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# Summertime

by CHARLES L. MEE

---

A hundred slender white birch tree trunks.

A scattering of casual, summer-house furniture all covered in white muslin.

Grass grows on a desk,  
and there are stars in the sky.

A woman's white summer dress hanging from a tree branch.

Later on, there might be 300 wine glasses half-filled with rose wine.

There is not so much a set for a play, as an installation piece  
in which a performance occurs.

Violin music, quietly in the distance.

Tessa wears something in the colors of Spring.  
She may have a flower in her hair.  
She sits at the desk.

James enters.  
He, too, is wearing something the color of Easter eggs,  
and he carries a bright yellow umbrella.

JAMES  
Excuse me?

TESSA

Yes?

JAMES

I didn't mean to barge in...

[he closes the umbrella]

I was told I might find a translator here.

TESSA

Oh, well, I...

I do some translation sometimes.

JAMES

You are?

TESSA

Tessa.

JAMES

Tessa.

Right.

Good.

I have a few things

I need to have put into Italian.

You see,

I work for someone

a photographer

who took photographs

and then asked certain people to look at the photographs

and say things or write things

that he would then put with the photographs.

TESSA

Captions.

JAMES

Yes. Right.

Well, no, not exactly.

More like thoughts or I don't know, feelings.

That is to say, he asked Roberto Calasso to write something or, as it turned out, he thought he asked Roberto Calasso whereas in actuality he asked a journalist named Francesco Ghedini to speak to Calasso and ask Calasso to write something do you know Calasso?

TESSA

I know *of* Calasso, sure.

JAMES

Right,

and Francesco said he had spoken to Calasso

and that Calasso had written these things

the things I have here.

TESSA

I see.

JAMES

but actually Calasso never did write them

I guess Francesco made them up

or even someone else made them up and told Francesco

that they had been written by Calasso

TESSA

This is really complicated.

JAMES

What is?

TESSA

This whole story.

JAMES  
Right.  
Well: life itself.

TESSA  
Right.

JAMES  
So, when the proofs were sent to Calasso for his final approval because the book is going to press— Calasso said he had never heard of these things and if we printed them he would sue. And so we had to stop the presses and I came here to talk to Calasso.

TESSA  
Calasso is here? What, for the summer?

JAMES  
I guess.

TESSA  
What's he doing here?

JAMES  
I don't know, I guess he's on vacation.

Anyway,  
when he heard what had happened with Francesco he didn't want to get Francesco into trouble

TESSA  
Francesco.

JAMES  
I don't know why  
I suppose because he understood Francesco, you know, is just trying to make a living

and Calasso felt sympathy for Francesco, I guess, because Calasso's a nice man  
and so he suggested maybe someone else could sign the words  
and he suggested Benigni

TESSA

Roberto Benigni.

JAMES

Right.

Because Benigni is well known as a lover in a way  
a person who loves life and women

And Calasso knows Benigni and he said he would call him—  
because he's here too, vacationing...

TESSA

He is?

JAMES

Do you know Benigni?

TESSA

I know *of* Benigni.

JAMES

Right....

and the pictures are...uh...

did I say what the pictures were?

TESSA

Nudes.

JAMES

No.

Did I say that?

TESSA

I guessed.

JAMES

Well, yes.

Or, no.

Not entirely.

Some are nudes, but some are not.

I mean, many are not.

And there are men, too. And old people.

And children, I mean: as friends.

You know.

[silence]

Love.

[silence]

Sex for sure. But: also love.

TESSA

Oh, well, love.

No wonder it's so complicated.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

These days especially.

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

With what we all know now  
what we've come to know.

JAMES

Exactly.

[silence]

JAMES

Anyway the texts are in English  
because we have them in type for the American edition

TESSA

and Benigni doesn't speak English

JAMES

Right. Well, not so well.

TESSA

So you need them translated back into Italian.

JAMES

Right.

[silence]

TESSA

No problem.

JAMES

What?

TESSA

No problem.

I can do that.

JAMES

Oh. Oh, great, thank you.

TESSA

Do you have them?

JAMES

Sure.

They're right here.

TESSA

So.

Why did you want Calasso to speak about love?

JAMES

Because he's, well,  
he's Italian....

TESSA

Right.

JAMES

You know,  
from Europe,  
from an ancient civilization in a way,  
the old world.

TESSA

Greece and Rome.

JAMES

Right.

And still in touch with the deeper ways of life and love  
the things that are deep in human nature and eternal

TESSA

close to the dreamtime of civilization

JAMES

Right.

TESSA

The time of mythology.

JAMES

Right.

Deeper than Freud, even.

TESSA

Right.

Deeper than Freud.

[silence]

JAMES

Or, you know, I suppose we could have gotten a woman to write about it.

TESSA

Right.

Though probably that wouldn't have helped.

JAMES

No.

[silence]

Do you think I could wait here while you do it?

TESSA

This could take a while.

JAMES

Right. Of course,

and you'd rather have some privacy I guess.

I only thought,

if you had any questions.

TESSA

Sure, sure. You can stay.

You can sit there.

[silence]

JAMES

Do you mind if I just lie down?

I'm sort of jet-lagged.

TESSA

No. Fine. Please do.

JAMES

Thanks.

[he lies down;

she looks at the text for a while, quietly.]

TESSA

This line—

"deer heart" —

what is that?

JAMES [sleepily]

Um...

I don't know.

I guess it's just something that...uh...you know  
someone thought of.

TESSA

Unh-hunh.

I mean, it's supposed to be an animal, a deer,  
a fawn, a wild animal,

but at the same time it should suggest sweetness: d-e-a-r.

In English, you have this play on words.

JAMES

Yes. Right. I suppose you do.

That's one of the challenges of translation I guess.

TESSA

Well. Yes, it is.

[Music comes up.]

Francois walks vertically down the sky,  
or steps out of a wardrobe  
or up out of a steamer trunk  
or through the wall  
or out of the trees.

He carries a rose umbrella;  
and he too wears flowered or brightly colored clothes  
and has a flower in his buttonhole]

FRANCOIS

Are you free for dinner?

TESSA

No.

I'm busy.

As you can see.

FRANCOIS

Everyone has to eat.

TESSA

I'm not dressed.

FRANCOIS

I have something for you.

JAMES [waking up]

Uh, excuse me.

[he hands her a crimson satin slip]

TESSA

Oh, Francois.

This is a slip.

FRANCOIS

Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA  
As a dress?

JAMES  
Pardon me.

FRANCOIS  
Yes.

TESSA  
To go out?

FRANCOIS  
Sure.

TESSA  
Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

FRANCOIS  
Of course in Martha's Vineyard.  
It all started here.

TESSA  
I like it.

[she steps out of her dress  
and into the slip;  
she wears, otherwise,  
black boots, and socks that are falling down around her ankles;  
or else, she takes off the dress and doesn't put the slip on,  
wearing nothing else but stockings and red high heels]

JAMES  
What is this?  
I beg your pardon,  
but you seem to have interrupted something here.

FRANCOIS  
Do you believe in love at first sight?

TESSA

No.

JAMES

What's going on?

FRANCOIS

It's the truth.

TESSA

So?

FRANCOIS

So what?

TESSA

So why do you tell me this?

FRANCOIS

Because perhaps this is how it is for us.

TESSA

How can this be after all these years we've known one another?

FRANCOIS

Because sometimes you don't see the other person at first.

And then suddenly you do.

You sense something in one another.

You might not even know what it is.

In fact, probably you never know,

the connection is so deep,

beneath the place where language even starts.

And then, if you let the moment pass, it is past forever.

And what you never know is:

was this a great love or not?

Was this your one great love

that you've just missed.

Because each of us is given only one great love in life.

That's what all the poets have known.

We've forgotten it in our times.  
I think we get too caught up in our daily lives.  
But people used to know:  
you are born,  
you have one great love,  
you die.  
There's nothing else to life.  
That's why, in Romeo and Juliet,  
after they find their love,  
they die.  
Because that's the truth of it:  
birth, love, and death,  
that's all there is.  
Your great love may come at the beginning of your life,  
or in the middle,  
or near the end.  
Or not at all.  
But there is only one  
and if you miss it,  
you've missed it forever.

JAMES

This is exactly what I meant to say to you.  
This is what I myself was thinking when I first met you.

TESSA

Is this what you always say to women?

FRANCOIS

No.

JAMES

I was going to say the very same thing to you  
but I was afraid you would think I was too forward.

FRANCOIS

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

JAMES

Excuse me.

Wait a moment.

Uh...I beg your pardon.

Goddammit.

[Music comes up.

They dance—

not just for a moment

but this dance is a long performance event of its own.

James paces back and forth,  
wanting to interrupt, feeling too uncertain and shy,  
until finally he does.]

JAMES

Well, look, finally,

I don't mean to interrupt, but...

TESSA

I'm sorry.

James, this is my friend Francois.

JAMES

Yes, so I gather.

It seems that I happen to doze off for a minute  
and now you're dancing with someone else.

TESSA

What?

JAMES

You're dancing with someone else.

[she hurriedly puts on the slip— if she didn't have it on]

TESSA  
Someone else?

[the following is all on top of one another]

JAMES  
Well, yes.  
Excuse me,  
Tessa and I...  
I thought we...  
well, I might have been mistaken,  
but I thought we were...  
taken up with one another.

FRANCOIS [withdrawing]  
Oh, I beg your pardon.  
I didn't realize.

TESSA  
What?  
Taken up with one another.  
What he means is...

FRANCOIS  
I didn't realize....  
I didn't mean to intrude.

TESSA  
You're not intruding.  
This is a...  
we have a business relationship.  
I mean we are...  
I am working for him  
in the sense that...uh....

FRANCOIS  
That's quite all right. I'll just be....

JAMES

Business relationship, yes.

I suppose so, but I thought there was something more than that.

I thought...

FRANCOIS

Possibly we'll have the pleasure again....

[he exits;

at the same moment, Mimi enters,  
coming out of the woodwork or the woods  
also with a brightly colored umbrella  
and brightly colored clothes.

She doesn't speak for a while;  
she just stands there, drinking an iced tea, and watching.]

TESSA

What have you done?

JAMES

Done?

I hope I haven't done anything.

I certainly didn't mean....

TESSA

This was my friend!

I was dancing!

JAMES

Yes, I see.

And I didn't mean to....

TESSA

What are you,  
some kind of stalker?

JAMES

No. No.

All this happened totally by chance  
by pure chance.

Stalker!

TESSA

We might have been....

I mean, you can't tell what you might have interrupted....

JAMES

I know.

I'm sorry.

Well, in fact, of course,

I don't mean to presume,

but I also thought that perhaps you felt....

that is to say,

we met,

and frankly I felt something right away,

and I even thought perhaps you might have felt something, too.

TESSA

Felt something?

For you?

JAMES

Yes, for me.

I thought I sensed something special possibly.

Are you telling me you didn't feel some connection?

TESSA

No. No, I didn't.

JAMES

I was just a stranger with whom you were doing business  
and, knowing nothing about me, you let me sleep here with you  
and you felt no connection?

TESSA

Sleep with me?

JAMES

From the first moment I saw you  
I thought  
here is a wonderful person  
and I thought you felt something of the same  
but now you seem, well,  
as though you might be denying your impulse.

TESSA

Impulse? I don't have an impulse!

JAMES

What do you call it?

TESSA

I call it nothing.  
Are you crazy?  
You thought  
we were in love?

JAMES

Not that I thought we were in love,  
but that perhaps there was some feeling of a connection.  
You have such beautiful eyes.

TESSA

Eyes? Eyes?  
I have nothing to do with my eyes.  
They have nothing to do with me.  
Get out! Get out! Just get out!

JAMES

I'm sorry. I apologize.  
I'm leaving.  
I wouldn't think of staying another minute.

TESSA  
Then go!

MIMI  
Excuse me.

[Tessa wheels around to see Mimi]

TESSA  
God, Mimi, am I glad to see another woman.  
I am so sick of men  
and all their talk of love and sex

JAMES  
I don't think I mentioned sex.

MIMI  
Love, I hate love

TESSA  
do you know has it ever been anything but a cover  
for some kind of manipulative bullshit  
some kind of exploitation

JAMES  
I don't think I was trying to....

TESSA  
has anything ever done more damage to me than love?

MIMI  
These men what is sex to them  
but some way to avoid any sort of reality altogether

TESSA  
call it love  
and it's nothing but a hideout.

MIMI

I know just how you feel.  
I feel the same way exactly.

TESSA

A woman wants another person with whom she can relate

JAMES

And so does a man.

TESSA

one who sympathizes

MIMI

who can know how she feels

JAMES

Just like a man.

TESSA

and know who she is in some deep sense

MIMI

accept her for exactly who she is

JAMES

As a man hopes as well.

TESSA

not try to keep just to the surface of things

MIMI

avoid the real involvement with the deeper things  
that are inevitably more complex

TESSA

and sometimes not entirely easy to deal with

MIMI

but this is the real human exchange  
the exchange with the inner being  
that feels really good and consoling

TESSA

and, as far as that goes, really hot

MIMI

and sexy

TESSA

Exactly.

JAMES

Excuse me, but is there maybe something  
are you two having some sort of....?

TESSA

Certainly not.

JAMES

Because I thought I sensed...

TESSA

You sensed something again?

JAMES

If not on your part for her  
then possibly on her part for you.

MIMI

Certainly not.

JAMES

I think so.

MIMI

Absolutely not.

TESSA

I am a person without any involvements whatsoever!  
And that is exactly how I intend to keep it!

JAMES

And all the while  
doesn't it mean anything to you  
that I think I love you?

TESSA

Love me?

MIMI

You think you love her?

JAMES

It happened so suddenly—  
who's to know?  
it was all the most fortuitous event  
but, in fact, this could be our real chance in life, Tessa.

TESSA

I hope not.  
[to Mimi]  
He could be some kind of narcoleptic.

JAMES

You don't know anything about me.  
We've only just met.  
Maybe I seem like a jerk to you

TESSA

Well....

JAMES

but that could be just because it's an awkward time  
I'm not at my best  
something like that  
I mean everybody has these potentials within them

to look like a jerk  
or even to be a jerk  
but they might be more  
like 90% of the time or even 98% of the time  
really fine people  
or good people  
or funny  
or even,  
you know,  
hot.  
I might be like that  
and then that would be good for us  
because I tell you  
I'm crazy about you.

TESSA

You walk in on me with some random project.  
You don't even know me.

JAMES

You don't think I do?  
People are smarter than we think.  
We think  
it takes a long time to get to know someone  
and in a way it does  
but we know so much from the first second  
it's not just the words another person speaks  
we right away take in  
their, you know, body language  
the way they hold themselves  
cock their heads  
how their hair falls and how they push it away from their eyes  
whether impatiently or gently  
whether they are irritable or thoughtful people  
gentle or violent  
caressing or insensitive  
how they smell  
whether they look directly in your eyes  
or they can't look up from the ground

or meet your gaze directly  
or their eyes dart from side to side  
because they are anxious in a way  
they will never change  
I saw you  
and I knew:  
I've looked for you all my life.  
I love you.

[Francois enters,  
sees Mimi, starts to sneak back out.]

MIMI  
Francois!

FRANCOIS  
Oh,  
Mimi.  
Imagine that. It's been...

MIMI  
A long time.

FRANCOIS  
Yes. Precisely.  
How extraordinary.

TESSA  
You know each other?

MIMI      FRANCOIS  
We were...    We had a...

FRANCOIS  
We lived together...

MIMI  
Briefly.

We spent the weekend together in San Remy.

FRANCOIS

A wonderful time...

JAMES

Excuse me, but we were having a conversation here.

MIMI

Until what?

You walked out the door...

FRANCOIS

We were outdoors at the time.

MIMI

Right. In a little outdoor cafe.

TESSA [to Mimi]

You never told me this?

FRANCOIS

So, technically speaking...

JAMES

Perhaps you would excuse us....

FRANCOIS [to James]

I'm sorry....

MIMI

You walked out of the cafe  
and got into some woman's car.

FRANCOIS

Not some woman.

That woman was a friend.

I mean,

I had known her....

which is to say  
I had been friends with her at one time  
and then there she was in San Remy  
she asked for my help.

MIMI  
Your help?

TESSA  
Who was this?

JAMES  
Do we care about your love affairs?

FRANCOIS [to James]  
I beg your pardon.

[to Mimi]

It seems she was there with a fellow  
who wouldn't let her out of his sight  
and she needed to phone her husband  
so I said I would drive her to a telephone I knew  
by the side of the road  
where she could make a call  
with the motor running as it were  
and I could bring her back.

MIMI  
But?

FRANCOIS  
Well, but it turned out, of course,  
the phone was out of order  
and then she was frightened to return  
so she convinced me to drive her to another town  
down towards Les Baux  
and

[shrugs]

by that time it had become so late  
and I thought you would have been angry  
so that, for me to return....

MIMI

So instead you disappeared.

[He shrugs.]

Men! Men!

You appear and then you disappear!

[She turns away from him,  
not knowing which way to go.

Four people come out of nowhere  
simultaneously,  
in mid-sentence:

Natalie,  
Maria,  
Frank,  
and Edmund.

They are all dressed in summer clothes,  
beachwear perhaps,  
or linen things in greens and whites.  
They all wear sunglasses.

This is a multiracial and differently abled cast.]

MARIA

...which is not what I meant to do at all.

FRANK

So you say

so you always say when you do these things

EDMUND

That happens to me all the time  
finding I've done something I never meant to do

FRANK

and yet how could you not mean it  
when it happens over and over again

NATALIE

Me.

I do what I mean to do  
and when it's done  
I've done it.  
What do I care?

MARIA

Francois!

NATALIE

Mimi!

[Francois spins around one way,  
Mimi spins around the other.]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

MIMI

Natalie!

NATALIE

What are you doing here?

MIMI

Yes, well...

I might ask the same of you.  
And yet, how wonderful to see you.

[to Tessa]

This is my friend Natalie.  
This is Tessa.

MARIA  
Ah, Tessa!

TESSA  
Mother!

MARIA  
I didn't realize you knew Francois!

TESSA  
Well, *know* him.  
I don't know that I *know* him.

FRANK  
It would seem that's just as well.  
And yet,  
we step out of the house for what seems a few minutes  
and already you're having a house party.

MARIA  
It's alright, Frank,  
she's a grown woman,  
this is her home, too,  
she should do as she likes.

FRANK  
And yet, entertaining men.

NATALIE  
Can you just say  
how wonderful to see you  
and that's that?

MIMI

What's what?

NATALIE

I thought,

well,

I thought

getting to know you

you changed my life.

Really.

Everything I thought.

Who I was.

Who I thought I was.

What I meant to do with my life.

How I meant to live.

How it was to see the world with new eyes

and feel all my feelings completely transformed.

And yet it seems

I meant nothing to you!

Nothing!

I thought you would be my whole life!

[She bursts into tears,

turns around

and disappears.]

MIMI

Natalie!

Natalie!

[Everyone is looking quizzically at Mimi.]

It was just a casual thing, you know.

Not that I'm not really fond of her.

Women,

sometimes they like a dalliance with another woman

or the warmth of friendship

whatever

but I am definitely heterosexual.

I just happen to be someone who likes men.  
I like men!  
That's just who I am.  
Of course maybe I've had some relationships with women

JAMES  
Exactly what I thought.

MIMI  
But I've had a lot of relationships with men,  
I shouldn't say a lot  
but, on balance....

JAMES  
Who are these people?

[ Note: Throughout the piece, all the characters are meant to inhabit the setting  
with a physical life independent of the dialogue and actions

—

that is, they are meant to lounge and do their nails and write books  
and despair and try on various outfits and practice solo dances  
and perform tai chi and carry on lives as others occupy center stage.]

TESSA  
This is my family.

MIMI  
And friends.

TESSA  
And friends.

JAMES  
I thought we were going to be alone.

TESSA  
Where did you get that idea?

EDMUND

No one is alone.

We all come into the world with a family.

We all have a past.

MARIA

And a present, too, it would seem!

FRANCOIS

None of us starts a new day carte blanche, do you think?

JAMES

Yes. Yes, I do.

Why does a bride wear a white wedding dress?

Because she starts anew.

But what chance is there for us?

TESSA

What chance was there ever?

JAMES

This is a minefield!

FRANCOIS

A battlefield.

MIMI

A rubblefield.

JAMES

How is anyone supposed to know where to put a foot?

FRANK

You're a friend of my daughter?

JAMES

Your daughter?

FRANK

Yes, Tessa is my daughter.

JAMES

Well, friend I don't know.

I'd certainly like to be.

FRANK

Indeed.

MARIA

And, in fact, Francois,  
what exactly are you doing here?

FRANCOIS

It's not entirely clear to me  
what I'm doing here.  
As it started out  
what I thought was  
it was a perfectly straightforward life plan  
as clear as the plot of a novel  
I was setting out in life  
to find a woman I could love  
and who loved me  
and then one thing led to another  
I found myself with a friend  
the next thing I knew I was at a chateau in the country  
where there were many people  
there was a party  
I couldn't find the woman I had come with  
you know

[he shrugs]

I became disoriented.  
But as I think about it  
I think  
is this not how life is?  
You think you are doing one thing

it turns out you have been doing something else entirely  
life has no plot  
you only think it does  
while all the time something without a plot is happening to you  
over and over until you reach the end of your life  
and you think you've had a beginning and a middle and an end  
but all you've had is a start and a stop  
and a lot of disorientation in between  
trying to get a grip  
hoping for true love  
maybe you have a chance and you lose it  
you don't know where it went  
you're not sure if you had it  
or who it was with  
maybe the time you least thought it was meaningful at all  
that was your one chance  
you walked right past it  
while you were pursuing another woman  
and then you kick the bucket....

[Maria slaps Francois.]

FRANCOIS

What?

MARIA

How can you flirt with her like this?

FRANCOIS

Flirt with her?

Flirt with whom?

MARIA

I was always the one who loved you.

FRANK

Excuse me.

I'm feeling a little....

MARIA

I called you all the time.  
You never called.

FRANK

I don't think this is meant for me....

FRANCOIS

Maria, please,  
this is hardly the right occasion....

MARIA

What?  
You can't bear to hear the truth?

EDMUND [kindly]

Frank,  
would you do me a favor?  
Would you get me a little milk for my tea?

FRANK [disoriented]

Milk. Yes. Of course.

[he leaves]

JAMES [stupefied, looking at Maria]

So, this is your mother?

TESSA

Yes! Yes! So you see!  
This is what I grew up with!  
What chance did I have with a family like this?  
And you want to fall in love with me?  
How can anyone expect me to form any kind of relationship  
with another human being?

[Tessa goes to the couch  
where she lies down,  
face buried in a pillow,  
like a Balthus girl,  
disconsolate.

James follows her to the couch, uncertain what to do to help.  
During the following conversation,  
James moves toward her, then away,  
toward her again, then away.

Finally, James finds a blanket  
and gently puts it over Tessa;  
she accepts the blanket without acknowledging him.]

MARIA

So  
you ignore me,  
you neglect me,  
you're always running around with these sluts

MIMI

I beg your pardon?

MARIA

Actresses, then, actresses!

MIMI

Sculptors!

MARIA

Artists. Whatever.  
I love you, Francois,  
I was always the only one who ever loved you.  
You will end up alone and lonely  
because you can't know what it is to be loved.  
You think I am clinging and demanding

FRANCOIS

And neurotic, frankly.

Let's be honest.

MARIA [to Francois]

You think you'd like to get rid of me  
but I could take care of you forever, Francois!  
Sometimes, Francois, I think you are a good person  
if only sometimes you wouldn't try so hard  
if you would just relax  
let life come to you  
take it as it is  
don't always be on the prowl  
because, in the end,  
all we have is one another  
you're not a boy any longer  
you won't live forever  
and what you will have had will be your friends  
these days like today  
where nothing special happens to you  
but you have been with me

[she is weeping now]

I don't want to go through life  
always bickering, always unhappy  
feeling cheated  
I could be content just to have a glass of wine  
to dance  
to hear you sing  
I don't care what kind of voice you have  
I love you  
I can be with you as long as we have on earth  
it's not so bad  
just to love and be loved

FRANCOIS

On again off again!

On again off again!

You are a lunatic!

MARIA

I'm a person who says what I feel  
when I feel it.

With me you always know where you stand.

You can count on it.

That is a kind of certainty and security  
that is almost impossible to come by in this world.

We could have another chance, Francois!

FRANCOIS

Would you stop this holding on to me?

Can't I take a breath?

Can't I go out to dinner?

You are a married woman!

This is disgraceful!

Can't I do my job without you calling  
tracking me down,

you'd think you were my wife

asking me, can you see me now,

can I come with you,

where are you now?

Who are you with?

Are you having an affair?

You're more than neurotic

[Barbara, the cook,  
enters wiping her hands on a dish towel,  
stands there listening to Francois.]

you're psychotic

with your crying and your pleading  
and what else

your taking pills to go to sleep

pills to wake up.

I have to live my life,  
you would suffocate me,  
you would pull me down and bury me alive!  
I wish you were dead!  
Dead!

[silence;

all this time,  
James is getting a cup of tea for Tessa, which,  
again,  
she accepts from him  
but without acknowledging him]

BARBARA

So this is how people speak to one another these days?  
Men.  
Who wants you?  
With a man, every act of love is an act of rape.

A man will swim through a river of snot,  
wade nostril-deep through a mile of vomit,  
if he thinks there'll be a friendly pussy waiting for him on the other side.  
He'll screw a woman he despises,  
any snaggle-toothed hag,  
and furthermore, pay for the opportunity.  
A man will fuck mud if he has to.  
And why is that?  
Because every man, deep down,  
knows he is a worthless piece of shit  
hoping some woman will make him feel good about himself.

Eaten up with guilt, shame, fears and insecurities  
obsessed with screwing,  
to call a man an animal is to flatter him;  
a man is a walking dildo,

a completely isolated unit,  
trapped inside himself,  
incapable of love, friendship, affection or tenderness  
his responses entirely visceral, never cerebral  
his intelligence a mere tool of his drives and needs;  
a half-dead, unresponsive lump of flesh,  
trapped in a twilight zone halfway between humans and apes.

Why did god create man?  
Because a vibrator can't mow the lawn.

I went to the County Fair.  
They had one of those "Believe it or not?" Shows.  
They had a man born with a penis *and* a brain.

Why were men given brains larger than dogs?  
So they wouldn't hump women's legs at cocktail parties.

My feelings about men  
are like a Jew just released from Dachau.  
I watch the handsome young Nazi soldier  
fall writhing to the ground with a bullet in his stomach  
and I look briefly and walk on.  
I don't even need to shrug.

Men pretend to be normal  
but what they're doing sitting there  
with benign smiles on their faces  
is they're manufacturing sperm.  
They do it all the time.  
They never stop.  
They are suffering from testosterone poisoning.

You know what they say:  
What do you call a man with half a brain?  
Gifted.

Why do men name their penises?  
Because they want to be on a first-name basis  
with the person who makes all their decisions.

What do you call the useless bit of fatty tissue  
at the end of a penis?  
A man.

Will all these people be staying to lunch?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't eat a lunch you made if it were the last piece of uncooked shit on the  
planet.

What is it with you women  
you think men can't live without you.

Have you noticed  
how uncomfortable it is for most women  
to put their elbows on the table while they eat?  
Because the table is too high for them.  
But for most men,  
it is uncomfortable not to put their elbows on the table  
because they are taller.  
But it's not proper to put one's elbows on the table.

And why is that?  
Because etiquette is a system that defines as appropriate  
what is natural for a woman,  
and defines as inappropriate what is natural for a man.

[In the middle of this,  
a slimy young Italian guy enters  
to deliver a pizza.  
He stands there holding the pizza box.]

So, of course,  
similarly,  
perhaps one should not be so surprised that pornography,  
which appeals to men

is condemned,  
while soap operas and romance novels,  
the female equivalent of pornography  
is acceptable.

And so, of course, men have become ashamed that they are men.  
And so women control men as they wish, at their whim,  
they get men to do whatever women want them to do.  
The women get the men to do the dirty work, the violence,  
the bad stuff  
whatever women want but don't want to do with their own hands  
so they can have whatever they like  
and blame the men for it.

BOB [holding the pizza box as he speaks]  
And yet, I think, nonetheless,  
forgiveness is possible.

FRANCOIS  
You do.

BOB  
Well, sure.  
Really under any circumstances.

Uh, primarily, uh, uh, the, uh, the...  
primarily the question is  
does man have the power to forgive himself.  
And he does.  
That's essentially it.  
I mean if you forgive yourself,  
and you absolve yourself of all, uh,  
of all wrongdoing in an incident,  
then you're forgiven.  
Who cares what other people think, because uh...

EDMUND  
Was this a process you had to go through over a period of time?  
Did you have to think about it?

BOB

Well, no.

Not until I was reading the Aquarian gospel did I,  
did I strike upon,  
you know I had almost had ends meet because I had certain  
uh you know  
to-be-or-not-to-be reflections about of course what I did.  
And uh,

EDMUND

I'm sorry, what was that?

BOB

Triple murder.

Sister, husband. Sister, husband,  
and a nephew, my nephew.

And uh, you know, uh, manic depressive.

EDMUND

Do you mind my asking what instruments did you use?  
What were the instruments?

BOB

It was a knife.

It was a knife.

EDMUND

A knife?

BOB

Yes.

EDMUND

So then, the three of them were all...

BOB

Ssssss...

(points to slitting his throat)

like that.

EDMUND

So, uh,  
do you think that as time goes by,  
this episode will just become part of your past,  
or has it already...

BOB

It has already become part of my past.

EDMUND

Has already become part of your past.  
No sleepless nights? No...

BOB

Aw, no. In the first three or four years there was a couple of nights where I would stay up thinking about how I did it, you know. And what they said...they told me later there were so many stab wounds in my sister and I said no, that's not true at all, you know. So I think I had a little blackout during the murders, but uh...

[he sits,  
making himself at home]

Well, uh, they said there was something like thirty stab wounds in my sister, and I remember distinctly I just cut her throat once. That was all, you know, and I don't know where the thirty stab wounds came from. So that might have been some kind of blackout thing. You know, I was trying to re- re- re- uh, re- uh, uh, resurrect the uh, the crime—my initial steps, etc. You know, and uh, and uh, I took, as a matter of fact, it came right out of the, I was starting the New Testament at the time, matter of fact I'm about the only person you'll ever meet that went to, to do a triple murder with a Bible in his, in his pocket, and, and, listening to a radio. I had delusions of grandeur with the radio. Uh, I had a red shirt on that was symbolic of, of some lines in Revelation, in the, in the New Testament. Uh I had a red motor...as a matter of fact, I think it was chapter 6 something, verses 3, 4, or 5, or something where uh it was a man, it was a man. On a red horse. And, and, a man on a red horse came out, and uh, and uh uh, and he was given a knife, and unto him was given the

power to kill and destroy. And I actually thought I was this person. And I thought that my red horse was this red Harley Davidson I had. And I wore...it was just, you know, it was kind of a symbolic type of thing. And and and uh, you know, uh after the murders I thought the nephew was, was the, was a new devil or something, you know. This, this is pretty bizarre now that I think back on it. I thought he was a new devil and uh, uh. I mean basically I love my sister, there's no question about that. But at times my sister hadn't come through uh for me. You know and I was in another, one of these manic attacks. And uh, and uh, uh, uh, you know, uh, I was just uh, I was just you know, I mean I was fed up with all this you know one day they treat me good and then they tell all these other people that I was a maniac and watch out for me and etc. and like that. And uh, uh, so I went to them that night to tell them I was all in trouble again, you know, and could they put me up for the night, you know, and they told me to take a hike and uh so uh, believing that I had the power to kill, uh you know, that was that for them. You know. I mean when family turns you out, that's a real blow. You know. But uh, back to the original subject of forgiveness. If I forgive myself I'm forgiven. You know that's essentially the answer. I'm the captain of my own ship. I run my own ship. Nobody can crawl in my ship unless they get permission. I just (he nods) "over there." You know. "I'm forgiven." You know. Ha-ha. You know. (Laughs.) It's as simple as that. You know. You're your own priest, you're your own leader, you're your own captain. You know. You run your own show, a lot of people know that.

Who ordered a pizza?

TESSA

I did, but that was hours ago.

BOB

Well, here it is.

TESSA

I'm sorry, it's too late.

[Frank returns, holding a glass of water.]

BOB

Too late?

I don't think so.

Who's going to pay for the pizza?

FRANK

Here you are Edmund.

EDMUND

What is this?

FRANK

You asked for a glass of water.

EDMUND

No, Frank.

[he laughs]

Not a glass of water.

A little milk for my tea.

FRANK [confused]

I'm sorry.

I don't know what I was thinking.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no,

I'll be right back.

[Frank leaves.]

BOB

Who's going to pay for the fucking pizza?

EDMUND

I'll pay for it.

Give it to me.

BOB

Plain cheese.

EDMUND

Right.

Here.

Keep the change.

BOB

Thanks. I appreciate it.

Which way did I come in?

EDMUND

That way.

BOB

Are you sure?

EDMUND

I'm sure.

BOB

Don't fuck with me.

EDMUND

I would never fuck with you.

BOB

Right.

Thanks again.

[Bob leaves.]

BARBARA

I'll take the pizza.

[Barbara exits with the pizza.]

MIMI [to Francois]

You know,

I myself knew a woman,

I won't say who,  
who was in love with a man who was married,  
and this married man went away on vacation with his wife.

FRANCOIS

Mimi, this is  
this is probably not a perfect moment.

MIMI

And the woman I knew, who was left at home,  
spent every day thinking  
not just what *she* was doing at every moment  
but what this *man* was doing at every moment, too,

MARIA

Who was this?

[Francois paces back and forth, moping his brow  
as Mimi assaults him with this story of their past]

MIMI

knowing, as she got up in the morning  
that her lover was waking up with his wife

MARIA

Who was this, Francois?

FRANCOIS

I wouldn't know.  
This is some sort of I don't know what.

MIMI

and behaving as he always did in the morning  
lying in bed,  
turning over to embrace his wife  
perhaps making love

MARIA

Are you saying that you were married?  
That you have a wife?

FRANCOIS [to the others]

There's not a shred of truth to this.  
Essentially.

MIMI

and lying there under the covers afterwards  
as his wife went to make a cup of tea for him  
bringing it back to bed

MARIA

All this time you've been married  
and I never knew?

FRANCOIS

No, not married.  
Of course, in the past....  
in a different time,  
at another time,  
as you yourself are married at the present time.

MIMI

the conversation then, the planning for the day,  
the breakfast in the cafe

MARIA [totally thrown, sinking to the ground, talking to herself]

How could this be  
and I didn't know?

EDMUND

There's only so much pain a human being can endure  
before they cave right in.

MIMI

his reading things out loud from the newspaper  
every moment, for two weeks,

FRANCOIS

How can you say this?

MIMI

this woman thought all the time, every moment, of what her lover was doing  
waiting for the moment that he would return  
and call her

FRANCOIS

What could I have done?  
Given the circumstances!

MARIA

I can't believe I never knew this!

MIMI

and come by and take her out to dinner  
and spend the night with her

MARIA

How do human beings keep themselves from knowing things all the time?

MIMI

she knew the hour and the minute that he would return

MARIA

This is inconceivable.

MIMI

and when at last he did return  
and the woman waited by the phone for him to call  
he did not call that evening

MARIA

We do this with everything.

MIMI

he might have been delayed by the weekend traffic  
and he did not call late that night  
or early in the morning

FRANCOIS

Well, I couldn't call.

MARIA

We make ourselves unconscious  
and then we wonder why we are so tormented.

MIMI

not from home or from the road saying he had been delayed  
he did not call all that next day or night  
he did not call until the following day  
in the afternoon

FRANCOIS

I couldn't very well get to a phone.

MARIA

Couldn't get to a phone?

MIMI

from his office

FRANCOIS

Mimi....

MIMI

to suggest dinner the following week.  
So what did this woman do?

FRANCOIS

What?

MIMI

She waited for her lover.

She waited until the time he said for dinner.  
She waited for him,  
and she is still waiting.

[She sinks to the ground  
next to Tessa  
so that now, Tessa, Maria, and Mimi are all on the ground.]

EDMUND  
Human beings are as tough as cockroaches, really.  
They can take so much more than they can imagine.  
But, at a point, you can crush them.

JAMES  
You know,  
I can understand how perhaps he couldn't call.  
I mean, I myself have been in a similar situation.  
Sometimes it's not easy to call.

[silence]

TESSA [speaking quietly, sadly to James]  
So  
it turns out  
you mean you meant nothing of what you said to me.

JAMES  
What?

TESSA  
You lied to me.

JAMES  
I never lied to you.  
What are you saying?

TESSA [still quietly]  
I think you did.  
You came to me with someone else still in your heart.

You said you loved me.  
But, in fact, you weren't free to say such a thing at all.  
Part of you still belonged to someone else.  
Part of you was stuck to someone else.

JAMES

What who are you talking about?

TESSA

This other woman you didn't call.

JAMES

It was not.

I was just saying—this was long ago.

I was not stuck to someone.

I mean,

of course, as you say yourself, we never shed our pasts entirely.

But I wasn't *stuck* to anyone.

TESSA [close to tears]

I'd like to be able to trust someone, you know.

You see the sort of life I've had

I could turn out to be a totally fucked up person myself

[now she is crying]

and what I need more than anything is someone I could trust

and I thought

even though you were a jerk

I could trust you.

JAMES

I'm a jerk?

TESSA

I mean, I'm sorry,

I mean even though you came on to me,

well, face it, James,

the way you came on to me

it wasn't exactly so suave  
but I thought you were sincere  
and honest  
and innocent

[she is sobbing]

and for a moment I thought:  
oh, I could trust you  
I could trust you  
and now it turns out  
you're just like every other man!

[she curls up in a fetal position  
underneath the desk]

JAMES

I'm not!

I'm not!

I'm not like a man at all!

[He throws himself to the ground in a heap,  
bouncing and rolling several times  
before he settles down in a funk.]

FRANCOIS [trying to whisper, or speak privately]

Maria, I think, perhaps, frankly,

we just need to make love

it's been so long

we need to be close to one another again to have some hope.

MARIA

Are you serious?

This is disgusting.

I wouldn't touch you.

I wouldn't touch you.

Not now.

I could vomit.

FRANCOIS [still trying to keep this conversation from the others]

We've just gotten off track.

If you come to bed with me it'll go away.

It always does.

MARIA

You're pathetic.

You've never really made love to me.

To *me*.

You don't even know who I am.

You don't even notice.

FRANCOIS

You're really crazy if that's what you think.

MARIA

Oh, I'm crazy?

You think you're in love with someone  
who is repulsed by the very smell of you  
and I'm the one who's crazy?

Everyone kept telling me what a great guy you were.

So I looked past the fact that you bored me to tears.

I suffered through your endless inane monologues about rocks.

I tried to see you for what you think you are,  
strutting around the house as if you were a man:  
you're a fucking dwarf!

I could kick you across the room.

MIMI

What a beast.

FRANCOIS

What do you mean, I'm a beast?

MIMI

Yes!

TESSA

Would you people get out?

Would you just get out?

Don't you know some people are trying to lead their lives  
trying to lead lives that are not all FUCKED UP?

Don't you people know

how you treat people

this is who you are!

A person is not what job he does

or how the neurons work inside his skull

or how he looks in the suit he wears

but how he is with other people

and this then is the world he makes

for others to live in

whether this world is happy or savage!

[silence]

FRANCOIS

It's true. It's true.

I am a beast.

Oh, god.

I'm sorry.

What can I do?

I can't say that I can't do anything about it

because I have to try

that's my responsibility

but I can't seem to do anything about it.

God, what a loathsome person I've become.

MARIA

Francois I never want to see you again.

FRANCOIS

What's wrong with me?

What do you mean?

MARIA

Just what I say.

FRANCOIS

Never?

You never want to see me again?

[to James]

You know when people say never,  
I never believe they really mean it.

MARIA

Okay, then, okay:

For five years!

I don't want to see you for exactly *five* years,  
not a moment before!

[she vanishes]

FRANCOIS

Oh right! Great!

You never know where you stand with women, do you?

Whatever you do is wrong.

One day they call you a satyr,  
the next day an impotent idiot.

You can never tell what they want.

In a word, then, the poisoning has begun.

The man has been used, that's all.

One of a number of equally acceptable items

taken down from the shelf, used, put back,

never valued for himself, no,

but only for what can be gotten out of him.

And then women will complain about physical satisfaction!

Or gossip to her friends about her lover.

A man, on the other hand, would consider it a betrayal of her trust,  
her privacy.

It never occurs to a woman to think he

might have miscalculated about her  
Might have second thoughts about *her*—  
in giving her what she needs to feel secure,  
having given away himself  
so that he no longer *possesses* himself  
so that he no longer knows who he is  
or if he even exists any longer!

[he turns on the radio at full, hostile volume,  
rips off his shirt in a rage and throws it across the stage  
and does a quick, hostile, sexually suggestive dance step  
and then he takes off his belt and hurls it across the stage  
and does another hostile dance step;

this is strip music he is working to  
and soon he is taking off his shoes and hurling them across the stage  
then unzipping his trousers  
and he is totally into a striptease—still with anger and defiant sexuality—  
and he does the full Dionysian thing,  
completely into it and wild.  
This goes on for a long time—a full performance.

Eventually the music stops,  
and he is left alone there,  
suddenly embarrassed.  
He stops, looks around;  
everyone is just looking at him,  
and he is humiliated.  
Sheepishly, he starts to gather up his clothes and awkwardly put them on.]

FRANK  
Here you are, Edmund.

EDMUND  
What is this?

FRANK  
Your tea.

EDMUND

My tea?

Frank, do you never listen to me?

FRANK

What?

EDMUND

I asked you for milk for my tea.

FRANK

Milk?

EDMUND

Do you never pay attention to me?

FRANK

I'm sorry.

I'll get it for you right away.

EDMUND

Never mind.

FRANK

No, no, I'll be right back.

EDMUND

Never mind, Frank, it doesn't matter any more.

FRANK

I said I'll get it!

EDMUND

Fuck it!

I don't want it!

FRANK

I said I'd get it goddammit!  
And I will goddam get it!  
Am I not always getting things for you?  
Get this, get that,  
you stand here like the Prince of Wales  
while I fetch things for you night and day  
and one time I happen to get the wrong thing  
and you say I never listen to you?

EDMUND

Because in fact you don't!  
I think I have no respect for you  
or common courtesy  
certainly no real sympathy  
or empathy  
or love as one might expect  
even from simply another human being passing in the night.  
Think how it is:  
you are sleeping with another person.

FRANK

That's not true.

EDMUND

You are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

Oh, Maria. Well....

EDMUND

Well, what?

FRANK

Well, she's my wife.

EDMUND

You mean, yes, you are sleeping with Maria.

FRANK

*Sleeping* with her yes.

But she's my wife, my wife.

EDMUND

So?

FRANK

It's not as though we were lovers.

EDMUND

You say you're not.

But you sleep with her.

You love her.

You love to be with her.

She makes you laugh.

She thrills you.

FRANK

Yes, yes, yes.

So?

EDMUND

Well, there are many kinds of lovers in the world,  
many kinds of relationships,  
marriages even, you might say.

You are married to her.

FRANK

Only in the sense of being married  
not in the sense of being married as you use the term.

EDMUND

You sleep in the same bed.

FRANK

So what?

You can sleep with us, too, if you like.

EDMUND

I beg your pardon?

FRANK

Well, we *are* friends.

EDMUND

Who?

You and I?

FRANK

Well, yes,  
also you and I.

I mean you and I *are* friends, aren't we?

I hope.

EDMUND

You hope?

You hope?

What do you mean you hope?

FRANK

Forget it! Just forget it!

I'll be right back, goddammit!

[Frank leaves.]

EDMUND

Forget it!

And what do you suppose happened when I went over for dinner  
the other night?

I arrive, and he says, what is it you're doing here?

I've come to dinner, I say.

Did I invite you to dinner, he says. No I don't think so.

Why don't you have dinner with me, I say.

I can't. You know, he says, this is too much. I can't....

Just dinner, I say. Nothing more.

You say so, he says, and then you just want to stay on after dinner....

When you talk this way, I say to him, I begin to feel like I'm expecting a death sentence.

Then we argue, he says, you cajole me, you don't leave and you don't leave, I begin to feel cornered.

I shout at him: I'm just talking about dinner!

Next thing you know, he says, you think there's no reason you shouldn't spend the night....

If we just sleep together, I say to him, just sleep in the same bed, nothing more

And then, he yells at me for no reason at all, when you fall asleep I look at you and I see how ugly you are when you're relaxed.

What, I say, what?

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

When I'm asleep I'm ugly, I say, that's what you're saying?

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

Every night?, I say. Are you saying every night?

Yes, he says, yes. Almost every night. Ugly and repulsive. Like another person altogether. So that I hardly recognize you except I say to myself: right, yes, there you are again the way you really are. Last night I woke up with palpitations and a pain in my head and I thought: right, there you are again, attacking me in the middle of the night when I'm defenceless.

I'm attacking you?, I say!

Like the time you tried to hyptonize me while I was asleep, he says, setting my nerves on edge so I had to hit you in the face that time to get you to stop, you remember that and you said you were being eaten alive by worms.

I did not. You didn't hear a word I said.

EDMUND AND MIMI TOGETHER

I hang on every fucking stupid word you ever say!

EDMUND

Every stupid word I say!

*You are stupid.*

Stupider than ever.

MIMI

And black and venomous. Poisonous really, more poisonous now than ever before.

FRANCOIS

Ever before when?

EDMUND

Before you used to give me that filth at the dinner table—on purpose, on purpose—so that it made me shiver?

MIMI

Before that?

FRANCOIS

Before you would seek some intimacy with me, force yourself on me,

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

*demanding* I make love to you....

MIMI

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

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

Excuse me, if I remember correctly you always turned your back on me, always.

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to pursue you,  
put my arms around you so I was always in the position of the suitor,

EDMUND AND MIMI

you were always cool, no, cold,

FRANCOIS

I was supposed to be the beggar the suppliant  
and then,

EDMUND AND MIMI

[not necessarily exactly together, but both of them saying the line on top of one another]

if I *had* to turn over because my arm had gone to sleep  
and my shoulder feels broken  
and I have a pain in my head,

EDMUND AND MIMI AND FRANCOIS

and I turned over because I couldn't bear the pain of holding you in my arms,  
then did you

FRANCOIS

ever,

JAMES

ever,

MIMI

ever once,

FRANCOIS

did you ever a single fucking time turn over and hold me the way I held you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

EDMUND

Did you ever pursue me the way I pursued you?

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

No.

FRANCOIS AND EDMUND AND MIMI AND JAMES—EVERYONE

[not necessarily exactly together, but all of them saying the line on top of one another]

You just got finished saying I come over to dinner and try to stay the night.

Is this not pursuing you?

Oh, sure! Now! Now! Now it's too late!

Why is it too late?

EDMUND

Because I woke up this afternoon in the middle of the afternoon with women's voices in the apartment below and I thought I had come to live finally in a home invaded by sluts! And I began to cry! I'm a man, and I began to cry! I can't take this bullshit forever! What kind of person do you think I am? Do you know why the earth has governments and dictators and none of the other planets do? Because this is the only planet where all the inhabitants do not say what they think, where people lie all the time, lie and lie and lie all the time, and I am sick of it. No, you cannot stay for dinner. No! Just fucking leave me alone!

Love! Love!

Do you think love is possible these days?

EVERYONE [variously]

No. No. Love is not possible these days. No. No. No.

[Music.

A big hostile dance

with everyone throwing everyone else to the ground over and over again,  
venting their aggression

by running into the walls and trees,

throwing themselves to the ground all together in repeated synchronous  
movements,

until, finally, still seething with rage or disgust,

or given over to hopelessness and despair,

they are exhausted,

sprawled on the ground or on the couch or in a chair,

and the music ends.]

## **Act Two**

FRANK [gently]

Here's your milk.

EDMUND

Thank you, Frank.

FRANK

I'm sorry.

EDMUND

Thank you.

I apologize.

FRANK

One looks for things  
and finds something else.

There's no simple story of boy meets girl  
any more  
these days.

And other stories, too,  
are gone entirely.

And those people  
who once loved in some other way  
they're gone forever, too,  
their lives, their loves  
their sensibilities  
we will never see anything that remotely resembles them again.  
How people used to love  
the ways for which we now have complete contempt.

We think because the past is no longer who we are  
that the age that came before us is stupid  
and that how we are today  
or what it is we wish to be  
is the true way and the good way—  
even if, in fact, we are tormented every hour of our lives—  
and, in any case, our true way is passing too  
to yield to yet another true way  
and who's to say the past  
did not have pleasures as deep as those the future holds  
or deeper  
or perhaps simply different?

The aging gay man who had to keep his life a secret  
and found ruses and manners to hide himself  
and find another who would share his inner world  
we don't know how it is to live like this today  
that sense of nuance and subtlety  
the decor of a home  
that would suggest but not declare  
the inner life of its host  
that finely developed ability  
to discriminate the gentlest hint

all this is gone  
and it would be wrong to mourn its loss  
and the suffering that so often went with it  
and yet I still have friends who are lost  
because it is lost  
their lives  
the lives they thought they would live all their lives  
vanished suddenly  
with nowhere to go  
just as all of us  
will one day be gone

our lives unrecoverable  
the civilizations of the past  
so distant from us  
as to be more alien than foreign countries  
human beings we recognize  
are in some way related to us  
and yet so different we cannot know  
their inner lives  
the only lives that matter  
their private lives  
the lives they thought they lived  
are lost forever

and even as we live today from day to day  
each day is lost as we live it  
never to return  
we shed our lives as we live them  
we die each day  
our lives becoming first stories  
and then barely remembered dreams  
the fleeting stuff of mortality  
so that even as we live  
we disappear  
and all that we have treasured most  
disappears along with us.

[James sits down next to Tessa,  
trying to entice her into conversation.]

JAMES

You know,  
maybe everybody does have a past.

[silence]

And, you know,  
it's like they say,  
when you go to bed with someone,  
you bring six people to bed with you,  
each other,  
and the other person's parents  
and your own parents.

[silence]

Well, or maybe even more people than that  
because....

[silence]

TESSA

Are you trying to start a conversation with me?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

You should probably say something else.

JAMES

Right.

I was only just saying  
it's like, you know,

you were saying you have this family  
and this past you can't escape  
and I was only saying....

TESSA

Right.  
And I was saying,  
maybe you want to talk about something else.

JAMES

But what I was saying was that other people  
are not just your past  
they are also your future.

TESSA

You mean, you're planning on having an affair with someone I know?

JAMES

No, no, no.  
I mean, what we are is humanity,  
I mean, part of humanity,  
we just have to accept that,  
we can't separate ourselves from that  
from one another  
so all of us all the time...  
you know...

TESSA

What?

JAMES

Are part of humanity.

[silence]

You can't escape that.

[silence]

I'm a person too, you know.  
You feel you grew up with certain  
difficulties in your upbringing  
but so did I!  
So did everyone I suppose  
and this is our chance  
to love one another  
*because* of our backgrounds  
to console one another  
to feel close *because* of the pain we've felt  
to feel intimate  
and to know even better how to take care of each other  
because we know how important that is  
and how it feels  
and just where another person needs support.  
Being fucked up, you know,  
might be a *basis* for love.

TESSA

You're an American.

JAMES

Yes?

TESSA

I don't think I could like an American  
or love an American  
or really even have fun with an American.

JAMES

Aren't you an American?

TESSA

I'm half Italian.

JAMES

So you can't love someone who is all American?

TESSA  
I don't think so.

JAMES  
That's crazy.

TESSA  
Why?

JAMES  
Because Americans are just—Americans.

TESSA  
So?

JAMES  
Well, they're just Americans.

TESSA  
So?

JAMES  
So, what is that?

TESSA  
Well, I don't know.

JAMES  
So, you see?

TESSA  
No, I don't see anything.

JAMES  
You see, you could come to love me.  
I'm crazy about you, Tessa,  
you know, if somebody's crazy about you,  
you can't resist it finally  
because it feels so good to have someone be just crazy for you

and just love everything about you and everything you do  
and just be delighted in you  
and laugh at your jokes and feel for you  
and love to do things with you  
and look out for you  
and all that sort of thing  
I think I'm going to become irresistible to you.

TESSA [smiling]  
You do?

JAMES  
I'm really pretty sure of it.

Think, how,  
you know,  
I found my way to you,  
which, in a way,  
you have to believe is the most important thing in life  
so you have to believe I know how to do the most important things  
to have enough a sense of adventure to throw myself into the world  
to see what happens  
and to come up successful,  
this couldn't be such a bad partner for someone.

TESSA  
But what if you're not, I don't know, funny  
or fun or something.

JAMES  
I might not tell jokes  
but I might just be ridiculous  
which, in time, once you got to know me  
could be constantly amusing to you.  
Plus I think you're in a situation where anything could happen.

TESSA  
I guess that's true.

JAMES

What else do you want of life?

TESSA

What do you mean?

JAMES

To live a life where anything could happen.

And then, of all the anythings,  
you can choose what you like.

TESSA

I guess.

JAMES

Well, then.

TESSA

There's just a whole lot to fight your way through these days  
how men are,  
for that matter: how women have become  
all the stuff  
you know what I mean  
you watch television  
I'm doing a twelve-step program  
I'm trying to work it through  
but simple love  
even if you're an OK guy  
I don't think you can get there from here any more.

I was just wondering a little while ago  
how it would be if we were sleeping together  
and I imagined we had to sleep on a giant mattress on the floor  
and you were chilly  
and the cat was giving birth to eight kittens in the room  
and it made you cranky.

So I went out to buy you some  
red thermal underwear  
and I came back with the wrong thing but by then  
you weren't cold anymore but you needed a travel toiletry bag.  
So I went back to the store for groceries  
and the store was an Arabian camel tent  
with pyramids of canned foods and regular check out grocery scanners  
and I bought ten dozen yellow and red roses and a bunch of six foot high gladiolas  
and a silver mesh Gucci toiletry bag for ten thousand dollars

And when I got home  
you were asleep  
wearing the red thermal underwear that was too small for you  
and a pair of red gloves  
with each finger labelled with random words on colored tapes

and you were wearing my black RayBan sunglasses  
that you had already stretched out and ruined with your giant head.

I crawled on top of you and started kissing you  
and you opened your eyes and yelled,  
"How the fuck am I supposed to pay for a ten thousand dollar toiletry bag?!"  
And you climbed up on the scaffolding at the foot of the bed  
and started throwing the yellow and red roses at me—thorns first  
and there were thorns stuck all over my arms and legs and chest  
and the roses were hanging off me  
and I was rolling around the mattress trying to get them off  
and you told me you knew a guy named Todd  
who had thrown batteries at his girlfriend and killed her  
when she had done something like that  
and then you smashed a tape recorder under your boot  
and took out the batteries and threw them at my head  
and you climbed higher and higher up the scaffolding  
saying that the higher you went the more the batteries would hurt  
and that even a penny could break my skull  
from way up there.

[silence]

That's what I see when I fantasize about our being together.

[She looks at him for a moment  
and then turns away from him.

In rage and despair, he grabs a chair,  
takes it to an upstage corner, and sits facing into the woods.

Maria appears]

FRANCOIS

Maria!

How time flies!

MARIA

No wonder your family won't speak to you  
and every woman you've ever been with has gone crazy  
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 whoever gives in to you  
for being weak and pathetic and worthless.

FRANCOIS

Okay. Okay.

This is how it is.

We're through.

Forget everything I ever said to make up.

The truth is: Frank is a better person than I am anyway.

I've never been a good person

or even an acceptable person

I'm actually a person of almost despicable character.

You should go back to Frank

what more could you want?

He's a wonderful person  
loving and kind and considerate and generous.  
What could you have been thinking  
not just to be grateful for that?

MARIA

Probably you're just saying that,  
but I think it's true.

FRANCOIS

It is true.  
In fact, all you've ever done is string me along  
out of some sense of discontent  
you never could define!  
You never loved me if you think about it.  
Your heart has always been with Frank.

MARIA [to Frank]

What he says is true, Frank.  
I do love you.  
I'm sorry for all I've done to hurt you.  
I don't know why I ran away from you.  
I think I never felt you wanted me  
but I want you, Frank,  
let's never leave one another's side again.

FRANK

It's too late, Maria.

MARIA

Too late?

FRANK

I'm sorry.  
I would never do anything to hurt you  
because I do love you.  
But now, you see, without you,  
I've turned more and more to Edmund  
for solace and companionship and,

finally,  
love.  
And now I couldn't betray him  
after all he's done for me  
his being there for me  
his loyalty  
he's completely won me over  
and I think I never could find my way back to you.

EDMUND

Don't say that, Frank.  
The truth is, you've never left her.  
You've never been with me.  
I've always felt you left half yourself behind.  
And you could never let go completely  
and be with me  
the way I need someone to be  
for my sake.  
Go back to her.  
She's your family.  
You'll never be happy without her.

FRANK

Love these days:  
it is such a strange and difficult terrain  
so often we don't know where we are  
or whether we're in the right place at all  
we can't find a place that feels like home  
our hearts are lost.  
And I have to admit,  
the place that feels like home to me  
is with you, Maria.

MARIA

Oh, Frank,  
I'm so happy  
to feel we can start out again in life together  
and have a whole second life.  
One doesn't just throw away a marriage on a whim

for some fleeting romance or sudden passion  
all those years  
the chance of having an entire lifetime together  
that's the truest treasure of all.

Shall we all have a drink—  
or shall we have some tea?  
Is this tea, Tessa?

TESSA  
I don't think it's hot.

[Maria spills it down the front of Francois's trousers.]

FRANCOIS  
Oh! Oh!  
Yes, it is hot.

MARIA  
Oh, Francois, I'm so sorry.

FRANCOIS  
No, you're not!

MARIA  
Here, give me your trousers,  
you don't want to have a stain.

[she unbuckles his belt, starts to take off his trousers;  
Tessa slowly stands up,  
horrified by this further display of her family's behavior]

TESSA  
Mother!

FRANCOIS  
Excuse me. Please.  
I don't think I'll be taking off my trousers.

TESSA  
Mother!

MARIA  
I'm only thinking what's practical!

FRANK  
Let's all take off our trousers, then,  
so you don't feel embarrassed.

FRANCOIS  
Frank, you are the perfect host, but...

TESSA  
Are you going to do this?

[he takes off his trousers  
as Maria helps to remove Francois's;

meanwhile,  
Gunter and Natalie enter;  
they stand, their clothes dishevelled,  
obviously having been in bed together,  
looking at what's going on]

FRANCOIS  
I don't think this is necessary,  
a little tea can't hurt.

MIMI [to Natalie]  
Natalie, where have you been?  
And who is this?

NATALIE  
This is Gunter.

MARIA  
Hello, Gunter.

FRANK  
Hello, Gunter.

GUNTER  
How do you do?

MIMI  
Is this your idea of getting even with me?

NATALIE  
I don't know what you mean.

MIMI  
Oh, yes, you do.

GUNTER  
I'm not taking off my trousers.

MIMI  
Oh,  
taking off your trousers.  
Right. Good idea.  
I have an idea.  
All the men take off their trousers  
and I will make a sculpture of all of you.  
I've always thought:  
what would it be  
to do a whole set of modern torsos?

GUNTER  
Is this what people do here?  
Everyone takes off his trousers?

JAMES  
I'm not taking off my trousers I can tell you that.

EDMUND  
I'm taking off my trousers.

NATALIE

Here.

I'll help you with your trousers, Gunter.

[Natalie goes for Gunter's pants.]

GUNTER

No, no.

I don't remove my trousers.

NATALIE

Come, Gunter.

What's the difference?

You could be wearing a swimming suit.

Lift your foot, Gunter.

GUNTER [seeing all the other men taking off their trousers]

Well, I don't know if this is right.

MARIA

Come along, James.

Is it James?

JAMES

Yes.

MARIA

Don't be shy.

We're among friends here.

Let me help you get your pants off.

JAMES

I don't think so.

I'm not a stripper.

MARIA

Of course you're not.

Taking off your trousers doesn't make you a stripper  
or all men would be strippers.

TESSA

How can I have a relationship with a man  
when my mother takes off everyone's pants  
who comes into the house.

[Maria starts to take off his trousers]

MIMI

Now, if you will all lie down,  
come,  
lie down here in a row  
on your backs, not your fronts,  
not too close together....

[Tessa has ended up sitting in a corner,  
like a Schiele doll,  
her knees pulled up under her chin,  
her dress pulled up to her waist,  
and she is naked under her dress  
and looking forlorn,  
like a broken doll,  
her head tilted over to one side.]

NATALIE

Come, Francois.

FRANCOIS [as he cooperates, led by Natalie]

You never think  
I may have feelings, too.  
Just because it seems to you I am indifferent  
or cold  
or interested only in conquests,  
but I am a vulnerable person too in my way  
I want just as much as you  
to have a deep and meaningful relationship  
but it may be that in my own way  
I don't know any better than you in your way  
just how to go about achieving it.

MIMI

that's good  
I'll show you what I'm going to do  
I'm going to make  
plaster casts of your torsos  
five male torsos I will call them.

Here, Francois,  
I'll take you first.

[she starts to mix water and plaster of Paris  
in a bucket;

Natalie gets Francois settled,  
his head in her lap;

in fact,  
though all the men have their pants off,  
Mimi will never get beyond the cast of Francois;

suddenly, now, there is a tableau:  
the men all lying down, propped up on their elbows,  
the women arrayed around them  
as though at a picnic;  
we are at a salon  
where there will be a philosophical conversation]

MARIA

I love art  
and artists  
people who make things in general  
creative people  
there are people who make things  
and the other sort  
and my feeling is  
I love a person who makes something.

[Sentimental Italian music comes up  
under the dialogue,  
a violin or mandolin]

Because art  
art is where we discover  
in the freedom of our imaginations  
what it is to be a human being

FRANCOIS

Or else, we discover it in love.  
Because human beings are social animals  
not isolated imaginations  
and so we discover truly who we are  
in our relationships  
that's where we can see the full complexity  
and wonder of a person  
where we see the mystery of what it is to be a human being.

FRANK

Of course, you're talking here  
not just about sensual love  
what the Greeks called *erotike*  
but also about love as friendship,  
what they called *philia*.

Because the Greeks thought  
love is not just a sentiment  
but is actually the physical principle of the universe itself  
the very stuff that binds the universe together.  
And without it the whole world just falls apart.

GUNTER

This is fine for you to say  
but it's not so clear you can know what it is to love  
and so what it is to be a human being  
unless you live the life of a bourgeois person in a bourgeois country  
because  
under Stalin

the Russians only made love an average of 1.2 times a month  
the same is true in Bulgaria as I happen to know  
and then not very happily  
and mostly in the doggie position  
this is a statistic  
this is a fact.  
And some people, in prisons,  
they forget entirely how to reach out to another human being  
to touch another person in any way  
that isn't cruel.

How do you think it is for the street hookers  
who live in the alleys of Istanbul and Havana?

TESSA

You look around the world,  
and you think:  
should there be love in a world like this?  
Of should there only be politics?

JAMES

This is true.  
I think this is true.

FRANK

Still, we carry on.

TESSA

We shouldn't.

MARIA

No matter what,  
you can't stop living.

GUNTER

And yet, it can seem strange  
to live in a world where, just to get a lipstick,  
you have to choose between

Red  
or Hot Red  
or Classic Red  
or Real Red  
or Radiant Red  
or Russian Red  
Reggae Red  
Love that Red  
Uptown Red  
Drop Dead Red  
Red Red Red  
Crimson Splendour  
Guerlain no 102 Rouge Boléro KissKiss Hydro-soft  
Guerlain no 103 Rouge Satin Tango KissKiss Hydro-soft  
Guerlain no 104 Rouge Passsion KissKiss Hydro-soft  
Cherry  
Crushed Cherry  
Cherry Blossom  
Very Very Cherry  
Cherries Jubilee  
Hard Candy Tramp....

[silence;  
bewilderment and awe at Gunter's knowledge of lipstick]

FRANCOIS

The world can be so confusing,  
what are the rules, what is allowed, what is not allowed  
and we live in constant anguish.

You have to reinvent your relationship every day  
discover all over every day what it might be  
what a woman wants  
what you yourself might want.

MARIA

And then, sometimes  
you might live apart from your wife or lover  
and so you have love affairs

or you even agree to have love affairs  
even while, at the same time, in your own way,  
you remain faithful to one another in your love for one another  
whatever you might be doing physically  
and yet, no matter how you sort it out,  
even at the moment you are going to bed with another person  
it makes you feel even more alone and betrayed

FRANCOIS

And then  
when you say, for example, do you love me?  
then she replies I don't know you  
because in fact she never will, she never will.

JAMES

Why not?

FRANCOIS

Because I rediscover who I am every day,  
it's a moving target, you can't hit it.  
How can you have love at all these days?  
These days,  
it's not easy for a man and a woman to fall in love.

MARIA

It never was.

GUNTER

One needs courage.

EDMUND

Human beings.

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.

FRANCOIS

In the olden days  
you were married for life, that was it  
and then you have your love affairs.  
But nowadays these love affairs cause nothing but pain or death,  
and it seems you shouldn't have them.

EDMUND

Or you might say,  
this wonderful married love  
this is not for me.  
What I long for is a moment  
and nothing more  
an intense moment  
a moment even of pain  
or especially of pain  
never mind the falling in love  
the consummation  
the lifelong pleasure  
let us cut right to the end of it  
the searing pain  
that lets us know  
we did once long and love  
we are alive  
and this awful pain proves it  
over and over again.

FRANK

This is not my idea of love.

GUNTER

Or it may be  
rather than feeling the pain ourselves  
we like to inflict it on others

to enable them to feel what we ourselves cannot  
and this can be a form of generosity  
giving the sensation of life to another  
life at its most intense and intimate

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really....

[Natalie now launches into an aria  
whose sole purpose is to get Mimi's attention  
and seduce her.]

NATALIE

Sometimes you might like to say to someone  
hey! go ahead  
do your worst  
stick it in me,  
up my ass,  
piss on me,  
double up your belt,  
make it sting  
make me lie still  
make me whimper  
make me beg

Because I like to feel some leather  
up between my legs from time to time  
with a little silk  
a knee up in my crotch  
nails down my sides  
bone against my clit  
a little bit of rubbing  
The old double dildo  
and you've got to like an animal from time to time.

Or you might say to your partner  
make it hurt  
spank me, pinch me  
give me an enema

bite me, burn me,  
but watch out for the joints, the nerves,  
watch out for the blood vessels, you know  
I'm taking this for granted,  
this will be safe  
think about the front of the thigh,  
the shoulder, the upper arm,  
use a little soap and water,  
alcohol, Betadine,

keep it perpendicular to the skin  
make a gentle cut  
wait a minute before the blood begins to flow  
and then another cut or prick  
like lightning going through the body

and when it's done  
rub it with wine  
stain it  
leave a mark there  
because these marks are here for life  
these are commitments being made  
we're never going back

MIMI  
never.

NATALIE  
And what do you need in life finally but  
some bandaids  
smelling salts  
sterile cotton

MIMI  
bandage scissors

NATALIE  
bolt cutters

MIMI  
aspirin

NATALIE  
spare keys

MIMI  
a marlinspike

NATALIE  
ice pack

MIMI  
hydrogen peroxide

NATALIE  
rectal thermometer

MIMI  
KY jelly

NATALIE  
tweezers.

MIMI  
And then you can feel free to say to your mate  
you could tie me down  
so I can't jump when you cut me  
you know  
Do it slow  
then work me over  
this is what I like  
and tell me bedtime stories

NATALIE  
You could powder me.  
You could oil me.  
You could dress me up.  
You could take me out.

[Mimi, having gotten caught up in Natalie's fantasy,  
has been worked up into a sweat.  
She takes a deep breath now.]

MIMI

There.  
I'm done.

I call these plaster casts of torsos  
my erection series  
because  
no matter what a man does  
when he feels the heavy warmth of plaster on his torso  
he can't keep himself from getting an erection  
don't ask me why.

[Silence.  
Mimi and Natalie are fixated on one another.  
All the others look at Francois.]

Maria bursts into song,  
an aria from an Italian opera,  
leading to a chorus

so that everyone joins her in singing the opera,  
even Tessa;

while they sing,  
Mimi takes Natalie by the hand  
and guides her into the woods  
or to the steamer trunk,  
opens the trunk, and gets into it with Natalie and closes the lid;

and also, while they sing,

beautiful things ascend from beneath the ground to heaven

or rose petals rain down

or ten thousand brightly colored beach umbrellas descend from the skies;

at the end, there is silence,  
and the sound of the surf]

GUNTER

Dear God,  
did you hear these women singing together?

MARIA

Thank you, Gunter.

GUNTER

But, no,  
could you hear yourself?  
I am speaking of you and your daughter.

TESSA

I was only singing.  
I wasn't listening.

GUNTER

The two of you  
mother and daughter  
your voices flowing in and out of one another  
like quicksilver  
like a mountain brook  
like satin sheets

MARIA

Oh, Gunter, really.

GUNTER

Like the spring breeze in the branches  
like the silk camisole  
beneath the summer dress

MARIA

Gunter, please.

GUNTER

Like the summer light  
falling on the pillow  
in the late afternoon  
and the ocean waves are quiet  
as the tide goes out once more

FRANK

Gunter.

GUNTER

My mother sang to me every night  
when she put me to bed  
and sometimes my grandmother would join her  
the two of them singing to me  
their duets and solos  
from the operas we had attended all together  
and I have often thought  
one never knows  
what one seeks in life  
why this man loves a woman with fair hair  
or this woman needs a man who seems substantial  
while that woman needs a man who is tender  
or even weak  
a man may love a woman  
or a man may love a man  
but why will he love this woman or that man  
these things that make us long for another human being  
or need another  
that make us unable to sleep  
or make us tremble  
make us perspire with a passion we don't understand  
it is so specific and so sickening and so potent  
it frightens us  
we run from it  
we choose instead some more peaceful seeming love  
some love we can bear from day to day  
even though eventually it may come to bore us  
and we forget what it is that makes our knees buckle

until, by accident,  
we come across it again in the most unexpected place  
as I have just done this moment  
with you, Maria, and with you, Tessa  
hearing the two of you sing  
I recognize: I love you  
I love the two of you together, singing  
and I need you  
I want you  
I need to marry you  
please, Maria, please  
[he is on his knees and weeping now]  
I beg you  
I can't help myself  
I can only plead that I can't help myself  
or else I would  
I only thank god in this moment  
that the passion I can't resist is this one  
instead of, as it could have been—  
who knows? we seem to have no control of these things—  
a passion to whip someone or shoot them  
I beg you, Maria  
I beg you, Tessa

MARIA

Gunter.

GUNTER

come with me

sing to me

I'll take care of you as you've never been cared for before.

FRANK

Gunter.

GUNTER

What do you say, Tessa?

I pray to God

I'll give you anything you want.

EDMUND

This is too bizarre.

GUNTER

The Mormons love two women all the time  
or three or four

EDMUND

Because of the way they sing?

GUNTER

Perhaps!

I don't know.

And why not?

JAMES

This is insane!

GUNTER

I don't say it's not insane.

I apologize for it.

But I can't control the way I feel.

MARIA

You should!

GUNTER

I can't.

I won't.

I love you, Maria.

MARIA

You are a creep, Gunter!

No one likes this sort of weird  
kinky kind of thing.

I am a normal person, Gunter,  
with normal sorts of normal feelings.

GUNTER

What I feel feels normal to me.

FRANK

I've never heard of such a thing.

GUNTER

This happens all the time  
someone becomes transported by another person  
this is what is called love.

MARIA

This is sick.

JAMES

Sick.

MARIA

Sick.

FRANCOIS

Do you think you can just come in and take another man's love  
right from under his nose  
and this is an acceptable thing to do.

GUNTER

I tell you, I can't be blamed.

FRANCOIS

Who would you ever blame then  
if not you yourself?  
Would you blame a man  
who likes to be tickled with pheasant feathers?

GUNTER

No. No, I wouldn't.

FRANCOIS

That was a bad example.  
Would you blame....

GUNTER

You can't blame anyone for love.  
You can weep for them  
but you can't blame them.

I could be so happy with the two of you  
so filled with joy  
it would overflow and fill your whole world  
so that finally  
you would be happy, too,  
I know it  
just as my mother and my grandmother were  
taking care of me when I was a little boy  
chastising me when I had done wrong  
spanking me if I needed it  
and sometimes I must admit  
I did need it.  
And we could be just this happy together  
if you would just give me a chance.  
I beg you, Maria.  
I beg you.

[he has Maria's foot, which he is trying to kiss;  
and she is trying to get away from him;

Francois comes and gently pries Gunter loose,  
and takes him to one side,  
putting an arm around his shoulder]

FRANCOIS

Here, here, Gunter, come with me.

GUNTER [weeping]

I love her.  
I'm afraid I can't get over it.

FRANCOIS

Many people have had to get over it, Gunter.  
She is a wonderful woman,  
with a big heart,  
but she can't love everyone.

[Francois helps Gunter to a place to sit down,  
where Gunter sits in absolute desolation  
and then gradually rolls under the desk in a fetal position.]

MARIA

I wish I could love you, Gunter,  
I would if I could,  
but it is the nature of women  
they are able to love only one man

or two

or so  
but there comes a limit  
or not  
but with me this is how it is.

[Bertha, an elderly woman, enters.]

BERTHA

I'm terribly sorry  
we've been having a party next door  
and suddenly I looked around and my little boy was gone.  
I suppose he just ran out.  
Have you seen my son?

MARIA

Oh. No.  
I'm sorry.  
Let's look for him.

EDMUND

Could he have come in through the kitchen?

FRANK

Or he might have come in through the terrace.

MARIA

Oh, how unsettling.

I remember I lost Tessa when she was a tiny little thing  
and we didn't find her for hours

do you remember Frank

and she was down by the ocean playing in the surf

and just as I spotted her

she tipped upside down in the water like a little cork

and of course she couldn't swim

and so she couldn't get herself right side up

I got to her just in time

and I thought

thank God

if we'd found her a moment later

it would have been too late.

[an awkward silence at this story she shouldn't have told Bertha  
at this moment]

FRANK

I'm sure he's fine.

Children these days are tough little creatures.

MARIA

We should branch out

so we cover all directions.

JAMES

How old is your little boy?

BERTHA

He will be forty-three on his next birthday.

[Silence.

Everyone—on the verge of scattering in different directions—stops.

They all look at the same time toward Gunter, under the desk.]

Gunter!  
Whatever are you doing there?  
I was worried sick!  
Where have you been?

GUNTER  
I don't know.  
I was taken outdoors by—someone—  
I don't see her here.

[Hilda, an even more elderly woman enters.  
She shouts everything she says.]

HILDA  
Have you found him, Bertha?

BERTHA  
It seems he has been here all the time.

HILDA  
What have you been doing, Gunter?

GUNTER  
I'm sorry.

MARIA  
And this must be your grandmother?

HILDA  
I beg your pardon?

MARIA  
Would you be Gunter's grandmother  
he was talking so much about.

HILDA

Not at all.

I am his mother's lover.

We have been together fifty-seven years this September  
and never had an unhappy day.

MARIA

Oh,

well,

I'm so glad to hear it.

FRANK

Relationships can be so complicated these days.

HILDA

Relationships have always been complicated.

Why is it people these days think they have invented complications?

Bertha and I had a hell of a time getting together

it was never easy

all the people who thought they had a corner

on the one true way of living on earth

and they ought to bury anyone else who had hold of a different stick

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

but we did it

because what the hell is the point of life

if it's not to live it?

FRANK

Yes, well, no doubt.

HILDA

What?

FRANK [shouting]

I say, no doubt.

HILDA

What the hell,  
do you think I'm hard of hearing?  
It's a timid age we live in.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

The landscape of love has always been a rocky one,  
filled with swamps and pitfalls  
brambles and sticky bushes  
and slippery slopes and precipices  
what the hell has ever been the point  
except to slash your way through the underbrush to score?

BERTHA

Of course, without hurting anyone.

HILDA

Of course. I'm not a Visigoth.  
Although sometimes, let's face it,  
shit happens.  
You give it your best effort.  
I try to be very, very careful—  
but you can't hold back just because there's no such thing as life insurance.

Sometimes we don't find anyone.

Sometimes we hurt someone.

Sometimes it doesn't last.

BERTHA

Hilda....

HILDA

Sometimes a love has the lifespan of a butterfly.  
So does life itself.  
We make the best of it.

Because time is running out.  
Time is running out!  
This is the only shot you've got!

BERTHA  
Hilda....

HILDA  
You've got to set a course and damn the torpedoes.  
And what do they mean you can pursue happiness  
but you can never find it.  
Why do they tell you such a thing,  
just to keep you from doing it?  
Bertha and me: we've found happiness.  
We are happy people.  
I recommend it!

BERTHA  
Hilda: sometimes she gets a little carried away

HILDA  
On a rant....

BERTHA  
But she's really a very nice person.

MARIA  
Will you stay for tea?

HILDA  
No, thank you, it's naptime for Bertha and me.  
And for you, too, Gunter.

GUNTER  
I was having a little nap.

HILDA  
You're going to be much more comfortable in your own bed.  
Come along, Gunter.

BERTHA

Thank you so much for looking after Gunter.

MARIA

Not at all.

BERTHA

Come, Gunter.

GUNTER

Goodbye.

[Bertha exits, followed by Gunter.]

HILDA

Nice chatting.

You'll have to come and visit us sometime  
if you like to get naked in a hot tub.

Bertha likes things a little kinky  
but I'm always telling her:

not with the guests, Bertha,  
not with the guests!

People don't like things out of the ordinary.

Well, they're young.

Once you get to be my age,  
you like to make sure you haven't missed anything.

Do come and visit us.

You're lovely people.

And don't forget,  
for us it's open house every day.

[She leaves.]

Barbara enters, carrying the pizza box.]

BARBARA

Have you decided about lunch?

The pizza's getting cold.

MARIA

Oh, Barbara, we forgot all about it.  
Come, people, what would we like?

TESSA

Whatever.

JAMES

Do you have any peanut butter?

FRANK

Salmon would be nice.

EDMUND

Just some raspberries for me.

[Bob enters.]

MARIA

Raspberries?

EDMUND

Some pale yellow raspberries.

BOB

This is the same place.

MARIA

Oh, it's the pizza man.

BOB

Did you phone for another pizza?

EVERYONE

I didn't phone.

Did you phone?

No.

No, I didn't phone.

EDMUND

We didn't phone.

MARIA

I'm terribly sorry if there has been some confusion....

BOB

You know, pizza is not returnable.

MARIA

I don't think anyone here is going to pay for a pizza we didn't order.

BOB

I am not taking this pizza back to the pizza parlor.

Who is going to pay for the pizza?

TESSA

What is this, some form of extortion?

EDMUND

I'll pay for the pizza.

Here.

BOB

Last time, if I'm not mistaken  
you gave me a good tip as well.

EDMUND

Here's a tip.

BOB

What's happened?

You've lost your job since we last saw one another?

EDMUND

OK. Here.

TESSA

This is enough.

I, for one, I have to get back to work.

Maybe no one else has to work,  
but I have to work.

And work is good.

This is another way to spend your life.

MARIA

Work?

What are you working on, Tessa?

TESSA

I am doing a translation for James.

MARIA

A translation.

JAMES

About love.

And women.

MARIA

Love, of course. Love.

Well, we know.

TESSA

What do you know?

FRANK

What is it you have?

It's not as though none of us has ever worked.

MARIA

Or loved.

FRANCOIS

Or loved.

All of us have worked.

It may be we can work with you.

FRANCOIS

Let me see.

TESSA

Please don't get mixed up in this  
and make everything all topsy turvy.

MARIA

Well, I don't think anyone would make it topsy turvy.

FRANCOIS

What is this?

JAMES

It's for a book.

It has some photographs and some text.

FRANCOIS [looking at the pages on the desk]

Right. Right. Right.

I think we can help with this.

I think, you know,

what you have is good

but it doesn't go quite far enough.

JAMES

Far enough?

FRANCOIS

I think love is more intense, clearly, than what you have here....

JAMES

I don't think you ought to get....

FRANCOIS

You know, tragedies  
and people fighting  
slamming car doors,  
driving off and leaving a woman by the side of the road at night.  
At least,  
this is what I hear.  
Probably I could help you.  
Let me have a pen.

MARIA

Here.

TESSA

Pardon my saying so  
but I don't think any of you knows anything about love  
and now you think you're going to write the book!?

FRANCOIS

We're not going to write anything  
or even change what has been written.  
But, well....  
for instance, this, with this photograph:  
"a slender, lovely, graceful girl,  
just budding into supple line" —  
who would say such a thing?  
it would be pretentious  
of course I'm not a writer,  
still, nonetheless....

MARIA

Who could speak of love  
if not you?

FRANCOIS

That's kind of you to say.  
Not that I know so much  
but perhaps I can help a little bit.

[handing the paper to Maria]

Now this is just a suggestion, but,  
you might try, for example—  
here....

[as she reads it and passes it to Frank  
who passes it to Edmund who passes it to James while  
Francois continues]

JAMES

Everyone seems to be an expert....

FRANCOIS

And then, too....

[he begins to edit another bit of paper]

you might say....just as an example....

TESSA

What is this?

FRANCOIS

What is what?

TESSA

"in copulating  
one discovers  
That."

What is "That?"

FRANCOIS

That's what Roberto wrote.

TESSA

Or Francesco.

FRANCOIS  
Or Francesco.

TESSA  
I know that.  
But what is "That."

JAMES [sitting, head in hands]  
God.

FRANCOIS  
That's what I have translated from his Italian.

TESSA  
I thought it was already in English and you were translating into Italian.

FRANCOIS  
Oh.

TESSA  
So now you are translating from English into English. Okay.  
But the "That" that you have in that.  
[pointing to the piece of paper]  
What is "That"?

FRANCOIS  
That's what he says.  
It's his idea, it's his sentiment.  
What do you mean, what is that?  
I'm not going to change it.

TESSA  
Look here at the phrase:  
"In copulating  
one discovers  
That."  
What is the "That" that one discovers.

FRANCOIS

Oh, "That."

Well,

I don't know.

TESSA

You don't know?

You are translating this

whatever you are doing to it

and you don't know what it means?

FRANCOIS

It's a mystery.

It's an unknown.

It is the great, wonderful unknowable deep knowledge

one discovers that is different for everyone.

Possibly.

I don't know.

I'm just trying to bring a little depth and sophistication and complexity to the text

because, let's face it, our young friend James here is, after all,

an American

and it may be that he doesn't know a great deal about love.

TESSA

Who doesn't know anything about love?

FRANCOIS

I don't say he doesn't know anything about it,

possibly just not so much

in its details and subtleties.

TESSA

Are you crazy?

You know nothing about love, nothing!

I've never known a man

who had so much tenderness as James

so much caring

a man so solicitous

who had so much regard for another person  
and so much respect  
and loyalty  
and steadfastness  
and dependability and sweetness.  
Someone you could count on  
when you're feeling vulnerable  
to take care of you  
even when you yourself are maybe not so friendly  
in a bad mood  
to have the strength and goodness  
not to be put off by that  
but to stay right with you  
until you could accept his caring  
and his kindness  
and his carefulness  
and his thoughtfulness  
and his gentleness  
and his honor

[silence;  
everyone is stunned by her outpouring of affection for James;  
no one is more stunned than James;  
then she realizes what she has done  
and turns away]

MARIA

That's lovely, Tessa,  
and yet, to be fair,  
it's not as though Francois knows nothing about love.  
In fact, he knows a great deal about love, about passion  
and excitement  
about what it is to thrill to life  
and to be thrilling to a woman  
to make a woman laugh  
to make her quiver and cry with happiness  
to make her weep with sorrow that her life will ever end  
to hold a moment in her heart as though it were forever  
and you would never let it go

and you long for it and pine for it to return  
you carry it with you in your heart your entire life  
you cherish it  
you never forget it  
because it was the moment that made your entire life worth living.

[silence;  
everyone is stunned by this confession of love for Francois]

FRANK  
Indeed,  
I think I know something about love myself,  
about patience and forbearance and generosity  
about wishing for happiness for another person,  
Maria:  
whatever might bring that to her  
wishing that for her  
even if it means  
not having such happiness oneself  
but taking real joy in the happy life of another.

[silence;

Francois takes Maria's hand]

FRANCOIS  
Maria.

MARIA  
Francois.

[A love song of the 50s or a heartbreaking aria by Caruso  
on a record with scratches and crackles.

Francois and Maria leave together.

Frank starts to follow them out, stops, looks after them.]

JAMES

Will you go away with me?

TESSA

Live with you, do you mean?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

How could anyone do that  
when you see how hard and painful it is?

JAMES

Not for everyone it seems to me.

TESSA

For everyone. Yes. For everyone.

[Edmund is watching Frank from the other side.]

JAMES

And yet, at the same time,  
maybe love is something that will grow,  
these things  
you never can tell  
not every love begins like in the movies  
where a person is swept off her feet  
sometimes it grows and deepens over the years  
you grow together  
until in old age  
you are so close  
so intimate  
you are like the home you live in  
indivisible  
and so deeply happy in the place you live  
you can't even understand it.

Maybe this is not your only choice  
but this could still be one of your options, Tessa.

How about just going out to dinner with me?  
There's no food in the house, right?

[silence]

There's food in the house, but you don't feel like cooking.  
Am I right?

TESSA  
Right.

JAMES  
You throw on a little something,  
we go to Tre Scalini,  
what's to lose?

TESSA  
Well....

[Frank continues to look in the direction in which Maria left.]

JAMES  
How many times have you eaten at Tre Scalini?

TESSA  
My parents took me there when I was a kid.

JAMES  
Now you go back as a grownup.  
Tessa, time is passing,  
you've been to Tre Scalini only once in your life  
already you're a grownup  
you could get to be sixty years old  
still sitting home  
waiting for the right person to call,  
hoping to go to Tre Scalini one more time before you die.

Let me take you out.  
Let's go somewhere.  
Maybe go on from dinner to a party  
maybe stay up all night  
go for a walk on the beach in the early morning  
maybe not  
this is how it is to be alive  
it's no big deal.

[Edmund turns and leaves.]

TESSA

I don't know.  
Nowadays it seems to me  
you have to be so brave  
even to accept a dinner invitation—  
and to fall in love  
that seems like a calamity,  
even life or death,  
and at the least a swamp.

[Frank turns around—sees Edmund has gone]

And, anyway,  
I'm not dressed.

JAMES

I have something for you.

[he hands her a red satin slip]

TESSA

This is a slip.

JAMES

Everyone's wearing slips these days.

TESSA

As a dress?

JAMES

Yes.

TESSA

To go out?

JAMES

Sure.

TESSA

Not in Martha's Vineyard, I don't think.

JAMES

Of course in Martha's Vineyard.

It all started here.

[she steps into the slip;

[Frank, looking lost,  
sits on the couch.]

TESSA

I like it.

JAMES

I thought it would be good on you.

JAMES

Do you believe in love at first sight?

[a long pause]

TESSA

Yes.

[James and Tessa kiss—a long, long kiss.]

JAMES

Do you dance?

TESSA

Of course I dance.

[They dance.

Frank puts his head slowly into his hands.

The lights fade to twilight and darkness.]

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support  
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