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The Talking Flower Pots

by CHARLES L. MEE

Six or eight big, beautiful pots of flowers are scattered around, speaking from time to time.

WOMEN SPEAKING

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

The male
the male is a biological accident
an incomplete female
the product of a damaged gene
a half-dead lump of flesh
trapped in a twilight zone somewhere between apes and humans
always looking obsessively for some woman
any woman

because he thinks if he can make some connection with a woman
that will make him a whole human being!
But it won't. It never will.

these cheap pikers,
these welchers,
these liars,
these double dealers,
flim-flam artists,
litterbugs,

psychiatrists!

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

ARIEL

I love you, with all my heart.

I love your hands and your kneecaps and your hair and your ears
and I love the way you are sweet when you are sweet

and the way you fuck up

because even when you fuck up

and it makes me so mad

you are actually so incompetent at it

such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you

because I think the reason you are such a loser

is that your heart is good

and so you can't hit the bull's-eye

when you are acting like a nasty shit

so that people don't have to take it seriously

and they can just wait till you realize

how wrong you've been

and also right

also right

because I don't think you are a pathetic loser

that people love out of pity

or because they want to be with some weak

useless guy they can manipulate

you really are a winner

because of your heart

which is always there

and when you come around

we all see it

and see you always were a good human being.

ELLA

The point is, you came on way too strong.

That's not the sort of thing you can take back now.

The damage has been done.

That's why people, when people play bridge,

they lead with the three of clubs,

they feel it out

and then they can build from there.

But when you throw down the ace of spades,

what is it?

You're going for a grand slam or what?

I've been thinking of us being together

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

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

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

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

Everyone was dressed in long silk gowns.

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

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

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

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

What do you think that means?

ARIEL

You
are an ignorant shoot from the hip cowboy
with your boots in cowshit
like a cow puncher savage
thinking you are such hot stuff
rolling your cigarette with one hand at a full gallop
but in reality you are a baby
a baby dude ranch greenhorn dweeb
who knows nothing
nothing
nothing about whatever
nothing about life
nothing about women
nothing about men
nothing about horses
you are a guy that's all
you are just a guy
I could spit at you
[she spits]
I could spit at you and spit at you
[she spits and spits]
because what you are is a typical male
I'll say no more
a typical male
you are a
typical
male
which is to say a shithook
and a dickhead

ARIEL

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and I love the way you are sweet when you are sweet
and the way you fuck up
because even when you fuck up
and it makes me so mad
you are actually so incompetent at it
such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you
because I think the reason you are such a loser
is that your heart is good
and so you can't hit the bull's-eye
when you are acting like a nasty shit
so that people don't have to take it seriously
and they can just wait till you realize
how wrong you've been
and also right
also right
because I don't think you are a pathetic loser
that people love out of pity
or because they want to be with some weak
useless guy they can manipulate
you really are a winner
because of your heart
which is always there
and when you come around
we all see it
and see you always were a good human being.

I had a man once
I was walking along the Appia Antica
and he came along on his motor scooter
and offered me a ride.
A skinny, ugly fellow with dark hair and big ears
and skin so sleek and smooth
I wanted to put my hands on it.
I got on the back of his motor scooter
and ten minutes later
we were in bed together at his mother's house
and I married him
and we had our boys.
All his life he worked
giving the gift of his labor to me

and to our children
he died of a heart attack
while he was out among the trees
harvesting the olives

and
if he came along now
I would get on the scooter again just like the first time.

MEN SPEAKING

I wonder:
would you marry me
or
would you have a coffee with me
and think of having a conversation
that would lead to marriage?
Or late supper.
Or breakfast tomorrow
or lunch or tea in the afternoon
or a movie
or dinner the day after
Thursday for lunch
or Friday dinner
or perhaps you would go for the weekend with me
to my parents' home in Provence
or we could stop along the way
and find a little place for ourselves
to be alone.
Or just we could
have coffee over and over again
every day
until we get to know one another
and we have the passage of the seasons
in the cafe
we could celebrate our anniversary
and then perhaps you would forget
that you are not married to me
and we can have a child.
You know, I have known many women.
I mean, I don't mean to say....
I mean just
you know
my mother, my grandmother
my sisters

and also women I have known romantically
and then, too, friends,
and even merely acquaintances
but you know
in life
one meets many people
and it seems to me
we know so much of another person
in the first few moments we meet
not from what a person says alone
but from the way they hold their head
how they listen
what they do with their hand as they speak
or when they are silent
and years later
when these two people break up
they say
I should have known from the beginning
in truth
I did know from the beginning
I saw it in her, or in him
the moment we met
but I tried to repress the knowledge
because it wasn't useful at the time
because,
for whatever reason
I just wanted to go to bed with her as fast as I could
or I was lonely
and so I pretended I didn't notice
even though I did
exactly the person she was from the first moment
I knew
and so it is with you
and I think probably it is the same for you with me
we know one another
right now from the first moment
we know so much about one another in just this brief time
and we have known many people
and for myself
I can tell
you are one in a million
and I want to marry you
I want to marry you
and have children with you
and grow old together
so I am begging you
just have a coffee with me.

CONSTANTINE

People think
it's hard to be a woman;
but it's not easy
to be a man,
the expectations people have
that a man should be a civilized person
of course I think everyone should be civilized
men and women both
but when push comes to shove
say you have some bad people
who are invading your country
raping your own wives and daughters
and now we see:
this happens all the time
all around the world
and then a person wants a man
who can defend his home

you can say, yes, it was men who started this
there's no such thing as good guys and bad guys
only guys
and they kill people
but if you are a man who doesn't want to be a bad guy
and you try not to be a bad guy
it doesn't matter
because even if it is possible to be good
and you are good
when push comes to shove
and people need defending
then no one wants a good guy any more

then they want a man who can fuck someone up
who can go to his target like a bullet
burst all bonds
his blood hot
howling up the bank
rage in his heart
screaming
with every urge to vomit
the ground moving beneath his feet
the earth alive with pounding
the cry hammering in his heart
like tanked up motors turned loose

with no brakes to hold them

this noxious world

and then when it's over

suddenly

when this impulse isn't called for any longer

a man is expected to put it away

carry on with life

as though he didn't have such impulses

or to know that, if he does

he is a despicable person

and so it may be that when a man turns this violence on a woman

in her bedroom

or in the midst of war

slamming her down, hitting her,

he should be esteemed for this

for informing her

about what it is that civilization really contains

the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness

the use of force as well as tenderness

the presence of coercion and necessity

because it has just been a luxury for her really

not to have to act on this impulse or even feel it

to let a man do it for her

so that she can stand aside and deplore it

whereas in reality

it is an inextricable part of the civilization in which she lives

on which she depends

that provides her a long life, longer usually than her husband,

and food and clothes

dining out in restaurants

and going on vacations to the oceanside

so that when a man turns it against her

he is showing her a different sort of civilized behavior really

that she should know and feel intimately

as he does

to know the truth of how it is to live on earth

to know this is part not just of him

but also of her life

not go through life denying it

pretending it belongs to another

rather knowing it as her own

feeling it as her own

feeling it as a part of life as intense as love

as lovely in its way as kindness

because to know this pain
is to know the whole of life
before we die
and not just some pretty piece of it
to know who we are
both of us together
this is a gift that a man can give a woman.

NIKOS

I thought,
I've always liked you, Lydia
seeing you with your sisters
sometimes in the summers
when our families would get together at the beach.
I thought you were fun, and funny
and really good at volleyball

which I thought showed you have a
well,
a natural grace
and beauty
and a lot of energy.

And it's not that I thought I fell in love with you at the time
or that I've been like a stalker or something in the background
all these years.

But really, over the years,
I've thought back from time to time
how good it felt just to be around you.

And so I thought: well, maybe this is an okay way
to have a marriage

to start out
not in a romantic way, but
as a friendship

because I admire you

and I thought perhaps this might grow
into something deeper
and longer lasting

but maybe this isn't quite the thing you want

and really I don't want to force myself on you
you should be free to choose
I mean: obviously.

Although I think I should say
what began as friendship for me
and a sort of distant, even inattentive regard
has grown into a passion already

I don't know how
or where it came from, or when
but somehow the more I felt this admiration
and, well, pleasure in you

seeing you become the person that you are
I think a thoughtful person and smart
and it seems to me funny and warm

and passionate, I mean about the things
I heard you talk about in school
a movie or playing the piano
I saw you one night at a cafe by the harbor
drinking almond nectar
and I saw that happiness made you raucous.
And I myself don't want to have a relationship
that's cool or distant
I want a love really that's all-consuming
that consumes my whole life

and the longer the sense of you has lived with me
the more it has grown into a longing for you
so I wish you'd consider
maybe not marriage
because it's true you hardly know me
but a kind of courtship

or, maybe you'd just I don't know
go sailing with me or see a movie

I talk too much.
I'm sorry.

I do that sometimes.
I wish I didn't.
But I get started on a sentence,
and that leads to another sentence,

and then, the first thing I know,
I'm just trying to work it through,
the logic of it,
follow it through to the end
because I think,
if I stop,
or if I don't get through to the end
before someone interrupts me
they won't understand what I'm saying
and what I'm saying isn't necessarily wrong—
it might be, but not necessarily,
and if it is, I'll be glad to be corrected,
or change my mind—
but if I get stopped along the way
I get confused
I don't remember where I was
or how to get back to the end of what I was saying.

And I think sometimes I scare people
because of it
they think I'm so, like determined
just barging ahead—
not really a sensitive person,
whereas, in truth,
I am.

DEBARGO

I've thought about it before
living in the country
because that would be beautiful
and I've always found it frightening
cut off from the world
as it seems to me
all alone
and
with nothing to do
but wait to get to be eighty years old
or ninety
and die.

You know, you might have thought you were going to be a doctor
or go to the moon
or just have a nice civil service job
a career and all the ordinary stuff of life
not throw it away on a great sort of romantic gamble

like you think
oh
I'd like to go to the country for the weekend
but to just fling myself out into the universe
and drift among the stars
and have this be my destiny
take the gamble that this would be a meaningful life
and one you would really like forever
the only life you have.
I mean, not that I'm a morbid person
but, you know, it seems to me,
if you're out there alone
maybe with a farm and fields and trees
and the night sky, the stars
you start to think pretty quickly
how you're all alone
and you just have your life on earth
and then it's over
and it hasn't been much more than a wink
in the life of the stars
and you haven't done anything
that you think is worth an entire life on earth
so I've always felt a lot safer living in the city
where you can't see the stars at night.

There you have your friends and things to do
you get all caught up
and it's fun
I'm not against having fun
what I mean is
going to movies, having dinner, hanging out
you can forget entirely that you're a mortal person
it seems: this could go on forever
until, I suppose, you meet someone, and you think:

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

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