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Under Construction

by CHARLES L. MEE

At the doorways entering the theatre
an artist's easel will have a blackboard on it
announcing:

Tonight we will be performing scenes

6

79

29

22

67

107

18

57

122

5

41

This version of the script is the way it's been done
with the SITI company,
and it seemed to us that these scenes,
in this order, are wonderful.

But, in the future, when others do it,
it may be that they will want to throw out some of these scenes,
write some new ones,
change the order of things.

And so, in this way, the piece will remain,
like America,
permanently
under construction.

PROLOGUE

Bing Crosby sings Dear Hearts and Gentle People:

I love those dear hearts and gentle people
Who live in my home town
Because those dear hearts and gentle people
Will never ever let you down

They read the good book
From Fri- 'til Monday
That's how the weekend goes
I've got a dream house
I'll build there one day
With picket fence and ramblin' rose

I feel so welcome each time I return
That my happy heart keeps laughin' like a clown
I love the dear hearts and gentle people
Who live and love in my home town

There's a place I'd like to go
And it's back in Idaho
Where you're friendly neighbors smile and say hello
It's a pleasure and a treat
To meander down the street
That's why I want the whole wide world to know
(I love those dear hearts)
I love the gentle people
(Who live in my home town)
Because those dear hearts and gentle people
Will never ever let you down

[It may be that a few members of the cast enter,
take their position as backup singers,
and sing the chorus parts along with him.]

They read the good book
From Fri- 'til Monday
That's how the weekend goes
I've got a dream house
I'll build there one day
With picket fence and ramblin' rose

I feel so welcome each time that I return
That my happy heart keeps laughin' like a clown
I love the dear hearts and gentle people
Who live and love in my home town

(Home, home, sweet home
Home, home, sweet home
Home, home, sweet home
Home, home, sweet home)

Scene 6. Thanksgiving

A table
people enter all talking in a hubbub
several conversations at once
as they bring in bowls of mashed potatoes, cranberry sauce,
string beans....

SOMEONE SAYS

The point is,
of course they are both games
and they both are played in a rectangular area
and the players go back and forth from one end to the other
but, in football,
all the players gather in a huddle
and the quarterback decides on the play
and then the players all go out and execute the play
and it is over

and so it goes starting and stopping and starting and stopping
with plans and more plans
whereas in basketball the whole thing is
you take out the ball
and you make it up as you go along
like life
it's an open thing
so this is why I say
the game people should really talk about
is not football
but basketball

ANOTHER PERSON

Or hockey.

FIRST PERSON

Right. Or hockey.

ANOTHER PERSON

Hockey. I don't know about hockey.

And the following conversation about getting organized
occurs at the same time as the sports conversation—
two conversations going on at once around the dinner table.

SOMEONE ELSE

I think it's time we got organized.

No more rushing for the train in the morning.

We need to have a leisurely breakfast before work.

No more instant coffee.

No more grabbing a piece of toast on the way to the station.

We need to start living life sanely.

No more hotdogs and hamburgers for dinner.

We're going to start making stews and casseroles.

No more television.

ANOTHER PERSON SAYS: What?

THE FIRST VOICE AGAIN: No more television.
I'm going to give the damn set away
and we're going to sit in a family group and read aloud.

ANOTHER PERSON SAYS: And you ought to get your mandolin fixed, Billy, we
could have friends in and sing.

THE FIRST VOICE AGAIN: No more passive entertainment.
No more homogenized milk.
We're going to save two cents a quart and shake it ourselves.
We need to start doing the things we believe in.

and then mom enters with turkey
saying turkey turkey turkey turkey turkey
and the others exclaim:

oh, wonderful!
turkey! turkey!
and cranberry sauce!
I love Thanksgiving....

and dinner table conversation resumes
as people serve themselves turkey and mashed potatoes

SOMEONE
Of course it could be
you didn't see last weekend's games.

SOMEONE ELSE
I did.

FIRST PERSON
Not everyone did.
The fact is,
if you didn't go to the games,
you can just shake hands with half the student body,
because they didn't go either.

[random overlapping talk
would you pass the cranberry sauce, please,
thank you
would you like a drumstick?
have you had gravy?....]

And some of the kids
when they were asked whether they went to the last game
what did they say?
they said, oh I had a date, or
I didn't have any way to get there.
And what I say is:
Sure, sure, you had a date,

and what's wrong with going to a basketball game on a date?
And, as for not having a ride,
you can always ask around and find one.
Because
if the team thinks that the game is important enough to play,
then the student body should think it important enough
to attend and to show the school spirit.
To have top teams
we have to have a winning student body
that wants its teams to come out ahead!

[the father stands to make a toast about thanksgiving]

THE FATHER

Now, then
one thing I think we can all agree about
I think we can all agree
this is a moment to remember how grateful we are for all we have
for being able to gather with one another
for the warmth of home and family
and a time of safety—
because
when you look back
not so long ago, in the past, people lived in places
with thick stone walls and thick iron bars over the windows

and they had towers on top of the big houses
where the family could all retreat in case they were attacked
and pour boiling oil down on top of the people
who were trying to get into their house
but these days we don't think about that any more
these days there is nothing between us and a hurled rock
but a big picture window made of glass
this is how safe we are
and so we count our blessings
we look back over the past year and take pleasure
in what we have done
and say to ourselves, even tho Bill may not have done so well with his geometry but
it's not a tragedy

[he goes on and on and on
so that people begin getting up one by one from the table
excusing themselves
first the mom to go to kitchen to check the pie:
"I'm just going to check on the pie."]

and after all it seems he couldn't help himself
although, frankly, I don't think
he should have blamed his mother
mothers are not always to blame

[then the grandmother slips away from the table:
"I'm just going to help Sally in the kitchen."]

sometimes the kids have to take the blame themselves
because when a girl gets pregnant in high school
she ought to leave, that's all

[then the son has a phone call:
"Sorry, Dad, I have a phone call."]

her boyfriend should stay and finish high school
so that he can get a good job when he gets out
that's my opinion

[then another son forgot something—left his skates outside:
"Oh, god, I think I left my skates outside!"]

but she should go home and have the baby
and then, when the baby is a little older
maybe the mother can get a job at the checkout counter
at the A & P....

[So, at the end,
the dad is alone
with two girls
and he leaves, defeated, saying
"I'll just help clear the table."]

The two girls are left behind.

One of the girls begins to say what she wants.
Perhaps the other joins in.
Maybe some of the other women straggle back in
and they join in voicing the list of desires, too.
They shouldn't repeat one another's lines—
each should have their own lines]

What I want.
I want to be respected.

I want my family to be proud of me.

I want to be creative.

I want whiter teeth.

I want more money.

I want better knees.

I want better skin.

I want a better body.

I want an end to war.

I want a tighter ass.

I want a better job.

I want to eat what I want and not gain weight.

I want people to care.

I want a better life for the poor.

I want to feel.

I want to be strong.

I want to skydive.

I want to do a back handspring.

I want to be protected.

I want to be safe.

I want to have nightmares

and wake up and share them with my lover.

I want to fuck like a teenager but with the knowledge of an adult.

I want what I don't have.

I want there to be justice.

AND NOW ALL TOGETHER AS A CHORUS

THE SAME LINES AT THE SAME TIME

I want what everyone else has.

I want more than you have.

I want what people don't know about.

I want good friends who are there for you and tell you what you need to hear and make you laugh so hard you pee in your pants.

[Deafening hard rock music from the present moment—
not the fifties—

so that we have moved from then to now in an instant—
and the women break into a wild, ecstatic, enraged, abandoned,
insane messy hair dance
at the end of which
they simply stop
and walk off without ceremony.]

It could be that there should be a large television set
to one side, for the entire performance,
and it should have continuous programming on it,
so that there could be news, the history channel,
home movies,
other random stuff—
the context for everything we see,
or else just some more random home movies.

Scene 41. The Backyard

the dad and his son with golf clubs

NARRATOR

In class it's not so bad but when school's out and the others go off to enjoy themselves well, if you're what they call a shy guy, that's when you really feel it. The awful loneliness of being new in town. You don't know how to make people like you and you find yourself holding a grudge against them. You're standing on the outside looking in. You might have something to contribute to their conversation, but nobody cares whether you do or not. There's a barrier and you don't know how to begin breaking it down. You imagine they keep watching the way you look, the way you act. They think you're different. So you head for home. What else?

DAD

Hello, Phil. How's everything.

PHIL

Okay, I guess Dad, but school here isn't like it was back in Morristown. I don't think I ever will fit in, not here. I'm different from the guys in this town.

DAD

What about the other fellas, what do they do? What do they like?

PHIL

Gosh Dad, I don't know. I never noticed.

DAD

Why not try to find out?

NARRATOR

Now there's an idea. Maybe a good idea. Worth a try anyway, and tomorrow's not too soon to start. Pick out the most popular boys and girls in school and keep an eye on them. Who are they, now? Some of them are right here in this class. Andy McIntire for instance. People like him all right. Chick Gallagher rates high in popularity too. There's Jane Davenport. She is popular with the boys and girls. And Jack Gilbert, what's he got that makes people like him so much? Andy's got something to say and Jack's listening. He really seems interested. Come to think of it, Jack's always interested in what people are talking about. Maybe that's why he hits it off so well with everybody. Look at Jack and Beezy over there. Girls seem to like them. Why? What's the angle? They do act kind of polite. At least they seat the girls and give their orders to the waiter. They aren't loud like some of the guys.

CHICK

Cherry coke, chocolate coke, milkshake and malt, double chocolate malt, okay, I got it.

BOB

Oh!

Excuse me. I've got the orders for this table.

CHICK

I'm sorry, Bob. I was just helping out during rush hour.

BOB

Gee, thanks a lot Chick, that's swell.

PHIL

You know Dad, there's a mixer Friday night, I, uh, I wasn't going to go but in the drugstore the other day, Chick said I ought to come.

DAD

Good idea, Phil.

PHIL

Well, Dad, there is a girl I'd like to take, Mary Lou Wright. But, I'm not sure she'd go with me. I've never even talked to her. I'd probably fall all over myself. Besides, she's popular. She's probably got a date by now.

DAD

Well, it is pretty late to ask a girl. Why don't you just go stag.

PHIL

I think I will. You know, I think it will be easier after I've had a chance to talk to her at the mixer. You know what? I kind of think I'm going to fit in after all.

Scene 76. Blog

In the 80's movie *Beehive* by Frank Moore and Jim Self
and filmed by Barry Shils
two people in giant bee costumes fly through the air.

Meanwhile a guy comes out on stage,
puts his feet into moonboots that are secured to the floor
and rocks back and forth

while a young woman speaks into a microphone.

So, this is her blog, or podcast:

BLOG

So I haven't updated this blog in forever.

So Yeah.

I live in NY now.

My apartment is pretty sweet.

We're right behind lincoln center,
and it sounds dumb but I feel rejuvenated
everytime I walk through it.

I get the feeling like "this is why i'm here."

I wish I knew more people here.

I kinda feel like this nobody in a sea of nobodies,
which has never really happened to me before.

It'll change soon. I hope.

SO life is ok.

It's a bit scary, but life is ok.

Stuff is a happenin.

Which is a good thing. I hope!

I had this WEIRD ASS nightmare last night.
I was in a parking lot
coming out of an event or a concert of some sort
and these evil cat people came in a black van
and got out and reeked havoc on the place
blowing things up and killing people with their claws
and i got away in a backseat of someone's car,
and for some reason I was taken to my friend Kim's house,
but it wasn't where Kim really lives,
it was my house,
but Kim lived there in my dream,
and i was telling her about the killer cat people
and she thought i was crazy,
and then i was in the backyard
and i saw the black van pull up front
and these 20 somethings got out,
but i realized that they were actually
the cat people disguised to not look catish
and be completely human,
and i tried to make myself not seen
and walked to the neighbors backyard
and somehow i wound up hiding in their bathroom
only for the door to be busted in by the cat people
and my friend Kim,
who I was alerted to was a cat person as well.
And then I woke up
and I thought:
What does this all mean?

Scene 74. Travelling Salesman

a salesman comes into a hotel room
puts his sample case on the bed
turns down the covers,
gets in bed

he takes one book after another out of his sample case
and we hear a voiceover—the voice of a woman—
reading the jacket copy

as he turns the book over in his hand
and skims the pages

VOICEOVER

Beebo Brinker

by Anne Bannon

Lost, lonely, boyishly appealing—
this is BEEBO BRINKER.

She landed in New York,
fresh off the farm...

her only certainty was
that she was different.

So innocent
she did not notice
that women watched her
when she entered the room.

Odd Girl Out

by Anne Bannon

She was the brain, the sparkle,
the gay rebel of the sorority,
and wonder of wonders,
she chose Laura as her roommate.

That was how it began.

Suddenly they were
alone on an island
of forbidden bliss.

Women in the Shadows

by Anne Bannon

A guarded look across the room.

That was all she dared to do,
and this was Greenwich Village
where almost anything goes....

She had learned long ago
that she could never love a man—
that only another woman could excite her.

And Laura found the strange,
sloe-eyed girl exciting.
I Am a Woman
by Anne Bannon

THE SALESMAN SPEAKS WITH THE VOICEOVER

She looked around the cellar
with Laura following her gaze.
"I know most of the girls in here...
I've probably slept with half of them.

THE VOICEOVER FADES OUT, LEAVING THE SALESMAN TO SPEAK ALONE

I've lived with half of the half
I've slept with.
I've loved half of the half
I've lived with.
"L for love," Beebo said,
looking into space.
"L for Laura."
She turned and smiled at her.
"L for Lust
and L for the L of it,

THE VOICEOVER FADES BACK IN WITH THE SALESMAN

L for Lesbian
L for let's—

THE VOICEOVER ALONE

let's,"
she said,
and blew smoke softly
into Laura's ear.

and then he sits, looking disconsolately out front,
while on the back wall behind him we see this scene from On the Waterfront:

TERRY

(struggling with an unfamiliar problem of conscience and loyalties)

Yeah—yeah—I guess I do—but there's a lot more to this whole thing than I thought, Charley.

CHARLEY

You don't mean you're thinking of testifying against—

(turns a thumb in toward himself)

TERRY

I don't know—I don't know! I tell you I ain't made up my mind yet. That's what I wanted to talk to you about.

CHARLEY

(patiently, as to a stubborn child)

Listen, Terry, these piers we handle through the locals- you know what they're worth to us?

TERRY

I know. I know.

CHARLEY

Well, then, you know Cousin Johnny isn't going to jeopardize a setup like that for one rubber-lipped-

TERRY

(simultaneous)

Don't say that!

CHARLEY

(continuing)

—ex-tanker who's walking on his heels—?

TERRY

Don't say that!

CHARLEY

What the hell!!!

TERRY

I could have been better!

CHARLEY

The point is—there isn't much time, kid.

There is a painful pause, as they appraise each other.

TERRY

(desperately)

I tell you, Charley, I haven't made up my mind!

CHARLEY

Make up your mind, kid, I beg you, before we get to four thirty-seven River....

TERRY

(stunned)

Four thirty-seven that isn't where Gerry G...? Charley nods solemnly. Terry grows more agitated.

TERRY

Charley...you wouldn't take me to Gerry G....?

Charley continues looking at him. He does not deny it. They stare at each other for a moment. Then suddenly Terry starts out of the cab. Charley pulls a pistol. Terry is motionless, now, looking at Charley.

CHARLEY

Take the boss loading, kid. For God's sake. I don't want to hurt you.

TERRY

(hushed, gently guiding the gun down toward Charley's lap)

Charley....Charley....Wow....

CHARLEY

(genuinely)

I wish I didn't have to do this, Terry.

Terry eyes him, beaten. Charley leans back and looks at Terry strangely. Terry raises his hands above his head, somewhat in the manner of a prizefighter mitting the crowd. The image nicks Charley's memory.

TERRY

(an accusing sigh)

Wow....

CHARLEY

(gently)

What do you weigh these days, slugger?

TERRY

(shrugs)

...eight-seven, eighty-eight. What's it to you?

CHARLEY

(nostalgically)

Gee, when you tipped one seventy-five you were beautiful. You should've been another Billy Conn. That skunk I got to manage you brought you along too fast.

TERRY

It wasn't him!

(years of abuse crying out in him)

It was you, Charley. You and Johnny. Like the night the two of youse come in the dressing room and says, "Kid, this ain't your night- we're going for the price on Wilson." It ain't my night. I'd of taken Wilson apart that night! I was ready— remember the early rounds throwing them combinations. So what happens— This bum Wilson

he gets the title shot— outdoors in the ballpark! —and what do I get—a couple of bucks and a one-way ticket to Palookaville.

(more and more aroused as he relives it)

It was you, Charley. You was my brother. You should of looked out for me. Instead of making me take them dives for the short-end money.

CHARLEY

(defensively)

I always had a bet down for you. You saw some money.

TERRY

(agonized)

See! You don't understand!

CHARLEY

I tried to keep you in good with Johnny.

TERRY

You don't understand! I could've been a contender. I could've had class and been somebody. Real class. Instead of a bum, let's face it, which is what I am. It was you, Charley.

Charley takes a long, fond look at Terry. Then he glances quickly out the window.

and when the salesman leaves his hotel room—
which maybe he does in the middle of the movie?—
his sample case is left behind

Scene 114. Reality TV Auditions

a live video cameraman comes on to videotape
whatever happens on stage

and then others straggle back in
and now everyone wants to be on camera
and gets in front of it
and does bits to get noticed
everyone does audition pieces as tho for a reality tv show
someone walks on a beam
while a couple keeps falling down a set of steps like rag dolls
Whatever special gifts the actors have.

And, during this, another piece of text is spoken—
For example, John Cage:

JOHN

I think the real changes that will take place
in society will take place primarily
through our renunciation of government
and our concern with the earth as a problem
in relation to the living of human beings.
I think that modern art and modern music
have served to draw the attention of the individuals
to the enjoyment of the world around them.

And when you see that work in art
then you can have more courage that it will work
in the world outside of art.

I think it was Steve Reich who said
it was clear I was involved in process,
but it was a process the audience didn't participate in
because they couldn't understand it.
I'm on the side of keeping things mysterious,
and I have never enjoyed understanding things.
If I understand something
I can put it on a shelf and leave it there.
If I understand something,
I have no further use for it.
So I try to make a music which I don't understand
and which will be difficult for other people to understand, too.

Scene 22. The Barber Shop

THE BARBER SAYS

the question naturally comes up:
what is an acceptable haircut, and what isn't
and the truth is
you need to ask if you don't want to get into trouble
does a boy have his mother's permission?
this boy went home one day with a crewcut
the first time he had ever been to the barbershop on his own
and when he got home his mother made him wear a hat
even though it was the middle of summer
and when his father came home
his father was upset
and you wouldn't think a haircut
could cause such trouble in a marriage
but a haircut is a very big deal
the mother would never let her son
come back on his own to the barbershop for a haircut
and so, just at the age when the boy should have been discovering
how to be an independent person
he was crushed

his spirit was crushed
and so, in the end,
he never grew up to be a confident self-assured person

[a guy is getting a haircut
while other guys stand around
listening to this chatter
and the dairy queen maids are hanging around, too

And the narrator steps up to a microphone and says:

NARRATOR

Nonetheless,
things can still work out
if a boy and girl know how things ought to go.
Take, for example, The First Date.
John calls for Mary at her home at the appointed time.
Mary is ready for John
and answers the door herself when he rings
(because he has come to see her, not some member of her family).
She greets him pleasantly
and leads him into the living room
where her parents are waiting to meet him.
Mary introduces John to her parents by saying something like,

MARY

"Mother, this is John.
Dad, you remember John plays center on the team."

NARRATOR

This little lead as a part of the introduction gives Dad and John something to talk about the first thing. Dad may ask a simple question on how the team is doing this season. John is put at his ease and answers, while Mother and Dad relax and enjoy getting acquainted with him. In a few moments Mary picks up her coat and, smiling at John, indicates that they had probably better be on their way. If John holds the coat for Mary,

she accepts his assistance graciously;
if he does not,
she slips into her coat without comment and prepares for departure. As the couple
is about to leave,
Mary turns to her parents and says,

MARY

"We are going to the Bijou for the double feature

NARRATOR

(or whatever),

MARY

you know. We should be home before midnight."

NARRATOR

This declaration of plans
and specifying of time for homecoming
has a double purpose.
It lets her folks know that she is taking responsibility
for getting in before it is too late,
and prevents them from putting down the parental foot too hard. Further, such
initiative on Mary's part lets John know what is expected of him in getting Mary
home.

If Mary has already talked over their plans with her parents
before John has arrived,
her last minute announcement is simply
a confirmation for all four of them.

The couple leave,
with John opening the door for Mary,
while she accepts the courtesy with a smile.
When they reach the box office,
Mary steps back and looks at the display cards
while John buys the tickets.
Inside, if there is an usher,
Mary follows him while John follows her down the aisle.
If there is no usher on duty,
John goes ahead and finds seats while Mary follows.
Once seated, John helps Mary slip out of her coat and get settled. They enjoy the

show without annoying their neighbors with talking, giggling,
or other disturbing behavior.

Out of the theater,

John may suggest something to eat

or he may conduct Mary to the place of his choice.

At this point, Mary is careful to let John take the lead.

When he asks her what she would like to have,

she thoughtfully hesitates

until she sees what price range he has in mind.

She says something along the following line,

MARY

"What is good here, John?"

NARRATOR

or

MARY

"What do you suggest?"

NARRATOR

If John recommends the steak sandwich with French fries,

or the double-gooney sundae with nuts,

this gives Mary the general idea of what he is prepared to spend.

If she is friendly and shrewd she may note that John,

in his desire to do the right thing,

is suggesting something extravagant.

If so, she will ask for something that she knows costs a little less. But if John says,

JOHN

"Which do you like better, coke or root beer?"

NARRATOR

Mary graciously keeps within these bounds.

Over their food,

John and Mary talk about the movie they have just seen

or friends they have in common

or anything that is of mutual interest.
As they leave the restaurant,
John pays the check and Mary thanks him by saying simply,

MARY

"That was good; thank you, John."

NARRATOR

Once back to Mary's house,
Mary gets out her key,
unlocks the door,
and then turns to John with a smile.
She says,

MARY

"It's been a lovely evening. Thank you, John,"

NARRATOR

or something similar that lets John know
she has enjoyed the date.
John replies,

JOHN

"I have enjoyed it too. I'll be seeing you."

NARRATOR

Then she opens the door
and goes in without further hesitation.
Since this is the first date,
neither John nor Mary expect a good-night kiss.

and the barber chair is left behind on stage when the scene ends

Scene 29. The Homecoming GI

greeted by everyone
and he tells what he hopes for now

GI

What I hope now
is to be in the living room after dinner
with my sister
with her silver locket around her neck
my mother, with large pearl earrings and a beige cardigan
my father, in his casual holiday dress,
gray flannel trousers, hand-knit argyle socks
a red and green plaid Pendleton shirt
standing with easy confidence
holding a china cup and saucer in his hand
my Irish setter Pat
stretched out on the carpet
elegant and soulful
I myself, stretched out on the leather couch
wearing a navy blue pullover
the game on television
the backyard barbecue talking about the Cubs
big Chuck Buckley wearing an apron and a chef's hat
standing at the grill holding in one hand a spatula
in the other a Scotch and water
the robust good cheer
football and the economy
the rise and fall of the Dow Jones
the best route to drive to the golf club in Park Ridge
the tweed jacket
the football letter sweater
the goodness of intentions
the deep pleasure in things as they are
the gratitude for the given order of things.

and then a young woman speaks to the returning GI
and says:

THE YOUNG WOMAN SAYS

What I want:

I want to graduate

and go to college

Northwestern, I hope it will be Northwestern

and my husband earns a lot of money

and we have thirteen kids

twelve boys and one girl

a football team, one sub, and a cheerleader.

What I always tell the freshmen is:

Study now,

because you can't learn it all in your senior year.

AND THE GI SAYS:

Right.

OTHER GUYS SAY

That's right.

That's for sure.

and the GI is followed out, a hero, by the guys

and his suitcase is left behind

Other things that might be left behind in the course of the evening:

a cheerleader's megaphone

a soldier's hat

a prayer book

a pair of shined shoes

a football helmet

a baseball glove

a pair of Chuck Taylor Converse red high top sneakers

a barber's shaving mug

Scene 103. Women

THE WOMAN SAYS

The blue-collar worker is the backbone of our society,

Society needs the services and products they provide, whether the workers

themselves dream of something better or not. Many of them love their jobs, too—

that doesn't change that quite a few of them
aren't qualified to do much else.
There's no shame in that.

Not that this is why I did it.
Not that I am saying that.
Luckily, that was never my reason.
I was not forced into it in that way.
It was my choice.

Not everyone can be a prostitute.
You do need a special talent.
It's definitely a hell of a hard, fucking job.
You need enormous amounts of patience,
enormous amounts of compassion.
You have to put up with a lot of shit.
It's like being in a war—
you're in a war zone.
You're in a society which is misogynistic and full of sexual guilt,
and you take that shit on.
It can get to you.
I compare it a lot to being a nurse.

I had a transsexual, hermaphroditic lover for a while—
a female to male, transsexual,
surgically made hermaphrodite.
A new option for people.
That's one of the great things about living these days.
My new lover is totally androgynous.
I think it's beautiful.

These days, you see men dressing as women wearing monkey boots,
and women dressing as men but with false eyelashes.
Now, everything's getting mixed together
which I really like.
And strap-on dildos, of course,
are really being used a lot to play with gender.
Women are getting these big dicks—
it's great.

And they really know how to use them.
It's so real.
And of course it never gets soft.

My friend Trish is really good at thrusting.
Women aren't generally as good at thrusting,
but she has really got it down.
Her dick is totally real to her
and I suck it like it's real
and I feel like she feels everything that I do.
It's just beautiful.
The technology has vastly improved.
When I first got into porno movies
they were tied on with pieces of elastic
and were really flimsy.
These were invented by men,
but now women are designing these fabulously beautiful leather strap-on things.

Scene 18. The Barbershop Quartet

a barbershop quartet forms out of the group
and steps forward to sing
a classic barbershop quartet song
such as:

BARBERSHOP QUARTET SINGS
lit-tle lil-ly was oh so sil-ly and shy,
and all the fel-lows knew,
she would-'nt bill and coo,
ev-'ry sin-gle night some smart fel-low would try,
to cud-dle up to her,
but she would cry;

"ma", he's mak-ing eyes at me, "ma", he's aw-ful nice to me,
"ma", he's al-most break-ing my heart,
i'm be-side him, mer-cy let his consc-ience guide him;
"ma", he wants to mar-ry me, be my hon-ey bee,
ev-'ry min-ute he gets bold-er,
now he's lean-ing on my should-er, "ma", he's kiss-ing me.

lil-ly was so good, ev-ery bo-dy could tell,
you'd nev-er see her roam,
she'd al-ways stay at home,
all the neigh-bors knew lit-tle lil-ly too well,
for when the boys would call,
they'd hear her yell;

"ma", he's mak-ing eyes at me, "ma", he's aw-ful nice to me,
"ma", he's al-most break-ing my heart,
if you peek in, can't you see i'm goin' to weak-in'
"ma", he wants to mar-ry me,
be my hon-ey bee,
ma i'm meet-ing with re-sist-ance,
i shall holl-er for as-sist-ance,
"ma", he's kiss-ing me.

Scene 49. Bad Stuff

A guy comes out with bloody hands,
blood up to his elbows
and he stands and shows them to the audience
as three young women wearing Victoria's Secret lingerie
are brought in on leashes by a guy with a whip
and a black cripple, badly burned from head to foot,
stumbles in, falls, and writhes on the ground
and another guy brings in a guy on a leash who hops up and down
and an old Mafia don comes in wearing sunglasses and stands there
and a guy comes in on his knees,
walks on his knees along the front of the stage
and goes out again
all the while some great popular music is playing.

And it may be that
on the rear wall
is projected a still, or moving scroll
with as much of this Jennie Holzer text on it
as seems enough:

a little knowledge can go a long way

a lot of professionals are crackpots

a man can't know what it is to be a mother

a positive attitude means all the difference in the world

a sense of timing is the mark of genius

a sincere effort is all you can ask

all things are delicately interconnected

ambivalence can ruin your life

any surplus is immoral

anything is a legitimate area of investigation

at times your unconsciousness is truer than your conscious mind

bad intentions can yield good results

being alone with yourself is increasingly unpopular

being happy is more important than anything else

children are the hope of the future

decency is a relative thing

don't place too much trust in experts

eating too much is criminal

enjoy yourself because you can't change anything anyway

every achievement requires a sacrifice

everyone's work is equally important

exceptional people deserve special concessions

good deeds eventually are rewarded

grass roots agitation is the only hope

if you live simply there is nothing to worry about

ignoring enemies is the best way to fight

illness is a state of mind

it's better to be a good person than a famous person

it's not good to operate on credit

it's vital to live in harmony with nature

just believing something can make it happen

keep something in reserve for emergencies

killing is unavoidable but nothing to be proud of

listen when your body talks

men are not monogamous by nature

murder has its sexual side

pain can be a very positive thing

people are responsible for what they do unless they are insane

people won't behave if they have nothing to lose

raise boys and girls the same way

redistributing wealth is imperative

religion causes as many problems as it solves

remember you always have freedom of choice

romantic love was invented to manipulate women

sometimes science advances faster than it should

sometimes things seem to happen of their own accord

starvation is nature's way

sterilization is a weapon of the rulers

the desire to reproduce is a death wish

the family is living on borrowed time

the idea of revolution is an adolescent fantasy

the new is nothing but a restatement of the old

the only way to be pure is to stay by yourself

true freedom is frightful

you are a victim of the rules you live by

you can't expect people to be something they're not

Scene 472. L.A.

This could be spoken by a man or a woman:

My head is a lot better in LA

There's always a feeling when I am sitting here
driving around in the car,

coming back into the studio,
in and out in my head,
and in and out of reality....
If you know my work,
you know that things are never finished....
so
then you have a lot of narrative threads
that interweave self-portraiture
fictional characters
cultural commentary
and much more
drama
humor
slapstick
critique
theatricality
entrepreneurship
attitude
quests
discoveries
self-sampling
internal recycling
auto-cannibalism
revelations
cosmologies.
Coming together and coming apart
and becoming something else
free-form
random
non-hierarchical
everywhere and nowhere.
And then you need an overview
because
or at least a point of view
because
all trees and no forest
means there isn't any difference between here and there
even though you still want to be
everywhere and nowhere.

It's all a blur
and the blur could be permanent
that would be OK
a blur, that's a cool thing, too.
I understand art as the pursuit of something.
As it is pulling me in this direction
I don't quite understand why I am going in this direction.
It is important that each piece creates
a territory for me to go in
like a direction that is opening up.
In this piece, which is called Perfect World,
the thing is you can fall off of it
and it can kill you.
You can walk on this surface
but it has these holes
these cracks
and then these soft spots,
these traps,
where it's just papered over.
I wanted to build this thing
which somehow mimics real life.
I am not interested in artists who close things down,
I am interested in situations which open things up.
That is just an optimistic perspective.
I want to build a work which includes the public
but does not exclude the artist.
If you imagine you have children
one is a drug-addict with crack
one is a drug addict with ecstasy
one is thirteen and has four kids
and one is kind of a genius.
It is important to see each one
in relationship to the other one
in relationship to yourself.
It is about seeing where all the positive parts are
in the things that you have created.
You have to deal with them.
You have to like them all the same.
Because what we have come to learn

is that the future is made
not by arguing well
but by speaking differently.
And speaking differently:
that's the job of poets.
Because truth is not something we discover;
truth is something we create.
How it is to be a human being
is something we decide
not because of how it has always been
but because
whether or not it has ever been that way before,
this is who we want to be
and how we want to behave
now.
Just because, in the past, there have been slaveholders
and patriarchs
we are not destined to live the same way forever.
The reason people study history
is so that they can see
the way things are
is not the only way they have been
or the only way that they can be.
It is up to us to see what human nature can become.

Scene 5. Hair Brushing

four women all brush one girl's hair and then each other's

SOMEONE SAYS

What they say is there are rules.
And everyone knows what they are.
Number 1.
Have dinner ready:
Plan ahead, even the night before,
to have a delicious meal—on time.
This is a way of letting him know
that you have been thinking about him
and are concerned about his needs.

SOMEONE ELSE SAYS

Number 2.

Prepare yourself.

Take 15 minutes to rest so you will be refreshed when he arrives.

Touch up your makeup

put a ribbon in your hair

and be fresh looking.

Be a little zestful and a little more interesting.

SOMEONE ELSE SAYS

Number 3.

Minimize the noise.

At the time of his arrival

eliminate all noise of washer, dryer, dishwasher or vacuum.

Be happy to see him.

Greet him with a warm smile

and be glad to see him.

And then there is a radio voiceover? and the girls answer variously yes, no, etc etc all in a jumbled unison

RADIO VOICE

Are you fit for marriage? To help you decide for yourself, the author presents in this article several tests that are being used throughout the country to determine individual fitness for marriage. By taking the three tests that follow and studying the results, you can measure your own marital aptitudes. Give serious thought to the result and you will find it's likely taking out a personal love-insurance policy that pays dividends throughout your married life.

Are you 21 or over?

VARIOUS VOICES

Yes Yes No Yes No

RADIO VOICE

Are or were your parents happily married?

VARIOUS VOICES

Very happy Average Above average I'd say average Unhappy

Were you happy as a child?

Very happy Unhappy Average Average

To what degree were you punished as a child?

Often and severely Rarely but severely Never Often but mildly Mildly

Where did you first learn about sex?

Don't remember From other children From strange adults books

What is your present attitude toward sex?

Disgust Necessary evil Indifferent Pleasant anticipation Intense interest

Have you ever wanted to be of the opposite sex?

Never as a child, yes As an adolescent As an adult As an adult? Yes!

How do you rate with your partner in mental ability?

Slightly inferior Definitely inferior Very similar Slightly superior Very superior

How do you rate with your partner in willingness to cooperate?

Definitely inferior Very similar Slightly superior Very superior

Is your religion the same as your partner's?

Yes No Yes Yes No

Have you a tendency to be careless or disorderly?

Yes No Yes No

Are you uncommonly bossy?

Yes No Yes No Yes

For the Man: Does he insist on having his own way?

Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom Never

For the woman: Has she a mean disposition?

Frequently Seldom Never Never

When his luck goes bad does he brood over it and look for your sympathy?

Yes No Sometimes Yes No

Does she try to please you?

Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom Never

Is he usually stubborn and insistent in his demands?

Yes No sometimes Yes No

Can you get him to change his mind?

Always Frequently Occasionally Seldom Never

Does she try to make you miserable if you so much as look at another woman?

Yes No yes, no Yes

Does he expect you to shower him with attention and affection in public?

Yes No Yes No Yes

Does she create scenes in public places?

Yes No Yes Yes Yes

Do you believe implicitly in your partner's:

Good Judgment?

Yes No Yes No

Honesty?

Yes Yes Yes No

Fidelity?

[silence]

Scene 79. Film Noir

NARRATOR

When they reached the dark hallway,
she slowed their walk.

WESLEY

Tired?

VANESSA

No.

It's just that I want to be kissed.

NARRATOR

She looked at him gravely.
He walked away, and she followed him.
It was a long time before he spoke.

WESLEY

When you get to be my age,
you won't take things so lightly.

VANESSA

I don't take them lightly now.

WESLEY

You may be a minx, for all I know.

VANESSA

I'm not sure what that means.

WESLEY

Look it up.

VANESSA

Where?

WESLEY

Well, I have a fine dictionary in my cabin.

Let's both look it up.

NARRATOR

He wished that he could have cut that last speech.

VANESSA

Let's go to mine

where there are no dictionaries at all.

NARRATOR

With a surge of dizzying feeling

he wanted her more than he had ever wanted anything.

Vanessa led him toward her cabin.

The night steward sitting in the corridor said,

Good evening,

and vanished.

She whispered:

VANESSA

Won't you come in?

I'll make you some scrambled eggs.

NARRATOR

She laughed, stepped into the cabin,

held open the door,

and he was drawn magnetically in.
She closed the door.
They stood in the blackness and she waited a full minute
before turning on a light.
She moved to the table and fixed two drinks.

WESLEY
Not until I know who you are.

NARRATOR
She handed him his glass and took a thoughtful sip from her own.

VANESSA
Vanessa Foley

NARRATOR
she said

VANESSA
and I'm sort of mad about you.

WELSEY
Sort of.

VANESSA
Really.

Another story:

NARRATOR
They passed from the road into a meadow.
The long grasses whispered to their slow tread.
He ignored the heavy dew
which soaked his shoes
until he realized that he was not caring for her....

WILBUR
Sakes alive! You'll catch your death of cold.
Let's sit on this gate.

NARRATOR

He had spoken so softly that the charm was not shattered,
and, swathed in glory,
they perched on the three-barred wooden gate
of a barbed wire fence.
She sat on a lower bar and leaned her head against his knee.
He instinctively stroked her cheek.

WILBUR

I've never felt so happy before.
I don't want ever to lose you.
Can't we be married?
I'm not worthy....

MYRTLE

Wilbur, you don't love me!
It's just the moonlight and walking with a woman.
You don't know what you want yet.
You wouldn't propose to me if it were a hot afternoon,
a muggy, wilty afternoon, and we were walking down Main Street.

WILBUR

But you do like me. And when we're both lonely....

MYRTLE

Probably no one will ever love me as I want.
Why should they?
I'm just a little hat trimmer with a love for tea and cats!

WILBUR

You aren't. You are the one person I could love
if you could only understand how much I mean it.

NARRATOR

And as he said it
he knew he didn't quite mean it;
he knew he was merely living up to the magic moment,
and he listened to his own high-pitched voice
going on in poetic periods unnatural to him....

WILBUR

When I look into your eyes
I see all the fairy stories my mother used to read to me....

MYRTLE

But you don't want a lady story teller.
You want a nice home
and somebody to send out the laundry for you.
I understand. I often want a home myself.
But I'm funny. I distrust sentimentality.
You ought to think what you're saying....

NARRATOR

Suddenly she was crying
in sobs accumulated through years of loneliness.
She crouched on the lower bar of the gate
and hid her eyes against his knee.
Her hat fell off and her hair was a little disordered.
Yet this touch of prosaicness did not shock him.
It brought her near to him,
made her not a moon wraith, but a person like himself.
He patted her shoulder till she sat up and laughed a little,
and they strolled back toward the town.

And he: the overwrought self
that had sung of love and fairy tales was gone.
But he felt toward her
a sincere and eager affection.

Scene 42. <http://actiongirls.com/>

a movie of sex and violence together
naked or nearly naked women with bows and arrows
and submachine guns and rocket launchers
bomb and shoot bad guys
and blow up buildings
at an incredibly rapid rate;
previews from this movie are available from the website url above

Scene 55. The Family Car

and everyone gets out at the Drive-In
holding cokes and popcorn
and sets up folding chairs
and watches the movie of The Perversion,
a documentary made for classrooms in the Fifties,
in which a man stands behind a desk in front of a map
of the United States and says:

GEORGE

Hello there.

I'm George Putnam.

I'd like to begin with a fact

a simple yet shocking fact

and it is this:

a floodtide of filth is engulfing our country

in the form of newsstand obscenity

and is threatening to pervert

an entire generation of our American children.

We know that once a person is perverted

it is practically impossible for that person

to adjust to normal attitudes in regard to sex.

Yet much of this material has been described

as an illustrated, detailed course in perversion.

Abnormal sex, crime, and violence—

it is also a fact that no matter who buys this material

seventy-five to 90% of it ends up in the hands of our children.

Now you might ask yourself

why this sudden concern?

Pornography and sex deviation

have always been with mankind.

This is true.

But, now, consider another fact:

never in the history of the world have the merchants of obscenity

the teachers of unnatural sex acts

had available to them

the modern facilities for disseminating this filth:

high speed presses, rapid transportation,

mass distribution.

All have combined to put the vilest obscenity
within reach of every man, woman, and child in the country.

In the past few years this obscenity traffic
and salacious newsstand literature
have become increasingly worse
not only in content but in volume
this traffic continues to increase and flourish
for one reason

it is big business

profitable business

for the mercenary persons who produce it
and for its more than 800 distributors.

The United States Supreme Court has described it as
dirt for dirt's sake.

We describe it as

dirt for money's sake

obscene literature is a two billion dollar a year business
that's two billion dollars

through this material youth can be stimulated
to sexual activity for which he has no legitimate outlet
he is even enticed to enter the world of homosexuals
lesbians, sadists, masochists and other sex deviants

The psychiatric term for these unnatural sex acts
are unknown to most decent adults in our country
but through these salacious materials
these abnormalities are corrupting the minds and the hearts
of our children.

[As the movie goes on and on,
one by one
the members of the family leave
to get a coke, a popcorn—
"gonna get a coke, be right back...."
and they never return.]

Perversion for profit.

Here is the most vicious
the most insidious feature of these publications—

they constantly portray abnormal sexual behavior as being normal.

They glorify unnatural sex acts
they tell youngsters that it's smart, it's thrilling,
it provides kicks to be a homosexual, a sadist
and every other kind of deviant.

[So finally the stage is empty,
as the movie sound fades
and then:]

Scene 57. The Dugout

all the guys come out
with gloves and baseball bats and sing a song

Maybe they sing this Frank Sinatra song
or some other:

Out of the tree of life I just picked me a plum
You came along and everything's startin' to hum
Still, it's a real good bet, the best is yet to come

Best is yet to come and babe, won't that be fine?
You think you've seen the sun, but you ain't seen it shine

a-Wait till the warm-up's underway
Wait till our lips have met
And wait till you see that sunshine day
You ain't seen nothin' yet

The best is yet to come and babe, won't it be fine?
Best is yet to come, come the day you're mine

Come the day you're mine
I'm gonna teach you to fly
We've only tasted the wine
We're gonna drain the cup dry

Wait till your charms are right for these arms to surround
You think you've flown before, but baby, you ain't left the ground

a-Wait till you're locked in my embrace
Wait till I draw you near
a-Wait till you see that sunshine place
Ain't nothin' like it here

The best is yet to come and babe, won't it be fine?
The best is yet to come, come the day you're mine

Come the day you're mine
And you're gonna be mine

When they leave,
they leave their baseball bats behind.

Scene 83. Union Station

everyone arriving at Christmas
with brief cases and hats and newspapers?
some or all holding a Christmas stocking?
Christmas carols are playing
or are they all singing a Christmas carol?
and then everyone rushing off in different directions?

Or do they all rush through
while we hear a voiceover giving this recipe:

2 cups cooked rice
1/2 cup finely chopped red onion
2 large eggs, lightly beaten
1/4 cup finely chopped cilantro
2 tablespoons butter or margarine, melted
1 tablespoon diced jalapeños
2 teaspoons cornstarch
1/3 cup packed dark brown sugar
2 tablespoons ketchup
2 tablespoons dark rum

1 lime, juiced
2 cups coffee, sweetened
10 tablespoons vanilla-flavored syrup, divided
4 egg yolks
3 tablespoons superfine sugar
1 pound mascarpone cheese
4 packages lady fingers, 1 dozen per package
3 cans (14 1/2 fl. oz. each) reduced-sodium chicken broth
2 packages (16 oz. ea) frozen cut broccoli
1 small onion, coarsely chopped
1 teaspoon bottled minced garlic
1/2 cup water
1/4 cup all-purpose flour
1 cup shredded cheddar cheese
1 tablespoon butter
2 teaspoons finely chopped ginger
1/8 teaspoon ground allspice
2 large cloves garlic, crushed
1 teaspoon olive oil
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/8 teaspoon ground black pepper
1 package (9 oz.) Fettuccine
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 tablespoon red wine vinegar
1/4 cup (1 ounce) grated Parmesan cheese
1 pound fresh tomatoes, chopped
1/4 cup chopped fresh basil or 1 tablespoon dried basil, crushed

Scene 85. Howl

We hear a saxophone
and we are in a coffee house in North Beach, San Francisco.

Some people sit at tables, smoking.

Bukowski sits up center at a small table with a microphone
and a glass of something.

BUKOWSKI

My Father

was a truly amazing man

he pretended to be

rich

even though we lived on beans and mush and weenies

when we sat down to eat, he said,

"not everybody can eat like this."

and because he wanted to be rich or because he actually
thought he was rich

he always voted Republican

and he voted for Hoover against Roosevelt

and he lost

and then he voted for Alf Landon against Roosevelt

and he lost again

saying, "I don't know what this world is coming to,

now we've got that god damned Red in there again

and the Russians will be in our backyard next!"

I think it was my father who made me decide to
become a bum.

I decided that if a man like that wants to be rich
then I want to be poor.

and I became a bum.

I lived on nickles and dimes and in cheap rooms and
on park benches.

I thought maybe the bums knew something.

but I found out that most of the bums

wanted to be rich too.

they had just failed at that.

so caught between my father and the bums

I had no place to go

and I went there fast and slow.

never voted Republican

never voted.

buried him
like an oddity of the earth
like a hundred thousand oddities
like millions of other oddities,
wasted.

[Bukowski gets up from the table,
gathers up his papers
and walks away

another poet, a woman, comes up,
sits down at the same table

someone plays guitar
or other happenings performance events occur
without reference to the reading
while she reads:

THE WOMAN POET

He's got me down on my knees
and I can't even focus on anything I have no time to understand
the position of my body or the direction of my face I see
a pair of legs in rough corduroy and the color of
the pants are brown and
surrounded by darkness
and there's a sense of other people there
and yet I can't hear them breathe
or hear their feet or anything
and his hand suddenly comes up against the back of my head
and he's got his fingers locked in my
hair and he's shoving my face forward
and twisting my head almost gently
but very violent in that gentleness and I
got only half a breath in my lungs the smell of
piss on the floorboards and this fleshy bulge in his
pants getting harder and harder as my face
is forced against the front of his pants
the zipper tears my lips I feel them getting bruised
and all the while he's stroking my face and tightening his fingers

around the locks of my hair and
I can't focus my eyes my head being pushed and pulled and
twisted and caressed and it's as if I have no hands
I know I got hands I had hands a half hour ago
I remember lighting a cigarette with them
lighting a match
and I remember how warm the flame was when I lifted it
toward my face and my knees are hurting from the floor
it's a stone floor and my knees are
hurting 'cause they banged on the floor
when he dragged me down the cellar stairs
I remember a door in the darkness
and the breath of a dog his dog
as it licked my hands when I reached out to stop
my headlong descent its tongue licking out at my
fingers and my face slams down
and there's this electric blam inside my head
and it's as if my eyes suddenly opened on the large sun
and then went black with the switch thrown down
and I'm shocked and embarrassed
and his arms swing down he's lifting me up saying
lookin' for me?, and he buries his face
in my neck and I feel the saliva
running down into the curve of my neck
and my arms are hanging loose
and I can see a ceiling and a dim bulb tossing back and forth.

so this is like a spoken word performance at City Lights bookshop
in San Francisco in the fifties

We hear a recording of Burroughs
reading the Exterminator or Junky
while a woman does a happening dance
and/or a guy is on the side doing amplified finger-sound performance
or
a guy on roller skates with kite wings
while Karen Finley smears herself

or Charlotte Moorman, naked, plays the cello
and/or a naked woman runs after a spotlight,
throwing spinach greens into the pool of light

[there are recordings of Burroughs in his distinctive voice
that could be played over a piece of choreography or performance]

and/or there could be a guy at the table,
who lipsyncs Burroughs' text
though he shouldn't try to lipsync it exactly,
but be a whole sentence behind or ahead of the voiceover
looking puzzled about why the sound doesn't sync with his lips
while we know it is because he's high on something

BURROUGHS

During the war I worked for A. J. Cohen Exterminators ground floor office dead end
street by the river.

I used my own car a black Ford V8 and worked alone carrying my bedbug spray
pyrithium powder bellows and bulbs of fluoride up and down stairs.

"Exterminator! You need the service?"

A fat smiling Chinese rationed out the pyrithium powder - it was hard to get during
the war—and cautioned us to use fluoride whenever possible. Personally I prefer a
pyrithium job to a fluoride. With the pyrithium you kill the roaches right there in front
of God and the client whereas this starch and fluoride you leave it around and back
a few days later a southern defense worker told me "They eat it and run around
here fat as hawgs."

When it comes to bedbugs there is a board of health regulation against spraying
beds and that of course is just where the bugs are in most cases now an old wood
house with bedbugs back in the wood for generations only thing is to fumigate...So
here is Mamma with a glass of sweet wine her beds back and ready...

I look at her over the syrupy red wine..."Lady we don't spray no beds. Board of
health regulations you know."

"Ach so the wine is not enough?"

She comes back with a crumpled dollar. So I go to work...bedbugs great red clusters of them in the ticking of the mattresses. I mix a little formaldehyde with my kerosene in the spray its more sanitary that way and if you tangle with some pimp in one of the Negro whore houses we service a face full of formaldehyde keeps the boys in line. Now you'll often find these old Jewish grandmas in a back room like their bugs and we have to force the door with the younger generation smooth college trained Jew there could turn into a narcotics agent while you wait.

"All right grandma, open up! The exterminator is here."

She is screaming in Yiddish no bugs are there we force our way in I turn the bed back ... my God thousand of them fat and red with grandma and when I put the spray to them she moans like the Gestapo is murdering her nubile daughter engaged to a dentist.

project Robert Frank film Pull My Daisy? (without the soundtrack)
while a young black woman erupts with Howl

A YOUNG BLACK WOMAN

I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by madness,
starving hysterical naked,
dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix,
angelheaded hipsters burning for the ancient heavenly connection to the starry
dynamo in the machinery of night,
who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking in the
supernatural darkness of cold-water flats
floating across the tops of cities contemplating jazz,

What sphinx of cement and aluminum bashed open their skulls and ate up their
brains and imagination?

Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children
screaming under the stairways! Boys
sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks!

Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! Moloch the loveless! Mental Moloch!
Moloch the heavy judger of men!

Moloch the incomprehensible prison! Moloch the crossbone soulless jailhouse and
Congress of sorrows! Moloch whose

buildings are judgment! Moloch the vast stone of war!
Moloch the stunned governments!
Moloch whose mind is pure machinery! Moloch whose blood is running money!
Moloch whose fingers are ten armies!
Moloch whose breast is a cannibal dynamo! Moloch whose ear is a smoking tomb!
Moloch whose eyes are a thousand blind windows! Moloch whose skyscrapers
stand in the long streets like endless
Jehovahs! Moloch whose factories dream and croak in the fog!
Moloch whose smokestacks and antennae crown the cities!
Moloch whose love is endless oil and stone! Moloch whose soul is electricity and
banks! Moloch whose poverty is the
specter of genius! Moloch whose fate is a cloud of sexless hydrogen! Moloch
whose name is the Mind!

America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel.

Scene 68. No Pig

[A guy comes out to speak.
After a few moments, while he speaks,
another guy comes out
and begins to dance—
without any musical accompaniment—
dancing not even to the spoken text,
rather just dancing in his own quiet world.]

We ended up living in a tiny apartment
in a house owned by an Indian couple in Flushing, Queens.
My stepmother cried the whole first night.
We've come to America, and look at this apartment!
It was one of those Archie Bunker neighborhoods.
You know when you watch All in the Family,
that first aerial shot with all those tiny homes
right next to each other?
That's exactly where we lived.
I got left back a year at the local public school
because I didn't know English.
I didn't know how to say
"May I go to the bathroom?"

or

"I don't know what you're saying."

My desk was right in front of the teacher's desk
and I would sit there all day and not go to the bathroom
until I went home.

Then I got a little picture book
and I would point to a picture of a toilet
and the teacher would know, OK,
it's time to go to the bathroom.

My teacher told my stepmother at a parent-teacher conference
that I wasn't learning English fast enough.

When I came home

my father was extremely upset with me.

He told me, in Farsi, that I must be stupid.

I had the hardest time trying to tell the cafeteria lady
that I couldn't eat pork.

My father taught me how to say, NO PIG! NO PIG!

It took about a month for the cafeteria lady
to realize I couldn't eat pork.

Whenever they were having pork products,
she would make me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich,
which was horrible, because I hated peanut butter and jelly!

So I didn't eat anything.

Then my father told me to say chicken,

but I would say "kitchen" instead of chicken.

It took me so long to differentiate between the two.

Imagine me:

"KITCHEN! NO PIG! NO PIG!"

Scene 92. The Woman in the Red Dress

music overwhelms the scene
and the woman in the red dress enters dancing

then a guy enters

another guy enters

a bunch of people are entering from every direction

wild music

unsynchronized frenzy

until finally all 10 or 12 are making the same gesture together, scattered over the stage, but dancing the same gestures and moves

and maybe this could happen, too:

at a certain point,
a woman is lying on the floor
a guy leans down and locks lips with her
and raises her from the floor into a flamenco-like dance
with lips permanently locked in a kiss
they go on and on and on and on and on
until he passes out and falls to the ground in a heap
she turns to another guy and locks lips with him immediately
and they dance
but she stops them, interrupts the dance
to tell him he is dancing the wrong way
they lock lips and dance again
she stops to correct him again
ditto
ditto
until she spins around, grabs the sleeve of his shirt
and rips it
then he is pissed
they argue
they argue and argue and argue and argue and argue
till the guy turns front and takes a dance posture
and flexes his bicep
he flexes his bicep to the music
5 guys join him in bicep flexing dance
all in unison
then they all do a hip thrust
very macho
then turns upstage and wiggle their butts
(not SO macho)
they move through other male display dance moves
finger snapping, etc
then three women step up and do the same male display moves

Scene 88. The Wedding Cake

We see the video by Laleh Khorramian
from the P.S. 1 show Greater New York 2005
in which paper cutouts of pen and ink drawings
brightly colored
fall and fall and fall and fall from the sky
everything is falling
while tragically moving music plays underneath it
and the immense absurdly baroque wedding cake "Sweet Nothing"
by Kirsten Hassenfeld (from the same P.S. 1 show)
rises from a trap door.
(The work of both these artists can also be seen on the internet.)

Scene 36. Mrs. Bridge

woman in red dress
entering, dancing solo
with floor lamp
looking for a place to put it
no dialogue here, just music?
Benny Goodman or Guy Lombardo or Bing Crosby
trying the lamp here, not liking it,
trying it there, not liking it,
trying it somewhere else,
finally placing the lamp and exiting

Scene 67. The Commuter Platform

just a guy with gray flannel suit, fedora, brief case
met at the station by his wife

JAY

Camila, I don't want to hurt you,
but I'd better say this and get it over.

CAMILA

Say what, Jay?

JAY

I want a divorce.

NARRATOR

Just like that.

No preamble. No explanation.

A clean surgical cut and then it was all over.

Or was it?

For she was merely looking bewildered.

CAMILA

Are you joking?

JAY

Do I look as though I'm joking?

CAMILA

I see. You want a divorce.

But what for? I don't....

JAY

What does any man want a divorce for?

CAMILA

You're not telling me you want to marry again?

At your age! I don't believe it!

JAY

I'm not Methuselah!

NARRATOR

Her chief feeling was one of intense amazement.

Perhaps she would suffer later.

She supposed women did suffer over things like this.

CAMILA

Then there is another woman?

JAY

What do you think I'm telling you?

CAMILA

And you're in love with her?

Well, if you want a divorce, you'll get it.

You always get what you want.

JAY

I had hoped you'd be reasonable about this thing, Camila.

After all, you're a sensible woman.

As to getting what I want,

you've always had what you wanted, haven't you?

CAMILA

I've always had what you wanted me to have.

There's a difference.

NARRATOR

He stared at her.

This was not the Camila he knew at all.

She was letting him go lightly, easily,

without a struggle. It hurt his pride,

and it demanded assuagement.

JAY

It isn't as though I really meant anything to you.

I haven't meant anything to you for years.

NARRATOR

And, to her eternal credit,

she used what amounted to her last breath

to turn away from the railroad platform

toward the car, and, pausing for a moment,

to turn back and throw a barb instead of a sop.

CAMILA

I wouldn't say that, Jay.

You've supported me.

NARRATOR

Then she left,
leaving him staring after her
as though he had never seen her before.

and his fedora and brief case are left behind

Scene 96. Cell Phones

Hello? Hello? Trish!
etc etc

the talker continues as all the other actors
look straight out at audience
finally another of them takes a cell phone call
is her lover breaking up with her? or it is difficult?
and then all 12 people are on cell phones at the same time having the same
conversation
about a love affair
a breakup
each taking different lines of the same conversation
or of archetypal conversations around this event
archetypal lines

Scene 99. I Remember

While television news footage of war—
and, or, if there is more than one screen,
of war and race riots and other violence—
is projected,
this text is spoken by one man.
or else one man begins
and then one or two or three others join him.

I remember many Sunday afternoon dinners
of fried chicken or pot roast.

I remember my father's collection of arrow heads.

I remember loafers with pennies in them.

I remember game rooms in basements.

I remember "come as you are" parties.
Everybody cheated.

I remember drugstore counter stools with no backs,
and swirling around and around on them.

I remember two-dollar bills. And silver dollars.

I remember "Double Bubble" gum comics
and licking off the sweet "powder."

I remember catching myself with an expression on my face
that doesn't relate to what's going on anymore.

I remember the little "thuds" of bugs
bumping up against the screens at night.

I remember when polio was the worst thing in the world.

I remember my first cigarette. It was a Kent.

I remember my first erections.
I thought I had some terrible disease or something.

I remember the only time I ever saw my mother cry.
I was eating apricot pie.

I remember when, in high school,
if you wore green and yellow on Thursday
it meant you were queer.

I remember an American history teacher
who was always threatening to jump out the window
if we didn't quiet down. (Second floor.)

I remember Liberace.

I remember pony tails.

I remember driftwood lamps.

I remember potato salad.

I remember salt on watermelon.

I remember lightning.

I remember my father in a tutu.

As a ballerina dancer in a variety show at church.

I remember getting erections in school
and the bell rings
and how handy zipper notebooks were.

I remember not looking at crippled people.

I remember chalk.

I remember daydreams of dying
and how unhappy everybody would be.

I remember the sound of the ice cream man coming.

I remember once losing my nickel in the grass
before he made it to my house.

I remember that life was just as serious then
as it is now.

And then, at the end,
hard rock music comes on,
they all dance
in the same way the women did at the beginning of the piece—

a wild, ecstatic, enraged, abandoned,
insane messy hair dance
at the end of which
they simply stop
and walk off without ceremony.

Scene 128. Antony

An empty stage, while we hear
Antony and the Johnsons sing one of their songs—
Twilight
or River of Sorrow
or Rapture
or Hope There's Someone

And it may be that a solo dancer enters quietly—
a young girl dancing contemplatively,
sweetly, gently, vulnerably—
or a solo male dancer doing the same,
or a dancer with Downs Syndrome.

The Gathering

the community gathers again
like the gathering around the thanksgiving table at the beginning
but look how everyone has changed!

musical intro

Each person brings in some thing
and puts it down somewhere
so that items on the stage accumulate

VERY old guy in print house dress and clogs

a guy in a dress with a red crown of flowers
comes downstage and smokes cigarette smiling
just that, no more, and is happy

a guy enters and sits on box
he has on a strait jacket
watches TV on packing crates
he frees his hands and eats bread and sings along with TV
making drumming motions with his hands

narrator wanders with sheaf of papers
in hand inadequate

a guy in a monkey suit

a woman in a beautiful black dress enters
and paces while she smokes
she is angry, hostile
as though challenging anyone's right to challenge her smoking
or her being there
and, in the end, she just turns upstage and rushes out

a guy wearing a roller blade on only one foot
going in circles
while another guy rolls around with yellow high heeled shoes on his hands

a clown wearing a clown hat, carrying a brief case

Asian woman appears in chinky/junky outfit
looking like one of the dancers in the Strange Mushroom company
she leaves,
returns in red shirt, white undies
with a pillow in her arms
looking for someone
and turns abruptly and leaves at once
she returns wearing a white shirt and tie and glasses
like an office worker
—as tho she has been trying out identities that will be acceptable

guy puts on 15 shirts
and 8 pairs of pants
then has a fit getting out of them
throwing them around

making pile of laundry and diving into it

a little guy wearing a wedding dress

others?

what they bring:

like workmen assembling a Rhoades piece

<http://www.davidzwirner.com/artists/5/>

chandelier of neon words such as Taco,

Oval office

sign on a piece of cardboard: Quality Control

pickle jars

four immense white boxes with red ribbons

as though Christmas gifts from Harry and David

a huge installation of styrofoam balls

plywood

fed ex boxes

and hand carts

desk chairs with wheels

boxes of foam

boxes of plastic wrap

huge vertical column plastic bags full of foam

piles of CDs

aluminum tubes

buckets

construction worker's plastic helmets

boards

a film projector

a shovel

a scanner

upside down yellow rain boots

poster for Marilyn Chambers, Behind the Green Door, adults only

computer components

construction site striped yellow and black tape

caution signs

road blocks—wooden horses

heavy duty orange electrical extension cords

if there are tables with things on them

the tables might be turned over onto their sides
so that foam balls and rubber balls roll out across the stage
fans blowing shit

so it looks at the end like this:

<http://www.theatredelaville-paris.com/voeux2005/voeux.htm>
[or has this page been removed from the internet?]

Scene 138. Beach Boys

and then everyone suddenly breaks out into
a dance
to what might as well be Italian beach boys music
it goes on and on and on
or they might do a version of one of the "life goes on" songs
by Johnny Cash or the Beatles or LeAnn Rimes or Tu Pac
or one of the dozens of other versions
happily ecstatically

maybe the version by Gary Chapman:

Cecil was a hard-workin' simple man
He raised six sons and a daughter
One of them became my father
His opinion was he was here to live
Till he was too weak to work any longer
Then he became much stronger
And like a leaf on a tree he would bud in the spring
And then fall to the ground in the autumn
And in death he would leave to this earth reasons for life
And life goes on
Until it stops
And a man walks on
Until he drops
And when life ends
Well it's better still
'Cause another life goes on
Life goes on, another life goes on
It always will

Life goes on
Daddy married mom when he was seventeen
They had me and my sister and brother
We all still love each other
Some day dad will go to where his dad is
And I bet Cecil laughs when he sees him
'Cause they always were the best friends
Just as sure as there's dirt here beneath my feet
There is surely a heaven above me
And I live in a hope that is far beyond my days
That life goes on
Until it stops
And a man walks on
Until he drops
And when life ends
Well it's better still
'Cause another life goes on
Life goes on
Another life goes on
Life goes on
Until it stops
And I believe a man walks on
Until he drops
And when life ends
Well it's better still
'Cause another life goes on
Life goes on, another life goes on
It always will
Life goes on
Life goes on
Oh, yeah, ooo
Life goes on

do they all settle down on beach blankets
amidst the chaos?

or are they seated again at the Thanksgiving dinner table?

Scene 147. The Future

woman with computer (and headphones) dancing
she comes out alone,
stands there, opens computer,
puts on headphones—we can't hear what she hears
then she dances solo to this unheard music—
and, after a couple minutes John Cage comes in
and speaks his text at a microphone while she continues to dance to the unheard
music

CAGE

My attitude toward old age
is one of gratitude for each day.
It strikes me
that since there's obviously a shorter length of time left
than I've already had
I'd better hurry up
and be interested in whatever I can.

I remember that it seemed to be essential
when I was in my twenties
to focus my attention on one thing
and I made a choice between music and painting.
I chose music.
But now it seems perfectly natural to open out
to every single thing I possibly can do
because I'm not going to be here much longer.
The best thing is to enjoy to do
as much as possible while I am here.

The business of the great things from the past
is a question of preservation and the use of things
that have been preserved.
I don't quarrel with that activity,
and I know that it will continue.
But there is another activity,
one to which I am devoted,
and it is the bringing of new things into being.

The difference between these two things
is the difference between spring and summer.

And so it is out of this chaos,
this accumulation of history and novelty,
that we begin building.
We are in the constant process of construction
making and remaking
from where we are and what we have.
This is what human beings do.
This is the human project
as long as we are alive.

and then the celebratory music:

Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man
and the lights go to black
and when they come up
does Copland play for the curtain call, too?

The End.

ADDITIONAL SCENES FOR ANYONE WHO WANTS THEM

Scene 51. The Brooklyn Girl

The actors all come out
put chairs in a row across the stage
and sit with their backs to the audience
watching for several minutes the video by Laurel Nakadate
from the P.S. 1 show Greater New York 2005
in which a young Asian girl wearing a girl scout sash stands
with fireworks going off behind her
and then we see squirrels close up
and then we see her dragged across a beach by a guy
and then we see her lying on a highway overpass with a dead bird
and then we see her dancing in her bra and underpants on her bed
as we see her figure out how to grow up

and make her own world to live in.
(Laurel Nakadate's work can also be seen on the internet.)

54. The Epileptic Dances

while twelve others just stand there watching,
to music by Mozart.
Or it could be someone with some extreme motor skill difficulty
dances
while the others watch
and then,
toward the end,
the others join in the dance, too,
not mocking the dancer
but appreciating and emulating his aesthetic.

Scene 68. The Arts

A country store.
A string quartet comes on,
finds chairs,
adjust their instruments, tune up,
and we just listen to some beautiful Bach
while how-to drawings from the Great Artists school
or paint-by-numbers paintings
are projected

And after a while, over the music,
Bill Dow steps up and reads his poem:

BILL DOW
Many people from many lands
Are living here as one.
They work together, learn together
For them living is fun.

This nation of ours is a powerful one,
It's known from shore to shore.
But as it grows, as everyone knows,

Cooperation is needed even more.

Rivers, valleys, mountains, plains,
Make up our beautiful land.
America is a wonderful place,
Made by God's own hand.

Scene 61. Rain Delay

We hear the song
It's Raining Men
by Paul Jabara and Paul Schaffer

Humidity's rising
Barometer's getting low
According to all sources
The street's the place to go

'Cos tonight for the first time
At just about half past ten
For the first time in history
It's gonna start raining men

It's raining men
Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen
It's raining men
Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen

Humidity's rising
Barometer's getting low
According to all sources
The street's the place to go

'Cos tonight for the first time
At just about half past ten
For the first time in history
It's gonna start raining men

It's raining men

Hallelujah it's raining men, Amen
I'm gonna go out
I'm gonna let myself get
Absolutely soaking wet

It's raining men
Hallelujah it's raining men
Every specimen
Tall blond dark and mean
Rough and tough and strong and lean

God bless Mother Nature
She's a single woman too
She took on a heaven
And she did what she had to do
She taught every angel
To rearrange the sky
So that each and every woman
Could find her perfect guy

It's raining men
Go get yourself wet girl
I know you want to

I feel stormy weather moving in
About to begin
Hear the thunder
Don't you lose your head
Rip off the roof and stay in bed

It's raining men Hallelujah
It's raining men, Amen
It's raining men Hallelujah
It's raining men, Amen

It's raining men Hallelujah
It's raining men, Amen
It's raining men Hallelujah
It's raining men, Amen

And, while we hear the song
the Shea Stadium ground crew
starts to cover the stage with a huge blue tarp.

They have to pause frequently in their work
to do unison dances to the song.
This is humiliating to different degrees for each of them.

And then,
while the ground crew finishes the job
the umpires come on and do a dance with umbrellas
they are totally straight faced but there is a lot of hip shaking.

At the end of the dance
the ground crew joins the umpires for a full cast rain delay dance.

Scene 48. Sex

There is a constant simulcast projection on a big screen
of live action as it is happening in the moment on stage,
and also pre-recorded stuff
of the same actor we are seeing on stage,
but of her in the dressing room
then leaving the dressing room
then standing just off-stage preparing to come on
then leaving the stage
and returning to her dressing room
and also two small TV sets on a bar with irrelevant movies playing, and projected
over the set and back wall as a whole,
another continuous Hollywood movie
while she speaks:

"Two weeks is a long time without sex,"
I heard someone say yesterday.
When you've been married 12 years
and you've got children,
sex every two weeks, hell, every two months,
is cause for celebration.
Forget about exchanging loving glances across any part of the house.

I am either fixing my kids' lunches
or figuring out where someone's homework folder is.
Let's face it.
Romantic sentiments including sex
have no place in a marriage with children.
When they all turn 18
perhaps there'll be time for such pursuits,
but will we still know each other then?
I am looking at a picture of my husband's grandparents
standing in front of their pharmacy
on 89th and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan.
I am told this picture was taken in the fifties
during the pharmacy's heyday.
Riva and Sol worked here morning till night,
only taking quick lunch breaks
upstairs in their one bedroom apartment.
It was also here that they raised their daughter,
my mother-in-law.
I have often wondered what sort of marriage they had.
In the picture Riva stands proud,
determined and independent.
Sol's demeanor is resigned,
almost defeated.
I doubt if they ever had a chance to
exchange loving glances at each other during the day,
much less at night when they tumbled into bed.
Theirs was the American dream.
Two Jewish immigrants who had done well
and sacrificed much.

Under Construction was composed with the dramaturgical collaboration of Tom Damrauer. It was, in part, inspired by, and samples some texts from, John O'Hara, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Jason Rhoades, John Cage, Sloan Wilson, instructional films of the fifties from the Prelinger Archives, Joe Brainard, Mary Roberts Rinehart, Lydia Lunch, Barney Rosset, Garson Kanin, Sinclair Lewis, Charles Bukowski, Lester Bangs, David Wojnarowicz, Annie Sprinkle, Jennie Holzer, Carla Nowlin, Lydia Gaston, and Richard Rorty.

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