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The Life of George Washington

by CHARLES L. MEE

We hear the music of Aaron Copland:
Fanfare for the Common Man.

We see a mobile home on a patch of dirt,
a café table and chairs,
a red London bus,
and trees behind.

And, it could be:
a little colorful rocking horse on wheels
a golf bag
a collage statue: a life-size figure of a man or a woman
made of a long-handled hoe
and a clothing iron for a head
and arms of clothes hangars
and legs of chairs and stools
and feet of bricks
the black wooden torso of a pregnant African woman
a toy bus with an open top where a kid can sit
a plastic pig with a pink saddle
a sewing machine
a wooden doorway lintel from an old house in Szechuan
sailing ship models

a TV set

Buddha's head atop a waist-high Corinthian column with gold leaf
posters of Pluto and Donald Duck
a baby carriage or two.

There is an outdoor grill.

Chuck Buckley comes out in the backyard,
wearing an apron and a chef's hat,
a spatula in one hand.
He is the guy who is in charge of the backyard barbecue.
He goes to the grill and checks it,
then looks up
and speaks to the audience.

CHUCK BUCKLEY

George Washington:
he didn't know what he had started
or where he was going
or how it would all turn out
but he stepped into it

[George Washington enters here—
wearing his elegant 18th century clothes
and his white wig—
and carrying a gas can,
and gets settled in his chair.
And Chuck goes right on-
as George Washington takes another chair
and sets his gas can down on the ground next to the chair.]

CHUCK BUCKLEY [continuing]
that's the mark of a hero
that's the mark of a fearless person
who has the capacity for discovery
stepping into the unknown.

GEORGE WASHINGTON

We had a tedious and fatiguing Portage down the Creek,
several Times we had like to have been staved against Rocks,
and many Times were obliged all Hands to get out
and remain in the Water Half an Hour or more,
getting over the Shoals;
at one Place the ice had lodged and made it impassable by Water;
therefore we were obliged to carry our Canoe across a Neck of Land,
a Quarter of a Mile over.

Our Horses were now so weak and feeble,
and the Baggage heavy,
therefore myself and others gave up our Horses for Packs,
to assist along with the Baggage.
Still, the Horse grew less able to travel every Day;
the Cold increased very fast,
and the Roads were becoming much worse by a deep Snow,
continually freezing.

The next Day we got to the River about 2 Miles above Shannapins;
we expected to have found the River frozen, but it was not,
only about 50 Yards from each Shore;
the Ice I suppose had broke up above,
for it was driving in vast Quantities.

There was no Way for getting over but on a Raft,
which we set about,
and got finished just after Sun setting,
after a Day's Work;
we got it launched, and on board of it, and set off;
but before we were half Way over,
we were jammed in the Ice in such a Manner
that we expected every Moment our Raft to sink,
and ourselves to perish:
I put out my setting Pole to try to stop the Raft,
that the Ice might pass by,
when the Rapidity of the Stream threw it
with so much Violence against the Pole,
that it jirked me out into 10 Feet Water,

but I fortunately saved myself by catching hold of one of the Raft Logs;
notwithstanding all our Efforts we could not get the Raft to either Shore,
but were obliged, as we were near an Island,
to quit our Raft and make to it.

The Cold was so extremely severe,
that Mr. Gist had all his Fingers,
and some of his Toes frozen,
and the Water was shut up so hard,
that we found no Difficulty in getting off the Island on the Ice
in the Morning.

Friday the 11th Day of January, I got to Belvoir
where I stopped for one Day to take necessary Rest,
and then set out once more.

[A solo performer steps up to a mike
and sings Red Sails in the Sunset.

It may be that, as the song goes on,
several actors come out and take seats on the carousel horses
and sing backup.]

SINGING

Red sails in the sunset, way out on the sea
Oh, carry my loved one home safely to me
She sailed at the dawning, all day I've been blue
Red sails in the sunset, I'm trusting in you

Swift wings you must borrow
Make straight for the shore
We marry tomorrow
And she goes sailing no more

Red sails in the sunset, way out on the sea
Oh, carry my loved one home safely to me

[instrumental interlude]

Swift wings you must borrow
Make straight for the shore
We marry tomorrow
And she goes sailing no more

Red sails in the sunset
Way out on the sea (ooh-wee-ooh, wee-ooh)
Oh, carry my loved one
Home safely to me

[And,
while we listen to the song,

some actors come out and play a game of croquet

and a woman comes out and puts on her stockings
sitting in a chair or seated on the ground

and a woman in a red dress dances through
embracing her floor lamp.

These actors, like all the actors in the play,
wear clothing from all different eras—
from the eighteenth to the twenty-first centuries.
And characters in the same scene,
characters who are related to one another,
characters who may be mothers and daughters,
should wear clothes from 1780 and 1922 or 1883
and 1895 or 1841 and 1945 and....

There may be several naked bathers
in the plastic wading pool at one side of the stage,
or one woman in a bathtub.

If it is several bathers,
then one of them is brushing her hair,
the other just standing in her corset,
the third naked in the water.

One of the women might do laundry in the plastic wading pool.

And, while these physical activities go on,
Chuck resumes speaking.]

CHUCK BUCKLEY

And then you think
he came to the end of his life.
I don't think so.

With some people,
it's hard to say when they died
or if they ever did.
That's how it is with the immortals.

Reminds me of that famous writer
whatshisname
when someone asked him what he hoped for after he died
he said
he hoped that maybe just one of his books.....
or really, maybe just one paragraph.....
or even really if just.....
one sentence....
or really, he said,
I'd just like to disappear into the English language.

And you hear him say that and you think
wow
that sounds awfully modest
and then you think
oh
I see
he wanted to live on in the language itself
so that ever after

whenever anyone spoke English
they would be speaking him
and I thought
right
he was like George Washington
who disappeared into history
disappeared into the American landscape
so that
now
he's everywhere.

You think he's vanished
and then
there he is again,
and you think:
was he there all the time
and I just couldn't see him?

Like the rest of us.

[Another guy comes out of the mobile home
carrying another gas can
sits in a chair,
lights a cigarette,
and opens the book he has been carrying
and reads to us:]

WALT
One's-self I sing, a simple separate person,
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse.

Of physiology from top to toe I sing,
Not physiognomy alone nor brain alone is worthy for the Muse, I say
the Form complete is worthier far,
The Female equally with the Male I sing.

Of Life immense in passion, pulse, and power,
Cheerful, for freest action form'd under the laws divine,
The Modern Man I sing.

To thee old cause!
Thou peerless, passionate, good cause,
Thou stern, remorseless, sweet idea,
Deathless throughout the ages, races, lands,
After a strange sad war, great war for thee,
(I think all war through time was really fought, and ever will be
really fought, for thee,)
These chants for thee, the eternal march of thee.

Thou orb of many orbs!
Thou seething principle! thou well-kept, latent germ! thou centre!
Around the idea of thee the war revolving,
With all its angry and vehement play of causes,
(With vast results to come for thrice a thousand years,)
These recitatives for thee,-my book and the war are one,
Merged in its spirit I and mine, as the contest hinged on thee,
As a wheel on its axis turns, this book unwitting to itself,
Around the idea of thee.

[Another guy who was standing nearby replies:]

JACK

I first met Dean

[gesturing toward one of the others as Dean]

not long after my wife and I split up.

I had just gotten over a serious illness that I won't bother to talk about, except that
it had something to do with the miserably weary split-up
and my feeling that everything was dead.

With the coming of Dean Moriarty
began the part of my life you could call
my life
on the road.

[And a third guy replies to that:]

ALLEN

What thoughts I have of you tonight, Walt Whitman, for
I walked down the sidestreets under the trees with a headache
self-conscious looking at the full moon.

In my hungry fatigue, and shopping for images, I went
into the neon fruit supermarket, dreaming of your enumerations!
What peaches and what penumbras! Whole families
shopping at night! Aisles full of husbands! Wives in the
avocados, babies in the tomatoes!— and you, Garcia Lorca, what
were you doing down by the watermelons?

I saw you, Walt Whitman, childless, lonely old grubber,
poking among the meats in the refrigerator and eyeing the grocery
boys.

I heard you asking questions of each: Who killed the
pork chops? What price bananas? Are you my Angel?

I wandered in and out of the brilliant stacks of cans
following you, and followed in my imagination by the store
detective.

We strode down the open corridors together in our
solitary fancy tasting artichokes, possessing every frozen
delicacy, and never passing the cashier.

Where are we going, Walt Whitman? The doors close in
an hour. Which way does your beard point tonight?

(I touch your book and dream of our odyssey in the
supermarket and feel absurd.)

Will we walk all night through solitary streets? The
trees add shade to shade, lights out in the houses, we'll both be
lonely.

Will we stroll dreaming of the lost America of love
past blue automobiles in driveways, home to our silent cottage?

Ah, dear father, graybeard, lonely old courage-teacher,
what America did you have when Charon quit poling his ferry and
you got out on a smoking bank and stood watching the boat
disappear on the black waters of Lethe?

SINCLAIR

This is America—
a town of a few thousand,
in a region of wheat and corn and dairies and little groves.

The town is, in our tale, called "Gopher Prairie, Minnesota."
But its Main Street is the continuation of Main Streets everywhere.
The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana,
in Kansas or Kentucky or Illinois,
and not very differently would it be told Up York State
or in the Carolina hills.

Main Street is the climax of civilization.
That this Ford car might stand in front of the Bon Ton Store,
Hannibal invaded Rome and Erasmus wrote in Oxford cloisters.
What Ole Jenson the grocer says to Ezra Stowbody the banker
is the new law for London, Prague, and the unprofitable isles of the sea; whatsoever
Ezra does not know and sanction,
that thing is heresy, worthless for knowing and wicked to consider.

Our railway station is the final aspiration of architecture.
Sam Clark's annual hardware turnover
is the envy of the four counties which constitute God's Country.
In the sensitive art of the Rosebud Movie Palace there is a Message,
and humor strictly moral.

Such is our comfortable tradition and sure faith.
Would he not betray himself an alien cynic
who should otherwise portray Main Street,
or distress the citizens
by speculating whether there may not be other faiths?

[The actors for the following scene are all African Americans.]

GRANDMOTHER

Haven't you nearly finished, Mary?

MOTHER

Yes, almost

only a few more things to be washed,
and then I can sit down and rest.

GRANDMOTHER

Is everything ready for the Christmas dinner tomorrow?

MOTHER

Every single thing.

The goose is ready to go on the fire;

the apple sauce is made;

the bread and the pies are baked;

and the plum pudding—

well,

you saw the pudding yourself,

so that I don't need to tell you about that.

It's a beauty, if I do say so.

[The two children, Walter and Gertrude, run in.

Their coats and mittens show that they have been playing in the snow.]

WALTER

Oh, Mother, it's getting dark outside.

May we come in now? Is your work all done?

MOTHER

Not quite yet, dears.

Run out, both of you, for ten minutes more,

and then I'll have everything cleared away.

It makes me nervous to have you about while things are in a mess.

GERTRUDE

All right, mother.

Come on, Walter, I'll race you to the gate.

[And both the children go out-of-doors again, running. Gertrude was nearer the door, and gets out first.]

MOTHER

Such energy as those children have!
Sometimes it makes me tired to watch them.
There,
every last thing is washed, and now,
when I've dried them, I can sit down.

[She goes on talking while she dries.]

There's one thing I haven't had time to do-those paper caps.
I suppose the children will be disappointed,
but I simply couldn't find time to make them.
The colored paper and paste and scissors are all on the mantel shelf
and I suppose I ought to sit right down now and go to work on them,
but I declare, I'm too tired.
Getting ready for Christmas seems to take all the strength I have.
I think I must be getting old.

GRANDMOTHER

You getting old!
Nonsense!
Wait till you get to be our age;
then you might talk of getting old and feeling tired. Isn't that so, John?

GRANDFATHER

Yes,
when you get to be as old as we are,
then you'll know what it is to be tired,
Christmas or another day.
I tried to help James shut the gate this morning,
where the snow had drifted against it,
and it tired me so, I haven't stirred out of this chair since.

[Now the outside door opens a second time, and the children come in again,
Gertrude first.]

GERTRUDE

Isn't it time now, mother?

MOTHER

Yes, I've just finished.

Take off your coats, and try to quiet down.

[She puts the clean dishes away in the cupboard and carries the dish pan away into the next room.

The children take off their coats and caps. Walter goes over by his Grandfather and leans against his chair. Gertrude sits down on a low stool beside her Grandmother.]

GRANDFATHER

What have you children been doing all the afternoon?

GERTRUDE

Oh, we've had the greatest fun.

First we went skating down on the mill pond.

WALTER

And then we built a snow fort,
and the Indians attacked it,
and we drove them off with snow-balls.

GERTRUDE

And then we played tag out by the barn.

WALTER

No, that was afterwards; don't you remember, Gertrude?
Before that, we raced down to the crossroads
to see if the postman had brought any mail.

GERTRUDE

Oh, yes, and you tripped and fell down in the snow drift,
and oh, grandfather,
you ought to have seen him when he got up;
he was a sight.
But it all brushed off.

GRANDMOTHER

And don't you feel tired after doing all that?

GERTRUDE

No, I'm not a bit tired; are you, Walter?

WALTER

Not a bit.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, that's the beauty of being young.

I suppose that when I was your age,
I was just the same as you children are now.

WALTER

How long is it since you were our age?

GRANDMOTHER

So many years, that I haven't time to count them up.

But I can remember it all clearly enough, even if it was so long ago. Everything
about it was very different then from the way it is now.

GERTRUDE

How was it different, grandmother?

GRANDMOTHER

Why, in all sorts of ways.

For one thing,
the days seemed ever so much shorter when I was a little girl.

GRANDFATHER

And the nights.

Nowadays the nights are sometimes quite long,
but when I was a boy they were so short,
that it almost seemed as though there weren't any nights at all.

GERTRUDE

Tell us some more things that were different when you were a boy.

GRANDFATHER

Well, let me see.

There were the brownies.

[A piano is brought out for someone to play.

And then:

five or six women in floor length white diaphanous gowns,
with silk scarves flowing,
dance in the woods,

and, while they dance,
a woman sits to one side making embroidery
and another woman sits under a tree, with her back to us,
reading a book

while the men talk among themselves:]

HAROLD

My father was a civil engineer,
and he thought engineering would solve all the world's problems
poverty, everything,
as soon as engineering was able to flourish entirely.
You think, looking back,
he was a conservative businessman,
but no
when he decided to be a civil engineer
that was the avant garde
those were the people who thought they could change the world
entirely for the better.
Those were the revolutionaries.

[a big piece of industrial revolutionary machinery—
rusted, broken, useless—
is brought out while Harold speaks,
put down,
and just left there for the rest of the evening]

EDWARD

I knew a guy once,
a geometry teacher,
who used to ride a bicycle,
and he would go into the Jewel Tea Supermarket
with his bike clips around the bottoms of his trousers,
and he would go to meat department
and look around,
and when he was sure no one was watching him,
he'd open up his pants
and put chunks of frozen meat in his pants—
and they'd stay there because of the bike clips at his ankles.
And he'd walk out of the store
with his pants full of frozen meat.
And the store manager would watch him go,
and then the manager would pick up the phone
and call the guy's wife
and say, hello, Mrs. Dow,
your husband is bringing home some meat this evening.
And she would say, thank you,
I'll be in first thing in the morning to pay for it.
That's how it was in that town
at that time—
a civil society,
where people knew how to take care of each other.

JIM [who has a basketball under one arm]

I knew him.
He used to coach basketball, too.
And he would stand on the side of the basketball court
and say to us,
ok guys,
let's take out the ball.
Just take out the ball.
Maybe you don't know what you're doing
or what you're going to do
but the thing is:
you can't score if you don't take out the ball.

HAROLD

The thing is,
what I don't understand is,
what's up with that red bus?
Where did that come from?

EDWARD

I thought you were the one who knew.
I thought you were here when it got here.

HAROLD

Not me.

EDWARD

So
whose is it?

JIM

Was that something that
maybe
the original English settlers brought with them
when they got here?

GEORGE WASHINGTON

As I have heard,
since my arrival at this place,
a circumstantial account of my death and dying speech,
I take this early opportunity of contradicting the first,
and of affirming that I have not yet composed the latter.
But, by the all-powerful dispensations of Providence,
I have been protected beyond all human probability or expectation;
for I had four bullets through my coat,
and two horses shot under me, yet escaped unhurt,
although death was levelling my companions on every side of me!

We were attacked by a party whose number
I am persuaded
did not exceed 300 men,
while ours consisted of about 1,300 well-armed troops,

chiefly regular soldiers,
who were struck with such a panic
that they behaved with more cowardice than it is possible to conceive.
The Virginia troops' showed a good deal of bravery,
and were nearly all killed ;
for I believe out of three companies that were there,
scarcely 30 men are left alive.
Capt. Peyrouny and all his officers, down to a corporal, were killed.
Capt. Poison had nearly as hard a fate,
for only one of his was left.
In short, the dastardly behavior of those they call regulars
exposed all others that were inclined to do their duty,
to almost certain death;
and at test, in despite of all the efforts of the officers to the contrary,
they ran, as sheep pursued by dogs,
and it was impossible to rally them.

[And, while we listen to the end of Washington's words,
a woman crosses on a cell phone
engaging in some banal chat we don't quite hear.

And a guy in a big overcoat to his ankles, smoking a cigarette,
walks through.

Another woman enters with an immense armload of groceries,
at least several feet high.
(Clearly this is a trick:
the pile of groceries is held together by sticks and wires and glue.)
She pulls an empty shopping cart behind her.
Halfway across the stage,
she drops a quart of milk.
She stoops to pick it up—
as we hold our breath,
fearing that she might drop all the groceries.
She stands upright successfully,
and tosses the quart of milk on top of the pile of groceries she carries,
and, of course,
the quart of milk stays there.

And now we have an explosion—
and a long succession—
of physical theatre events:

Something like bob e. thomas—
http://www.bobethomas.com/eccentric/ecc_main.htm
—depending on the talents of the people who are cast.

And then something like the Cohen Brothers
dancing with rifles to a song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SA6wYvVnq4g>

And then some more guy shit:

guys throwing circular sawblades so they stick in the walls;

guys juggling;

a guy who steps into a pair of moon boots that are nailed to the floor

and rocks back and forth to the music of the Cohen Brothers act.

FIRST SOLDIER

I happened to come across a few children
when I visited the hospital—
a 12-year-old girl,
who was just lying dazed in a room,
waving her arm at the flies.
Her shins had been shattered by bullets
when the soldiers fired through the front door of her house.
There were small plastic drainage bags filled with red fluid
sitting on her abdomen,
where she had taken shrapnel from another bullet.
Her uncle had been shot and killed,
his wife had been wounded,
and their home had been ransacked by soldiers.
"Before they left, they killed all our chickens," she said.
Another young woman there
had been walking home
with her brother two nights before.
She assumed the soldiers shot her and her brother
because he was carrying a bottle of soda.
She had a chest wound where a bullet had grazed her,
but then the bullet had struck her little brother and killed him.
In another room, a little boy was lying on his stomach.
Shrapnel from a grenade thrown into his home by a soldier
had entered his body through his back
and was implanted there near his kidney.
He was lying there
going back and forth between crying with pain
and playing with his toy car.

SECOND SOLDIER

Our time.
One time
we were out of breath when we got to the gun-truck.
There was a group of four Iraqis walking towards us from the black truck. They were
carrying a body.
When I saw this I ran forward
and began to speak to the man holding the body
but I couldn't say a word.

There right in front of me in the arms of one of the men
I saw a small boy (no more than 3 years old).
His head was cocked back at the wrong angle and there was blood.
So much blood.
How could all that blood be from that small boy?
I heard crying too.
All of the Iraqi men standing there were crying and sobbing
and asking me WHY?
Someone behind me started screaming for a medic,
it was the young soldier who had fired his weapon.
He screamed and screamed for a medic
until his voice was hoarse
and a medic came just to tell us what I already knew.
The boy was dead.
I was so numb.

I stood there looking at that little child,
someone's child (just like mine)
and seeing how red the clean white shirt
of the man holding the boy was turning.
It was then that I realized that I had been speaking to them;
speaking in a voice that sounded so very far away.
I heard my voice telling them how sorry we were.
My mouth was saying this
but all my mind could focus on was the hole in the child's head.
The white shirt covered in bright red blood.
The glistening white pieces of the child's skull
still splattered on that so very white shirt.
The raid was over
there were no weapons to be found
and we had accomplished nothing
except killing a child of some unknowing mother.
Before I left to go back to our base
I saw the young soldier who had killed the boy.
His eyes were unfocused and he was just standing there,
staring off into the distance.
My hand went to my canteen and I took a drink of water.
That soldier looked so lost,

so I offered him a drink from my canteen.
In a hoarse voice he quietly thanked me.

A VOICE [SINGING]

As I walked out one bright sunny morning,
I saw a cowboy way out on the plain.
His hat was throwed back and his spurs was a-jingling,
And as I passed by him, he was singing this refrain:

Ta whoop ti aye ay, git along, you little dogies!
Way out in Wyoming shall be your bright home—
A-whooping and a-yelling and a-driving those dogies,
And a-riding those bronchos that are none of my own.

The people all say we're goin' to have a picnic,
But I tell you, my boy, they've got 'er down wrong,
For 'f it hadn't-a-been for those troublesome dogies,
I never woulda thought of composing this song.

Ta whoop ti aye ay, git along, you little dogies!
Way out in Wyoming shall be your bright home—
A-whooping and a-yelling and a-driving those dogies,
And a-riding those bronchos that are none of my own.

[Before the first verse is finished,
part of the singer comes into sight at a window—
a tall, waggish, curly-headed young cowboy
in a checked shirt and a ten-gallon hat.
He looks about the room singing.
Just as he finishes he withdraws,
hearing footsteps.]

AUNT ELLER

Oh, I see you, Mr. Curly McClain!
Don't need to be a-hidin' 'hind that horse of your'n.
Couldn't hide them feet of your'n

even if yer head wasn't showin'.
So you may as well come on in.

[Curly appears again at the window.]

CURLY
Hi, Aunt Eller.

AUNT ELLER
Skeer me to death!
Whut're you doin' around here?

CURLY
Come a-singin' to you
only you never give me no time to finish.

AUNT ELLER
Go on and finish then.
You do sing purty, Curly.

CURLY
Nobody never said I didn't.

AUNT ELLER
Yeah, purty.
If I wasn't an old womern,
and if you wasn't so young and smart-alecky—
why, I'd marry you and git you to set around at night
and sing to me.

CURLY
No, you wouldn't, neither.
If I was to marry-anyone-
I wouldn't set around at night a-singin'.
They ain't no tellin' what I'd do.
But I wouldn't marry you ner none of yer kinfolks, I coud he'p it.

AUNT ELLER
Oh! None of my kinfolks neither, huh?

CURLY

And you c'n tell 'em, all of 'em,
includin' that niece of your'n,
if she's about anywhurs.

AUNT ELLER

Mr. Cowboy!
A-ridin' high, wise and handsome,
his spurs a-jinglin,'
and the Bull Durham tab a whippin' outa his pocket!
Oh, Mr. Cowpuncher!
'Thout no home, ner no wife,
ner no one to muss up his curly hair,
er keep him warm on a winter's night!

CURLY

So, she desn't take to me much, huh?
Whur'd you git such a uppity niece
'at she wouldn't pay no heed to me?
Curly-headed, ain't I?
And bowlegged from the sadfde fer God knows how long, ain't I?

AUNT ELLER

Couldn't stop a pig in the road.

CURLY

Well, whut else does she want then,
the damn she-mule?

AUNT ELLER

I don't know. But I'm shore sartin it ain't you.

CURLY

Anh! Quit it, you'll have me a-cryin'!

AUNT ELLER

You better sing me a song then!

CURLY

Aw, what'll I sing then?

AUNT ELLER

A-ridin' ole Paint.

You sing.

Maybe she gonna overhear you, wherever she is!

CURLY

A ridin' ole Paint and a-leadin' old Dan,

I'm gin to Montana for to throw the hoolian.

They feed in the hollers as they water in the draw,

Their tails are all matted and their backs are all raw.

Ride around the little dogies, ride around them slow,

For the fiery and the snuffy are a-rarin' to go....

VOICE FROM OFFSTAGE

Curly! Is that you, Curly?

[He stops, turns,
runs out.

Aunt Eller shakes out a shawl,
turns,
and leaves.]

BAMBI

Professor James Parkhurst,

I consider you a colossal failure as an educator.

PARKHURST

My dear,

what causes this sweeping assertion of my incompetence?

BAMBI

I do! I do!

Just what did you expect me to do when I grew up?

PARKHURST

Why, to be happy.

BAMBI

That's the profession you intended me for?

Who's to pay the piper?

It's expensive to be happy and also unluccrative.

PARKHURST

I have always expected to support you
until your husband claimed that privilege.

BAMBI

Suppose I want a husband who can't support me?

PARKHURST

Dear me, that would be unfortunate.

It is the first duty of a husband to support his wife.

BAMBI

Old-fashioned husbands, yes-but not modern ones.

Lots of men marry to be supported nowadays.

How on earth could I support the man I love?

PARKHURST

You are not without talents, my dear.

BAMBI

I can sing a little, play the piano a little, auction bridge a good deal;

I can cook, and sew fancy things.

The only thing I can do well is to dance,

and no real man wants to be supported by his wife's toes.

Why didn't you teach me something?

You know more about mathematics than the man who invented them,
and I am not even sure that two and two make four.

PARKHURST

You're young yet, my dear; you can learn.
What is it you want to study?

BAMBI

Success, and how to get it.

PARKHURST

Success, in the general sense of the word,
has never seemed very important to me.

BAMBI

Yes, I know.

The fact that you have not thought success important
is what hampers me so in the choice of a husband.

PARKHURST

Bambina,
that is the second time a husband has been mentioned in this discussion. Have you
some individual under consideration?

BAMBI

Oh, yes-Jarvis Jocelyn.

PARKHURST

He has proposed to you?

BAMBI

Oh, no. He doesn't know anything about it.
I have just decided on him.

PARKHURST

But, my dear, he is penniless.

BAMBI

That's why I must take him.
He'll starve to death unless some one takes him on, and looks after him.

PARKHURST

You don't happen to be in love with him, do you?

BAMBI

No, I—I think not.

I suppose I am fond of him rather.

PARKHURST

Have you any reason for thinking him in love with you?

BAMBI

Mercy, no!

He hardly knows I'm alive.

He uses me for a conversational blotting-pad.

That's my only use in his eyes.

PARKHURST

He's so very impractical.

BAMBI

I am used to impractical men.

I have taken care of you since I was five years old.

PARKHURST

Yes, but—

BAMBI

No buts.

If it had not been for me

you would have gone naked and been arrested,

or have forgotten to eat and starved to death.

PARKHURST

Now, my dear Bambi, I protest—

BAMBI

It will do you no good.

Have you a nine o'clock class this morning?

PARKHURST

I have.

BAMBI

Well, hasten, Professor, or you'll get a tardy mark.

It's ten minutes of nine now.

Don't you want this notebook?

PARKHURST

Yes, oh, yes, those are my notes.

Where have I laid my glasses?

Quick, my dear!

I must not be late.

BAMBI

On your head.

PARKHURST

Ah, yes! Thank you!

BAMBI

You're welcome.

[he rushes out]

SINCLAIR

On a hill by the Mississippi where Chippewas camped two generations ago, a girl stood in relief against the cornflower blue of Northern sky. She saw no Indians now; she saw flour-mills and the blinking windows of skyscrapers in Minneapolis and St. Paul. Nor was she thinking of squaws and portages, and the Yankee fur-traders whose shadows were all about her. She was meditating upon walnut fudge, the plays of Brieux, the reasons why heels run over, and the fact that the chemistry instructor had stared at the new coiffure which concealed her ears.

A breeze which had crossed a thousand miles of wheat-lands bellied her taffeta skirt in a line so graceful, so full of animation and moving beauty, that the heart of a chance watcher on the lower road tightened to wistfulness over her quality of suspended freedom. She lifted her arms, she leaned back against the wind, her skirt dipped and flared, a lock blew wild. A girl on a hilltop; credulous, plastic, young; drinking the air as she longed to drink life. The eternal aching comedy of expectant youth.

It is Carol Milford, fleeing for an hour from Blodgett College.

The days of pioneering, of lassies in sunbonnets, and bears killed with axes in piney clearings, are deader now than Camelot; and a rebellious girl is the spirit of that bewildered empire called the American Middlewest.

[A song from:

<http://mp34u.muzic.com/sourceHome.php?source=37>

song

song

song

song

song

song

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song

song

song

song

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song

song

song

song

song

song

song

song

random dances from DanceNow
<http://www.dancenownyc.org/festival.htm>

and the red dress woman can dance through with her floor lamp again

women bring out a string of six simple wood chairs, face front
one sews, two chat, one plays with a child or a dog, one reads a book

a woman comes out and puts down a bowl of cezanne fruit
or is it three women having a conversation
but one of them has just put a bowl of fruit in the middle of them
for no reason?
does she polish apples?
taking them out of a bag and putting them into a fruit bowl?

a woman comes out with a green picket fence,
sets it standing up by itself
stands in front of it, to one side, for a minute,
then picks up the fence and leaves
—does she do this several times during the evening?

baby carriage
just left in the middle of the stage
or next to a seated woman
or whatever]

GEORGE WASHINGTON

Your sentiments,
that our affairs are drawing rapidly to a crisis,
accord with my own.
What the event will be,
is also beyond the reach of my foresight.
We have errors to correct.
We have probably had too good an opinion of human nature
in forming our confederation.

To be fearful of investing Congress,
constituted as that body is,
with ample authorities for national purposes,

appears to me the very climax of popular absurdity and madness.
Could Congress exert them for the detriment of the public
without injuring themselves in an equal or greater proportion?

Are not their interests inseparably connected
with those of their constituents?
Is it not rather to be apprehended,
if they were possessed of the powers before described,
that the individual members would be induced to use them,
on many occasions,
very timidly and efficaciously
for fear of losing their popularity and future election?
We must take human nature as we find it.
Perfection falls not to the share of mortals.

What then is to be done?
Things cannot go on in the same train forever.
We are apt to run from one extreme to another.
To anticipate and prevent disastrous contingencies
would be the part of wisdom and patriotism.

What astonishing changes a few years are capable of producing.
I am told that even respectable characters
speak of a monarchical form of government without horror.
From thinking proceeds speaking;
thence to acting is often but a single step.
But how irrevocable and tremendous!
What a triumph for our enemies to verify their predictions!
What a triumph for the advocates of despotism
to find that we are incapable of governing ourselves,
and that systems founded on the basis of equal liberty
are merely ideal and fallacious!
Would to God, that wise measures may be taken
in time to avert the consequences
we have but too much reason to apprehend.

Retired as I am from the world,
I frankly acknowledge I cannot feel myself an unconcerned spectator.

No morn ever dawned more favorably than ours did;
and no day was ever more clouded than the present.
Wisdom and good examples are necessary at this time
to rescue the political machine from the impending storm.
Let prejudices, unreasonable jealousies, and local interests
yield to reason and liberality.
Let us look to our national character,
and to things beyond the present moment.

[A group of Mongolian singers enter and sing.

song

song

song

song

song

song

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song

song

song

song

And

when they finish singing,
they just turn and—unceremoniously—
sit down at a table and have coffee.]

JAVIER

So I moved in with my old Brazilian girlfriend in Sunnyside,
Queens.
Even though I was undocumented,
she got me an \$8-an-hour job in the café where she worked.

It happened so suddenly,
I hadn't considered the adjustments I would have to make.
Before I left, a friend asked me,
"Javier, how's your English?"
I told him I had studied it for three years in high school.
"House," "dog," that was about the extent of my vocabulary.
When I got here and started working in the café,
people would ask me, "Can I have a Coke?"
and I would think,
"What in the world is this guy talking about?"

But language was the least of it.
I was 32 years old,
already a mature adult.
Here, life was full of incoherencies.
I needed a dictionary to translate the culture of New York City.
I was essentially reborn with a blank slate,
and now,
three years later,
I am barely starting to speak.

One of my first tasks was to adjust to the American workplace.
One day when I was working the counter at the café,
a man complained that his table was dirty.
In Argentina, I would have gone and cleaned it —
we're used to multitasking.
But someone in line said to me,
"That's not your job."
So I didn't do it.
I guess I should have called the Department of Table Cleaning
to take care of it.

After a few months at the café,
I was named assistant manager —
my first promotion.
After a year and a half, I became the manager.
But still, not everything made sense.
Take that truly American word that says so much about life here: networking.
To me, it is an absurd concept.
In Argentina, such things happen spontaneously.
I go to a barbecue, I meet someone.
A party is a party.
Here,
networking is like going fishing.

Eight months ago,
I went to a networking party.
The conversations went like this:
"Hi, what do you do?"

"I sell shoes."

"Oh, I do Web design."

You exchange cards and go on to the next person.
Ridiculous.
But afterward, I made a business card, just in case.
To be prepared.

There were also differences I liked:
I found that New Yorkers smile a lot.
In Argentina, people's bitterness is visible in their faces.
If you go downtown, you have to avoid people who hate their jobs,
who are broke,
whose children are sick but the social security system doesn't cover them.
Here, people smile at you.
It's normal. It's polite.
Before I understood this, a woman would smile at me in the café
and I would immediately think
I should ask for her telephone number.
I was an Adonis.

Another thing that surprised me was that
when I started to explore New York,
I found that this city is a monster.
It's transitory, so making friends is very difficult.
It's unforgiving: you leave your car at a meter for three minutes too long,
you get a ticket.
On the other hand, there are unlimited possibilities.
Here, even I can afford to go out and spend \$20 every night.
If I told that to my friends in Argentina, they'd say:
"Wow, this guy, what a marvelous life he leads!"
Because even if they have money,
they don't know what's going to happen tomorrow.

After these three years, I'm a different person.
I have learned to be more private about my personal life,
like an American.
Still, I will never completely adapt.
For example, the idea of a stranger as your roommate
doesn't exist in Argentina,
but that's what I have here.

[And now:

Banghra music
Banghra music
Banghra music
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Banghra music

to accompany the backyard barbecue serving of drinks and burgers

is there a place for a bag lady in this piece who just walks through now?

then: a guy in moon boots rocks back and forth
in time to the Bangrha music

a woman takes a shower under a tree

an old woman with a cane walks through

random dances from DanceNow
<http://www.dancenownyc.org/festival.htm>

and now we begin to recover our equilibrium
after the craziness of the evening,
the violent physical performance pieces
and the trauma of veterans' memories of war

a woman is planting flowers or tending the grass delicately, blade by blade

a naked woman walks through
as another woman in the foreground
picks flowers

or
a big couch with an oriental coverlet
and a naked woman, an odalisque

or stomach down
and a painter paints her?
or photographer photographs her?

a wedding party just walks through with music]

DABA GIRL [blogging on a computer]

This whole messy ordeal
has advanced my Botox start date by at least two years.
Like every other Dating a Banker Anonymous girl,
every other DABA,
the economy was wreaking havoc on my relationship
and youthful good looks.
Phone calls went unanswered,
Hamptons invitations un-extended, plans canceled
(including, but not limited to, expensive opening night tickets to the ballet, which
were scalped instead of being graciously offered to me and a galpal), and so forth
and so on.

Until — the horror of all horrors —
my former boyfriend, my FBF,
lost his job,
which I guess technically downgrades him to just my BF.

Overnight, he went from unavailable to downright clingy.
He wants to have dinner every night.
By dinner I mean staying in and cooking
as Megu is no longer in the budget.

AND, FYI DABA girls —
chopping vegetables along side your man in a hot New York sized kitchen
is NOTHING like the sexy kitchen scene
between Mickey Rourke and Kim Basinger in Nine and a Half Weeks.
Seriously. It sucks.
Anyhow, he suggested I meet his parents over the holidays
and he keeps commenting that half Asian babies are by far the cutest.
My take on his 180:
having no steady source of income for the foreseeable future,
he realized that his chances of securing another fashion industry type girl

are pretty much zilch
and so he is cleaving to me
as the last vestige of his former high rolling lifestyle.

So, I now have a completely devoted BF,
which is exactly what I wanted.

So I should be happy, right?

Wrong.

I'm bored and can't stop thinking
about my perpetually unattainable Euro ex-boyfriend
who is recession proof courtesy of an offshore trust account.

To be honest,

I'm only with my BF

because I just don't have the heart to change my facebook status from

"in a relationship" to

"I ain't saying I'm a gold digger,

but I ain't messin' with no broke banker."

[And now

a couple more blogs from today,

like these two—

but whoever puts it on might want to take a look at the internet

and see if there's something more of the moment:]

ANOTHER BLOGGER

Eww its was raining so hard today.

I went to the mall at Grand Ave Newton in Queens.

Wow I haven't been in a mall since i got here and i spent around 100 dollars. Im
happy i found a forever 21.

But i spent most of my money at Macy's.

Nothing else happend today.

We didnt get to go clubbing this weekend

cuz the line was too long

and we had to get in before 12 to be free

and we were there at 11:30.

Heheh.

I went to Bang Bang with my friend

and i bought a top but i think I look like a slut in it.

I'm not too much for clubbing clothes..

I always feel naked in them.
It has been brought to my attention
that some of my friends think I act more like a guy than a girl sometimes. Heheh.
Yeah I guess soo.
I used to be a tomboy when i was like 10.
I say stupid things sometimes
and i seem to get into fights alot latley.
I dont like soap operas and i hate romatic movies.
I like action and kung-fu movies.
But I think i'm acting more girly now since i moved to NYC.
um here's a quiz you can take on the internet
lets see what this test say about tomboys.

CHUCK BUCKLEY

Everything is more complex
than you like to think at first.
We like to simplify.
We like to say
ah, well, you see
it was because of his father...
or the way that he was brought up
that he turned out the way he did
or we like to say
yes, it was because the banks did such and such
or, well, you can't let some other country get away with that
or given the socio-economic conditions
or god's will
and we think
when we make up these simple narratives
that explain everything
that then we understand how things are
what makes things happen
how it turned out that we are here today
but no
the world is more complex
than stories we can understand.
It will take a little more effort
to make sense of things
after all.

[What is George Washington doing while Chuck Buckley speaks?

Making coffee?

Wiping off the café table?

Taking care of some household chore?]

And then, too:

How it is

always

when you check into the old folks' home

or you go to your deathbed

you think you're finished

but you're not.

[We hear

Aaron Copland's Fanfare for the Common Man.]

as the lights fade to dusk, and, finally,

night.

The End.

The Life Of George Washington incorporates texts from Shepherd Knapp, Marjorie Benton Cooke, Lynn Riggs, Sinclair Lewis, Allen Ginsberg, Jack Kerouac, and *The Letters and Recollection of George Washington*. Any or all of them, however, can be replaced by other brief texts from other American classic plays— from the nineteenth century, from vaudeville or burlesque, from early films, or even from dialogue taken directly from well-known classic American novels or poems. The war texts are from Zachary Scott-Singley and Dahr Jamail.

Charles Mee's work has been made possible by the support of Richard B. Fisher and Jeanne Donovan Fisher.