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# The Four Seasons

by CHARLES L. MEE

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Sunlight.

A sidewalk café,  
surrounded by trees,  
with a dozen tables out front on the sidewalk.

Trees with buds on the branches,  
and, then, later on,  
there will be summer leaves,  
and then,  
fall foliage,  
and, at the end,  
bare branches,  
and then,  
finally,  
spring blossoms.

And the clothes the actors wear:  
at first the clothes of spring,  
then—if they are not all naked,  
like a nineteenth century French painting of a picnic—  
then they are in bikinis and summer shorts,  
and then the sweaters of autumn,

and, finally,  
winter overcoats and gloves and scarves.

Fabulous gypsy music.

And, as the music plays,  
the actors rush through  
on the sidewalk in front of the café:

A five year old girl (or a thirty year old woman),  
eating an ice cream cone, smiling,  
sitting in a red wagon pulled by her father,  
enters and leaves, smiling.

A golf cart, driven like crazy by a caddy,  
while, in the back,  
a couple embraces passionately,  
enters and leaves, as the couple continues to embrace.

A couple being pulled along on a picnic blanket  
with food and a champagne bottle in a bucket,  
and she is drinking and drinking and drinking the champagne  
enter and leave.

An electric wheelchair—  
a man driving,  
a woman sitting on the handlebars,  
she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over—  
enters and leaves.

A skate board,  
with a woman lying on her back on the skate board  
as a man twirls it round and round in ecstasy,  
enters and leaves.

A silk sheet, with silk pillows,  
she lying back in her lingerie

he taking photos of her,  
enters and leaves.

A homeless guy with cart of stuff  
enters and leaves.

A man and woman on a bicycle built for two—  
one peddles while the other eats pizza—  
enter and leave.

There are as many of these entrances and exits  
as there are vehicles with wheels  
and actors in the cast who can do a quick change and come through again.

Finally,  
one at a time,  
the comers and goers,  
enter,  
stop,  
get off or out of their vehicles,  
sit at one table or another in the café,  
and order coffee.

The cast should be radically diverse—  
in terms of race, class, style (and cost) of clothing, body type,  
way of moving and general physicality.  
There might be an immensely obese man or woman,  
a body builder,  
an aged wreck of a person,  
and/or other radical diversities of physical type.

ARIAN

Do you come here often?

YVETTE

Oh, yes  
all the time

ever since I left home to follow the man I love  
when he came here

ARIAN  
and you're together?

YVETTE  
oh, no, he doesn't know I'm here

ARIAN  
he doesn't know?

YVETTE  
and my mother doesn't know I've left home

ARIAN  
well, she sees you're not there any more

YVETTE  
no, because I'm still at home in bed

ARIAN  
home in bed?

YVETTE  
because my spirit has split in two...

ARIAN  
so you mean, as a metaphor, your mother doesn't know you've left

YVETTE  
she sees me still every morning when I wake up in my bed at home

ARIAN  
she sees you....  
so your mother....

YVETTE  
you think she's crazy

ARIAN

I think someone may be a little bit living in a dream

YVETTE

this is how it is to love someone

ARIAN

indeed

YVETTE

yes

ARIAN

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?

YVETTE

Oh.

Oh.

Well,

a coffee with you

I would have a coffee with you.

ARIAN

You are free now?

YVETTE

Free now? No, well, no

right now

I am busy.

ARIAN

OK then maybe later this evening?

YVETTE

Well, later this evening also I am busy.

ARIAN

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.

YVETTE

I don't think I can be alone.

ARIAN

With me?

Or by yourself?

You don't like to be alone by yourself?

YVETTE

No, I mean with you this weekend.

ARIAN

Oh.

Or then 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 café

we could celebrate our anniversary

and then perhaps you would forget  
that you are not married to me  
and we can have a child.

YVETTE  
A child?

ARIAN  
Because  
don't you think  
after we have been together for a year  
it will be time to start to think of these things?

YVETTE  
We haven't been together for a day.

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

YVETTE  
No.

ARIAN  
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.

YVETTE

OK.

ARIAN

When will you do this?

YVETTE

Right now.

ARIAN

Oh.

Oh, good.

Good.

[he kisses her hand]

Good.

Music.

And, as we listen to the music,

passersby of all sorts stroll through

a solitary young woman walks through with a huge overnight bag  
a transient for sure  
still in college?

a young woman selling her own handmade jewelry  
or T-shirts with stuff on them?

a dog walker with several dogs on leashes

a girl dances with her computer held close to her head  
listening to the music that comes to her from her computer

a human statue enters and takes his place  
—wearing a sign that says "available" ["available for parties"?]  
A while later, the human statue will just drop his pose  
when he's grown bored by it  
and sit down and have a cup of coffee.  
And then maybe he'll join in the conversation,  
or maybe he'll get up again and take up his statue pose.

A guy rides in on a bike.  
He kicks his kickstand and parks the bike.  
Then he turns and leaves.  
In a moment he rides in on another bike,  
parks it,  
turns and leaves,  
carries in another bike,  
puts it down on the ground,  
goes off,  
comes back in carrying bike parts,  
goes off,  
comes back in carrying more parts,  
goes off,  
comes back in carrying a tool kit,  
goes off,

comes back in carrying a sign that says:  
"going somewhere?  
we can fix it"  
and mounts his sign on the pile of ruined bikes.

And an astronaut descends slowly from heaven.]

DEBARGO

Hi.

ASTRONAUT [removing his helmet]

Hello.

DEBARGO

Would you like a coffee?

ASTRONAUT

Thank you.

DEBARGO

What brings you here?

ASTRONAUT

I'm just passing through.

ELLEN [at another table]

Well.

Isn't everyone?

CHEN CHI [at yet another table]

Whose woods are these?

DEBARGO

I don't know.

CHEN CHI

So.

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

DEBARGO

I guess you could.

[Chen Chi can be a new character,  
or she could be The Astronaut  
if The Astronaut isn't wanted as a separate character.]

CHEN CHI

I've never been lost in the woods.

DEBARGO

Neither have I.

CHEN CHI

I'm glad I'm not alone.

DEBARGO

So am I.

I like nature,  
but I'm a little bit afraid of it.

CHEN CHI

Well, sure.

DEBARGO

Of the dark parts especially.  
I'd like nature better if it were better lit.  
I think everyone is, you know,  
basically afraid of the dark.  
Even amoebas.  
I mean, every life form,  
you take them out of the light  
and they begin to feel some anxiety.  
I do.

CHEN CHI

I do.

DEBARGO

Light, basically, is how you orient yourself  
and a person without a sense of orientation  
I mean, if you don't know where you are  
and where you're going  
and about where you are on the line of the place where you are  
and the destination where you're going  
a person begins to freak out.  
I think that's why  
in jazz  
they always play the melody at the top  
and then  
once you know the tune  
you think: right, let them riff  
because I know where I am  
and I know that, in the end,  
they're going to come back to the melody  
You know what I mean?

CHEN CHI

Well.  
Sure.

DEBARGO

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

with a love story  
you know  
either they are going to get together  
or they're not.

CHEN CHI  
Right.

[silence]

Do you think  
you could ever live in the woods?

DEBARGO  
You mean, forever?

CHEN CHI  
Well, for a long time.  
Say, like five years.

[silence]

DEBARGO  
Five years.

[silence]

With you?

[silence]

CHEN CHI  
Oh.

Oh.

Okay.

With me.

[silence]

DEBARGO

Yes.

[silence]

CHEN CHI

Oh.

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.

CHEN CHI  
Unh-hunh.

DEBARGO  
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:

[silence]

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

[silence.]

She starts to back away from him.]

Or not, you know. Or not.  
I didn't mean to come on so strong.  
I just start talking, and I don't know when to stop.

CHEN CHI  
Stop.

DEBARGO  
Right.

CHEN CHI  
Good.

Maybe we could just take a walk in the woods.

DEBARGO  
Right. Good.  
Good idea.  
Let's do that.

CHEN CHI  
Like,  
right after we have a cup of coffee.

DEBARGO  
OK.  
Good.

[During this next exchange,  
between ELLEN and VIKRAM,  
the trees change from branches filled with flowering blossoms of spring  
to the full green foliage of mid-summer.]

ELLEN  
I sometimes wonder:  
what would it be like  
to have an exquisite sense of things?

An Oriental sense.  
You would say, for instance:  
there are elegant things—  
duck eggs  
wistaria blossoms  
the Pride of China tree  
the Sweet-scented marvel-of-Peru

You would say: there are things that are both near and distant at the same time.  
Like the course of a boat across a lake.  
Like paradise.  
The relations between a man and a woman.

Or things that give a clean feeling.  
An earthen cup.  
A new wooden chest.

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

ELLEN

I'm sorry?

VIKRAM

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

ELLEN  
is this what you had in mind?

VIKRAM  
yes. certainly.

ELLEN  
all you've done is about nothing else?

VIKRAM  
oh, no  
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

ELLEN  
Things happen in life  
but then  
they happen so quickly  
and then they're gone  
before they've ever quite landed  
they're gone  
and you think  
all of it  
it's over  
it's evanescent  
like a breath of life

[And now,  
the whole cast,  
or a Mongolian choir,  
steps forward and sings  
sings  
sings  
sings

sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings  
sings

And, while they sing,

several people help The Artist  
drag in a wrecked car,  
a completely filthy, ruined car  
[maybe, to make it easier, a small car like a Chevrolet Aveo].  
The Artist himself wears a white Andy Warhol wig.  
The car is filled with what looks like trash,  
but, as we spend a little more time looking at it,  
we will see that it is all  
Art.  
Many, many paintings,  
with awful Pollack like random scrawls of paint  
and smeared, dirty places on the canvases  
and the cloths that have been used to wipe up the paint.  
Finally, he puts a sign on the side of the car saying  
"Art for Sale."

WAITER

I was once in love with a woman.  
I met her in the summer  
a married woman.



classical music piece  
and, as we hear the music,  
the actors run back and forth and back and forth across the stage  
sometimes turning around mid-way and then running ahead  
sometimes jumping up and down up and down  
leaping  
throwing their arms up into the air  
spinning around and around  
and then  
as the music quiets down to loveliness  
sinking to the stage,  
lying on their backs as the music comes to an end.

The leaves of the trees are still in full summer foliage.

#### THE ARTIST

When a woman speaks to me  
and tells me of her most intimate thoughts and feelings  
then I know  
that a person can die and go to heaven.  
Or,  
when a woman sleeps  
then she is defenseless  
then, if she is naked  
and the covers have come down around her waist

#### THE ASTRONAUT

and one arm is outside the covers entirely

#### THE ARTIST

the fingers of her hand completely motionless  
then it is possible to draw her with red chalk  
to render her body

as though nothing stood between her skin and the air  
between her skin and the atmosphere of the whole world

THE ASTRONAUT

no clothes

THE ARTIST

no blouse, no undergarment yes

but also

no thought of any sort

no shame

THE ASTRONAUT

no pose

THE ARTIST

no manner

THE ASTRONAUT

no attitude

THE ARTIST

no demeanor

THE ASTRONAUT

no reticence

THE ARTIST

or no flirtatiousness

no hiding and revealing at the same time

THE ASTRONAUT

no resistance

no provocation

THE ARTIST

her body is being put to no use

THE ASTRONAUT  
it makes no suggestion

THE ARTIST  
nor does it refuse anything

THE ASTRONAUT  
it is completely naked

THE ARTIST  
it is beyond sexual  
beyond merely enticing or arousing

THE ASTRONAUT  
it has the allure of her very soul

THE ARTIST  
this is how naked she is when she is asleep  
she is transporting

What I like to see  
I like to see a woman  
when she is not expecting to be seen  
and in places where ordinarily  
she would not be seen at all  
when she is at her dressing table  
putting color on her cheeks  
when she is asleep in bed  
when she is sitting alone in a café  
when she is asleep in bed with another woman  
when she is backstage at the ballet  
putting on her pink tights  
and I can inhale her perfume  
I can inhale the scent of her hair  
of the nape of her neck  
I can know how it is for me to breathe  
when my head is on her breast  
and my eyes are closed  
I can breath her in

I can sit with her in a brasserie  
holding her hand for an hour  
my fingers twined among her fingers  
while she smokes and talks to her friends  
and she doesn't think to notice  
that I am playing with her hand all this time  
I can sit behind her then  
and say  
don't look around  
don't look at me  
just listen to my voice  
just form a picture of me from my voice  
and listen to my words  
let that be all you take in  
until you know me  
until you have formed all your opinions of me  
until your opinions of me are clear and firm and fixed  
and then  
you can turn and look at me  
if you will  
if you need to.

THE BIKER  
Do I know you?

A DANCER  
No.

THE BIKER  
That is to say,  
have we met before?

A DANCER  
Do you think we have?

THE BIKER  
You don't?

A DANCER  
Do you think  
we've made love in the past?

THE BIKER  
Wouldn't you remember that?

A DANCER  
Would I?

THE BIKER  
What would it take for you to remember?

A DANCER  
Something extraordinary?

THE BIKER  
Some extraordinary night of making love?

A DANCER  
Of falling in love?

THE BIKER  
The love of your life?

A DANCER  
A love you thought you would never have?

THE BIKER  
that would never be returned?

A DANCER  
that would never last?

THE BIKER  
Aren't you an odd sort of person?

A DANCER  
That's why I'm drawn to you.

THE BIKER

I have to admit  
I like a woman who has  
delicate shoulders  
and red hair

A DANCER

and a flat nose

THE BIKER

some people would think her plain

A DANCER

or even tough looking

THE BIKER

with her prize-fighter's nose

A DANCER

and her small chest

THE BIKER

but she's sweet, too, and shy

A DANCER

and wants never to be damaged

THE BIKER

and I would never damage her  
never raise my hand against her  
never raise my voice in speaking to her  
I would be as steadfast as she is

I would undress her with great care

A DANCER

and touch her very gently

THE BIKER  
and hold her through the night

A DANCER  
and let her live exactly as she would like

THE BIKER  
I would let her be free

A DANCER  
let her choose her own way of living

THE BIKER  
and I would dote on her

A DANCER  
and be there for her

THE BIKER  
whenever she would turn to me

A DANCER  
whatever it was that she would ask

THE BIKER  
I would give to her

A DANCER  
and when the time came that she no longer wanted me

THE BIKER  
I would let her go lightly

A DANCER  
or if she wished never to leave me

THE BIKER  
I would give my life to her

CHEN CHI

Nothing could be easier  
than beginning on a bottle of wine at lunch  
in a little restaurant somewhere

YVETTE

a simple wooden table out of doors  
shaded by a trellis  
with several dancers on a break from rehearsal  
having coffee  
the long summer afternoon

CHEN CHI

smoking a cigarette

YVETTE

a girl with her chin resting on her hand  
elbow on the little café table

CHEN CHI

the half full bottle and the glass

YVETTE

a full skirt  
a linen blouse  
her hair, slept in  
unruly  
a country girl who took a wrong turn  
some years ago

[silence]

CHEN CHI

So  
the conversation slipping sideways again  
losing any point other than passing the afternoon  
until one has begun to feel a little hopeless and desperate

YVETTE

not knowing whether to go on home for a nap

CHEN CHI

or if it may already be too late for that

YVETTE

and the drinking of the evening ought to begin

CHEN CHI

even though, then,  
it will have begun too early  
and the night will be shortened at the other end

YVETTE

one will have stayed up too long

CHEN CHI

drunk too much

YVETTE

begun even to feel a little sick

CHEN CHI

so that the rot has already begun to work at the core  
of the beautiful afternoon

YVETTE

this is how one comes to lie down  
on the bench in the garden for a summer nap  
and have a fitful sleep  
languorous, luxurious in the shade  
anxious that one's entire life  
might be consumed in just this way  
day after day  
feeling not quite pleasure, not quite pain

[And now

people just stand up and sing love songs

and love arias  
one person after another might step forward and do a solo  
For example, it could be this:]

### A Whole New World

I can show you the world  
Shining, shimmering, splendid  
Tell me, princess, now when did  
You last let your heart decide?  
I can open your eyes  
Take you wonder by wonder  
Over, sideways and under  
On a magic carpet ride

A whole new world  
A new fantastic point of view  
No one to tell us no  
Or where to go  
Or say we're only dreaming

A whole new world  
A dazzling place I never knew  
But when I'm way up here  
It's crystal clear  
That now I'm in a whole new world with you  
Now I'm in a whole new world with you

Unbelievable sights  
Indescribable feeling  
Soaring, tumbling, freewheeling  
Through an endless diamond sky

A whole new world  
Don't you dare close your eyes  
A hundred thousand things to see  
Hold your breath — it gets better  
I'm like a shooting star

I've come so far  
I can't go back to where I used to be

A whole new world  
Every turn a surprise  
With new horizons to pursue  
Every moment red-letter—I'll chase them anywhere  
There's time to spare  
Let me share this whole new world with you

A whole new world  
That's where we'll be  
A thrilling chase  
A wondrous place  
For you and me.

and then the whole group sings a song together  
the whole group sings a song together

and then the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings

the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings  
the café waiter sings

[And now,  
the leaves on the trees begin to turn gradually from summer  
to the bright colors of a New England autumn.]

VIKRAM

What happened to the summer days  
we went to the seashore  
and rowed out onto the water in an old skiff to swim  
stood up in the boat naked and shouting  
tied rags around our heads like turbans  
and cooked turbot on the beach

When my mother brought me a glass of rose  
in the garden  
and we sat in the shade of the lemon trees  
where it was cool  
and I could lean back in the reclining chair  
because I needed nothing so much as sleep  
I felt I had carried my body around for years  
it had gotten heavier and heavier  
hard to lift and carry from place to place  
putting it in a chair here

carrying it up the stairs there  
so that it was a relief to put it in a garden chair  
surrounded by things that sought a resting place in the soil  
and were not expected to move  
the trees, the potted flowers  
the stone walls and footpaths  
things that could sink to the ground  
and stay there  
in their rightful place  
no more demands made on them  
to lug themselves to a different location  
I felt the last resistance drain from my body  
as I sat back  
and listened to the light voice of my mother  
in the summer breeze  
telling me of my grandmother  
and all those who had never felt the need  
to make the tiring trip to the city  
but had stayed at home in the country  
carried along from year to year by the familiarities of daily life  
and taken to the grave by their neighbors  
as easily as any other of the everyday events of their lives.

ELLEN

Home  
its cove of green sea  
its complicated rocks  
the little woods  
old and new trees  
the warm terrace  
the rosebushes  
my yellow room

(pause)

VIKRAM

and I have a rocky perch  
between the sky and the sea

this was the world of my childhood  
long gone, long, long gone

ELLEN

what wild orchids  
deep purple  
growing in the meadows  
and roses and medlar trees in blossom  
the white rose vine covering the front of the house  
so white with flowers  
that at night it seemed to trace the milky way

VIKRAM

and the nightingales  
that didn't have time to eat or drink  
they sang from four in the afternoon  
to seven in the morning  
and from four in the morning  
to four in the afternoon

ELLEN

when did they ever make love

VIKRAM

long  
long gone

I remember  
the story about  
the little boy  
six years old

ELLEN [who sits with Vikram at the same table]  
who had just lost his first baby tooth?

VIKRAM

right  
who was playing one day with the ants in the dirt  
when suddenly

he heard the pitch pipes and the gongs and drums  
because a young man who lived just next door  
was marrying a girl from a neighboring village.

ELLEN

This was not so long ago—  
just fifty three years ago,  
in a village in Sichuan, in China.

VIKRAM

His mother came out of the house and said to him,  
"come along Guojiang  
let the bride touch your mouth,  
the new tooth will grow straight."

And so,

ELLEN

following the village tradition....

VIKRAM

Exactly.  
Following the village tradition,  
Gujiang was led to the bride's carriage.  
And slowly, a finger,  
that was white and smooth  
as if crafted out of marble,  
slipped out of the curtain,  
and into the boy's mouth.

And he got excited, and,  
by mistake,  
he bit the bride's finger.  
And so, she lifted a corner of the curtain  
and looked out at him and smiled.

ELLEN

And  
when he looked up at her  
the beauty and the grace of the bride  
stunned him  
and he fell in love.

VIKRAM

Right.  
And so.  
Ten years passed.  
Guojiang was no longer a little boy.  
He was sixteen.  
Every night after his day of work on the farm,  
he lay in bed thinking of the woman —  
of the the bride.  
The bride, whose name was Xu,  
was now 26 years old,  
with four children age one to nine,  
and she was a widow  
struggling to bring up her children by herself  
standing on street corners  
selling home-made straw sandals  
for five fens a pair.

And one day  
by chance Guojiang saw her.  
And so  
each day after,  
he made his way to the same street again and again  
where she was selling sandals  
and he would nod to her  
and, finally, even he said hello.  
And she said hello to him.

And then one day  
Xu went to fill a container with water from the river,  
and she slipped on the stone steps  
and fell into the river with the baby on her back.

And he heard her cry out  
and he ran to her,  
and dove into the water  
and brought the mother and baby safely to shore.  
And then, ever after,  
he would check on her every day  
seeing if there were anything he could do to help,  
chopping firewood, fetching water.  
And, in time,  
he grew into a wonderful young man.

Rumors began  
and gossip.

And Xu,  
afraid that the gossip would keep Guojiang  
from finding a decent bride,  
decided to disappear from his life.

One day, she said to him,

ELLEN  
"You'd better not talk to me again."

VIKRAM  
And she turned and walked away.

And then, for days, he couldn't sleep.  
Until, one morning,  
he went to her and said, simply,  
"Marry me!"

ELLEN  
"No," she said,  
"...it's not fair...to you...."

VIKRAM

But he understood,  
it was not fair to her,  
to let her be tormented by the gossips of their town.

And so, the next day  
the Widow Xu disappeared,  
along with her kids and the 19-year-old young man Guojiang.

They went deep into China's heartland in Sichuan province  
and climbed a tortuous trail to the summit of a mountain  
to where the mountain peak penetrated into the clouds  
and the heavens met the earth  
and the dense foliage opened out at last  
to a broad open field  
so the Widow Xu would be safe  
from all those who felt her love was wrong.

There, Guojiang built a cottage with his own hands—  
carrying the clay soil from the riverbank  
up the mountainside to where he built a kiln  
and there baked the bricks to build a house.

And then he built a shed to keep the herbs that he collected.  
And he planted cornfields and vegetable patches.  
And then, in a lush field nearby,  
where the trees bore wild fruit  
and the howler monkeys perched,  
he placed beehives in the trees to gather honey.  
And next to the house,  
he built a playground for the children.  
And, in the afternoons, barefoot, Guojiang would go to the stream  
and with his quick hands  
catch the fish he brought home to his family for dinner.

And then, from time to time,  
he would go back down the mountainside  
to market in the village

to trade some of his herbs and vegetables  
for other things to feed and clothe his children.

And his wife, too,  
would sometimes go down the mountain  
to visit with her family or to go to market.

And then one day,  
Guojiang noticed that his wife,  
coming home with a basket on her arm,  
slipped on the steep hillside  
and only just saved herself from falling down the mountain  
by catching hold of a rock ledge.

"All my fault," he said,  
"making you suffer here with me..."

ELLEN

"Nonsense," Xu said to him.  
"Here is my paradise."

VIKRAM

That night  
hearing Xu's moans of pain during her sleep,  
Guojiang thought

ELLEN

"Why not build a stone ladder  
from the hilltop all the way down to the foot of the mountain?"

VIKRAM

So my wife will be safe  
to go down the mountain side  
whenever she wishes to visit her family and her friends  
and for our children to go up and down the mountainside  
to go to school and see their friends  
and to come home safely to our cottage on the mountain top.

And so,

without telling his wife,  
Guojiang would go off from time to time  
over the months that followed  
with his hands and a hammer and a small chisel that he had  
he carved a stone stairway in the mountain side  
a stairway  
a stairway of six thousand steps.

For fifty years  
they lived in the deepest primeval forest.  
Occasionally, Xu would go with Guojiang to the town  
to visit their children at school,  
and later, when the children got married,  
to visit their homes in the villages.  
And their children would come back from time to time  
to help with some heavy household chores.  
But there was never an outsider to intrude into their safe heaven.

ELLEN

"They had no electricity,"  
their son Liu recalled,  
"and my father made a kerosene lamp from an ink bottle.  
And, to keep the steps clear and safe for my mother,  
he wore out seven chisels  
and as many hammers.  
It was his ladder of love."

VIKRAM

And when, at last,  
his wife lay dying.  
Guojiang said to her,

ELLEN

"What may I bring to you?"

VIKRAM

She said:  
"My lover,  
I wanted nothing else in the world,

ever,  
only to hold your hand  
until my last moment....."

[And now,  
the autumn foliage gives way to the bare branches of winter.]

DEBARGO

For my part  
I never move to a new home  
without looking for the place  
where my coffin will stand.

ARIAN

I understand exactly.  
When my mother died at our home  
the staircase turned out to be too narrow for the coffin  
so that she had to be lowered out the window

DEBARGO

That sometimes happens.

ARIAN

And since then I've never been able to look at that window  
without wondering which of the two of us  
will be the next to go through it.

That's why

I like to sleep with a night light burning in our bedroom  
and sometimes at night  
looking at you  
I see that you are lying awake, too  
and I know what you are thinking about  
but we never speak

DEBARGO

out of tact

xARIAN

out of a certain tact

There are nights when I suddenly jump out of bed  
and stand there for a second in a state of absolute terror.

DEBARGO

I understand.

[As the actors are speaking,  
we notice that Arian and Yvette are physically close to one another,  
as well as Vikram and Ellen  
and Debargo and Chen Chi—  
so, those three couples, at least—  
and possibly others—  
have come together  
or stayed together.]

THE ASTRONAUT

How can you tell when a person's been shot?

THE ARTIST

At what hour, you mean?

THE ASTRONAUT

No. I mean if they were shot before or after they died. What does rigor mortis  
actually mean?

THE ARTIST

That cellular death is complete.

THE ASTRONAUT

What does one do to support the lips if the teeth are missing?

THE ARTIST

A strip of stiff cardboard, a strip of sandpaper, cotton.

THE ASTRONAUT

How does a drowned body look?

THE ARTIST

Discoloration over the face, neck, upper chest. Because the body floats downward in the water, usually.

THE ASTRONAUT

What colors does a body pass through after death?

THE ARTIST

Light pink, red, light blue, dark blue, purple-red.

THE ASTRONAUT

Clever:

the way death gathers its harvests.

Whole generations do not fall at once,

that would be too sad

and too visible.

But bit by bit.

One day, one will go.

another day, another.

One must glance about oneself to notice the empty spaces,  
the vast contemporary killing.

CHEN CHI

Let any man get hold of as much pleasure as he can

as he lives his daily life;

the future will always be unknown.

The time of life is short,

and once a person is hidden beneath the earth

he lies there for all time.

A man is nothing but breath and shadow.

Time makes all things dark

and brings them to oblivion.

A cup without a bottom is not put on the table.

First you will see a crop in flower,

all white;

then a round mulberry  
that has turned red;  
lastly  
old age  
of Egyptian blackness  
takes over.

#### DEBARGO

In spring I think the dawn is most beautiful.  
In summer the nights.  
In autumn the evenings when the sun has set and your heart is moved by the sound  
of the wind and the hum of the insects.

#### CHEN CHI

In winter the early mornings,  
especially when snow has fallen during the night,  
or the ground is white with frost,  
or even when there is no snow or frost,  
but it is simply very cold,  
and someone hurries from room to room  
stirring up the fires and bringing charcoal or wood,  
and then,  
as noon approaches,  
no one bothers to keep the fires going,  
and soon nothing remains  
but piles of white ashes.

[Music.

And the actors rush and tumble and careen through.

And, while the actors rush through,  
the bare branches of the trees begin  
once again  
to be filled with spring blossoms.

A five year old girl (or a thirty year old woman),  
eating an ice cream cone, smiling,

sitting in a red wagon pulled by her father,  
enters and leaves, smiling.

A golf cart, driven like crazy by a caddy,  
while, in the back,  
a couple embraces passionately,  
enters and leaves, as the couple continues to embrace.

A couple being pulled along on a picnic blanket  
with food and a champagne bottle in a bucket,  
and she is drinking and drinking and drinking the champagne  
enter and leave.

An electric wheelchair—  
a man driving,  
a woman sitting on the handlebars,  
she running her fingers through his hair over and over and over—  
enters and leaves.

A skate board,  
with a woman lying on her back on the skate board  
as a man twirls it round and round in ecstasy,  
enters and leaves.

A silk sheet, with silk pillows,  
she lying back in her lingerie  
he taking photos of her,  
enters and leaves.

A homeless guy with cart of stuff  
enters and leaves.

A man and woman on a bicycle built for two—  
one peddles while the other eats pizza—  
enter and leave.

There are as many of these entrances and exits  
as there are vehicles with wheels  
and actors in the cast who can do a quick change and come through again.

And,  
after they have all vanished,  
and the tree branches are filled completely with spring blossoms,  
a solo dancer dances to beautiful music  
a solo dancer dances to beautiful music.  
a solo dancer dances to beautiful music.

The End.

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