to bring the big animal down.

SCENE 12

AKIKO

Sometimes in life
you just get one chance.
Romeo and Juliet

LUCIANY

They meet, they fall in love, they die.
That's the truth of life
you have one great love

AKIKO

You're born, you die
in between, if you're lucky
you have one great love
not two, not three,
you just get one chance just one.

LUCIANY

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

AKIKO

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

AKIKO/LUCIANY

but no.

There's only one pebble on the beach.

Sometimes not even one.

SCENE 13

BARNEY

How could you just suddenly: disappear?

FABIO

I didn't.

BARNEY

I thought you did.

And I thought you loved me.

FABIO

Well, I do love you.

[The other characters exit.]

BARNEY

Oh, yes, you love me,

but you don't love me in that way.

FABIO

I never pretended to love you in that way.

BARNEY

I can't go on in life

without being loved in that way.

FABIO

A lot of people are never loved in that way.

BARNEY

How can you tell

if you are really alive

if you're never loved in that way?

FABIO

What do you mean: in that way?

BARNEY

Unless I thought you were crazy for me
so crazy for me you couldn't stand it
you just had to kiss me
you just had to knock me down and kiss me
because you couldn't stand it
that you laughed at my jokes
or thought I was so cool
or like said really intelligent things
that made you think maybe not all of those things
but even just any one of them
just one of them
[Silence.]

You see what I mean, not even one.

FABIO

I'm sorry.

BARNEY

Why did you live with me, then?

FABIO

I thought I loved you
but I guess I didn't know what love was.
I liked you in a way
not much
but in some ways
or at least in the ways I thought guys
could be likeable
and the rest of it
I thought maybe that's just how guys are
and as time went on
maybe it wouldn't matter so much
but then I find it does matter
I can't help myself

some stuff you do
I just can't get over it
and the stuff I liked:
that I thought you were a responsible person
and mature
solid and dependable
all those turned out not to be true at all
so what am I left with?

BARNEY
It's not your fault.

FABIO
No, it's not.

BARNEY
Or maybe it is
that you weren't thinking very clearly
or being very focused when you made your choice
and a lot of people were depending on that choice
being really clear or at least I was

FABIO
I know. I'm sorry.

BARNEY
Being sorry doesn't cut it somehow.
I know people always say they're sorry
and probably they are
and I don't think it means nothing
I'm sure it means something
and it's essential for people to feel it and to say it
in order for life to go on at all
and yet
the truth is
it doesn't cut it.
I'm sorry: but it doesn't.

FABIO
I'm sorry.

BARNEY
Is that somehow now supposed to cut it?

WINTER

SCENE 14

ELLEN
How can you talk like this?

BONDO
I hope we're not going to argue
and then you're going to try to cajole me, you don't let me leave, you
don't leave,
I begin to feel cornered.

ELLEN
This is crazy talk.

BONDO
Next thing you know you think
there's no reason I shouldn't spend the night....

ELLEN
Well, sure, just sleep together,
just sleep in the same bed, that's all, nothing more

BONDO
And then [yelling] when you fall asleep
I'll look at you
and I'll see how ugly you are when you're relaxed.

ELLEN
What?

BONDO

Probably that's when you're at your ugliest,
when you're asleep so that I can't stand it.

ELLEN

When I'm asleep I'm ugly, that's what you're saying? How can you say
such a thing?

BONDO

Or really anytime after twelve o' clock: old and ugly

ELLEN

Every night? Are you saying every night?

BONDO

Almost every night probably.

Ugly and repulsive.

Like another person altogether.

So that I would hardly recognize you except I would say to myself:

right, yes,

there you are again

the way you really are.

I would wake up with palpitations

and a pain in my head and I would think: right, there you are again,

attacking me in the middle of the night when I'm defenseless.

ELLEN

Attacking you!

BONDO

Trying to hypnotize me while I was asleep,

setting my nerves on edge

so I would have to hit you in the face

to get you to stop,

and then you would make some remark

probably like how you are being eaten alive by worms.

ELLEN

Worms! Worms?

You crazy sonofabitch!

BONDO

What are you saying?

What are you saying to me?

ELLEN

What does it matter? You never hear a word I say.

BONDO

I hang on every stupid word you ever say!

ELLEN

Every stupid word I say!

You are stupid.

Stupider than ever.

And black and venomous.

Poisonous poisonous,
more poisonous now than ever.

BONDO

Ever before when?

Before you gave me that filth at dinner

--on purpose, on purpose--

so that it made me shiver?

Before that?

Before you would seek some intimacy with me,

force yourself on me,

demanding I make love to you....

ELLEN

Excuse me, would this be after you turned your back on me?

BONDO

Excuse me, I think it was you who turned your back on me.

ELLEN

No. No, I don't think so.

If I remember correctly

it is you you who turned your back on me,

as probably you always would,

always.

So that I am supposed to pursue you I suppose,

put my arms around you

so that I am always in the position of the suitor, and you can be always

cool,

no, cold,

and I would be the beggar the suppliant

and then, if I had to turn over

because my arm had gone to sleep

and my shoulder felt broken

and I had a pain in my head,

and I turned over because

I couldn't bear the pain of holding you in my arms, then would you ever,

ever, ever once,

would you ever a single fucking time

turn over and hold me the way I held you?

No.

Would you ever pursue me the way I pursued you? No.

BONDO

I have pursued you.

I have pursued you.

It's you who have never pursued me.

ELLEN

When did you? When did you ever?

[silence]

BONDO

I don't remember.

But it seems to me I did.

LEON

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.

BONDO

Just fucking leave me alone!

ELLEN

Right! Right! Leave you alone!
I am leaving you alone, you nutcake!
No wonder your family won't speak to you
and every woman you've ever been with has gone crazy probably or
killed herself.
Did you ever think about that?
It's not them, it's you!
You're like a baby with a switch blade.

So fucking needy
and when you get everything just the way you want it you attack who ever gives in to you
for being weak and pathetic and worthless.
[she exits]

BONDO

Who told you this?
You don't know this about me.
[she enters]

ELLEN

Nobody needs to tell me.
It's written all over you, you crazy fucker!
You make me crazy.
You drive me down into the pit of my own craziness
till I'm begging for mercy
you hunt me down
you throw me down the stairs
you rip off all my hinges
till my ears are flying in every direction
I can't understand a thought I'm having
my mind is a million bits of shattered glass
on the kitchen floor
and you stand there calmly yelling at me
go ahead and die, go ahead and die
you don't think I have inside me a capacity for misery?
[she exits; she enters]
I'm off the edge of the world here! I'm into the abyss
where is your helping hand?
are you a human being?
You are making me crazy! I'm begging you!
Who could live with you? Who needs you?
Now that a person sees how you are, who would want you?
[she exits;
he half follows her to the edge of the stage, yelling after her]

BONDO

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
[she enters]

ELLEN

And this is why women want to shoot men on sight
This is why they flush boy babies down the toilet at birth

SPRING

SCENE 15

STEPHEN

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.

SCENE 16

JULIA
You know
I've been thinking about it
and it turns out
I do love you

LEON
You do?

JULIA
Yes.

LEON
How could that be?

JULIA
I look at you
and I think you're sweet.

LEON
Oh, sweet.

JULIA
and good-natured.

LEON
Good-natured.

JULIA
Yes.

LEON
You do?

JULIA
Yes, I really do.
And I think
if you think a person's agreeable and warmhearted
then I think there's something there you can't explain
that gives you real
delight.

LEON
Oh.

JULIA
I find
you give delight to me.

LEON
Oh. Well.
That's what I'd hope for more than anything.

JULIA
So would I.

LEON
And you're not sorry about it?

JULIA
How do you mean?

LEON
That you find delight in someone
who doesn't seem to you in any other way
desirable
who doesn't perhaps have those qualities
that you can count on
for, you know, the solid, long-term kind of thing.

JULIA
I would just take delight long-term.

LEON
Oh.
So would I.

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