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A Perfect Wedding

by CHARLES L. MEE

Music.

Brahms's St. Anthony's Chorale
from Variations on a Theme by Haydn.

Or it could be J.S. Bach's Sleepers, Awake! from Cantata 140.

In any case:
a summer mansion of many rooms
(remember the Song of Songs:
"my love is a mansion of many rooms.")

The Prologue

At the end of the music,
Meridee enters, talking.

She is with her sister Tessa
and her brother Jonathan.

Among the three of them
they are carrying a white wedding dress,
shoes, and veil.

MERIDEE
Oh!

This is the perfect place for a wedding

TESSA

if you have to get married at all,
although, for the life of me
I don't see why anyone ever does any more.
What could be the point?

MERIDEE

Love would be the point, Tessa: love.

TESSA

Oh, right, love, right.
Because you can't love someone unless you marry them.

MERIDEE

And commitment.

TESSA

Commitment. Right.
Why not just a handshake then
and say, OK, it's a deal?
Why make a thing out of it with a crowd of people
you wish you never had to even talk to?

MERIDEE

It's not as though I don't know
that everyone thinks marriage is an old fashioned
sort of thing

JONATHAN

and pointless

TESSA

and pointless
and people have priests and rabbis get up at a wedding
and say all sorts of things
that no one believes any more

JONATHAN

so that a bride and groom start out in life
with their whole marriage,
the whole center of their lives from then on,
based on things they think are a total lie

TESSA

so that
how can they expect to stay together
if they've been such total hypocrites
at what they believe is the most solemn
beginning moment of their lives

JONATHAN

and so or else
they try to write their own vows
and they end up saying all these things
about growing together
and respecting one another
and letting one another's
trees be free to grow

TESSA

and they never say till death do us part any more
so it seems they're not promising
much of anything to anyone these days

MERIDEE

still
there are people who still want to love each other
and be together
and not just halfway,
not just keeping one foot out on the river bank
ready to say at any moment
ok, forget it,
I guess we grew apart
save yourself, I'm out of here
but they want to say
no, I'm going all the way with you

I'm here with you forever
I want to make this commitment to you
people still want to do this
because
no matter what we've seen in our lifetimes
this is still a universal human desire
the desire for love forever
and people still want to give themselves to that
and notice it
and mark it with a special occasion
so that when they die
it doesn't seem like the most important thing in their lives
was—what?—having their appendix out?
because everyone made such a big deal about that?
and love IS an important thing
it may be a necessary thing even
for the world to go on

[Tessa and Jonathan can't believe
Meridee goes on and on]

and so, the wedding guests are there
because when people make this promise to one another
it's a happy occasion
and the most important one
and people like to share it.

TESSA

And leave town before the misery begins.

Act I

[The family comes out of the walls talking:
Maria, carrying an armful of white linens,
who speaks with a trace of an Italian accent
and her lover Francois, carrying a half-dozen champagne glasses.]

MARIA

Of course a white dress!
And a bouquet. Because....
Meridee, dear!

MERIDEE

Mother!

MARIA

Oh, my, you look lovely, absolutely lovely!
Doesn't she look lovely, Francois?

FRANCOIS

Absolutely lovely.
Hello, Meridee. Tessa.

MARIA

Jonathan!
Thank God you're here!

FRANCOIS

Hello, Jonathan.

MARIA

There's not a moment to lose!
Now everyone has a special job to do.
Francois,
will you help Meridee with her veil?

FRANCOIS

Here. Let me take that.

MERIDEE

It's OK.
I've got it.

JONATHAN

I have it.

FRANCOIS

I'll take it.

MERIDEE

Don't bother. I have it.

JONATHAN

I've got it.

[the veil is taken from her]

MARIA

But where is the groom, darling?

You can't have a wedding without a groom!

MERIDEE

He's bringing the suitcases from the car.

MARIA

Excellent. Excellent.

Now, children,

we need everybody's help.

MERIDEE, TESSA, AND JONATHAN

Yes, mother.

MARIA

Just because you're not a girl, Jonathan,
doesn't mean you shouldn't be pitching in
to help your sister on her wedding day.

JONATHAN

Well, I think I am pitching in, mother.

MERIDEE

He's been carrying things in from the car.

MARIA

Good. Good.

I didn't say you weren't helping, Jonathan.

I'm only saying....

FRANCOIS

Only that you should.

[the groom, Amadou,
enters with suitcases,
followed by Ariel and James,
also carrying armfuls of things]

JONATHAN

I am! I am!

FRANCOIS

There's no reason to be upset with your mother, Jonathan.

JONATHAN

I'm not! I'm not!

MARIA

Ah! But is this the groom?

AMADOU

Yes. Yes, I am.

MARIA

Amadou! Amadou!

I'm so happy to meet you.

Meridee never stops about what a wonderful person you are
generous and tender and open hearted

[with a glance back at Jonathan]

and considerate

MERIDEE

This is my mother.

AMADOU

I'm happy to meet you.

[as they speak,

Ariel goes to Jonathan, puts her hand in his;
and James goes to Tessa,
hands her a dress he has had over his arm
and stays with her]

AMADOU

And this is your father?

FRANCOIS

Ah, no. I am Francois.

AMADOU

Francois....

TESSA

Our mother's lover.

AMADOU

Ah.

FRANCOIS

Tessa! So delightfully open and
and completely
open!

What usually we say is

I am her mother's very special friend.

AMADOU

Ah.

JONATHAN

We don't need to lie to Amadou, Francois.

He is a member of the family now.

FRANCOIS

Lie, no! Certainly not! Of course.

Am I a person who would tell a lie?

I was only thinking as a matter of I don't know
perhaps discretion

or

a sense of timing that's all.

[Frank enters in a rush.]

FRANK

I've found the silver in the cupboard, Maria,
but I can't begin to...oh!

Is this Amadou then?

How nice to meet you!

MERIDEE

Amadou, this is my father.

AMADOU

Oh, Meridee's father!

I'm happy to meet you!

TESSA

It doesn't seem to me, Francois,
that you are in any position to be lecturing anyone
about discretion.

FRANK

Discretion?

FRANCOIS

Lecturing?

I am only saying that in general
one has a sense of discretion
if one is at all discrete.

TESSA

Well, honestly, Francois,
if you are going to be with my mother all the time
in her home
helping with her daughter's wedding....

MARIA

Are you saying you don't want Francois's help?

FRANCOIS

Do you wish: what?
I would not be useful?
Of course if you prefer
I can make myself useless.

MARIA

Of course
everyone appreciates your usefulness, Francois.

FRANCOIS

Because I can stop if I am not appreciated!

MARIA

No, no, no,
of course you are appreciated, Francois.
I appreciate you.

FRANK

Everyone appreciates you, Francois.
Of course, it is true,
if a man lives with a woman
in the same home as her husband
I don't think this man is in much of a position
to talk about discretion.

MARIA

Whereas you would be a person to speak of discretion?

FRANK

Well, yes, to be honest
I think I am a discrete person
I have always been a discrete person
I was raised as a discrete child
to be a discrete grownup
and, if the truth be told
there are many people who consider me to be
the very soul of discretion.

[Edmund enters,
carrying a bottle of champagne.]

EDMUND

Frank! Oh, Frank, I can't find the....
Ah!
Here you are!

MERIDEE

Edmund!

EDMUND

Meridee. Hello.

MERIDEE

Edmund, I want you to meet my fiance.
This is Amadou.

EDMUND

How do you do?

AMADOU

So, this is your uncle then?

MARIA

No, no, no, gracious sake's no.
This is Frank's lover.

FRANK
Maria. Really!

MARIA
What?

FRANK
This is quite well—
open.

MARIA
Open?
Should I not be open?

FRANCOIS
It's very open.

EDMUND
What do you mean to say, Frank?
That no one should say who I am?

FRANK
Oh, Edmund, no, of course not!
We were only talking about discretion....

FRANCOIS
or simply a sense of timing.

EDMUND
Because if no one wants to know who I am
I can leave.

FRANK
Oh, Edmund!

MARIA
No one wants you to leave, Edmund.

FRANCOIS

It was, perhaps, a little more straightforward
than human beings quite need to be at all times.

MARIA

Ah, yes, of course!
For sure you would know about not being straightforward
you would be an expert in not being straightforward.

FRANCOIS

Are you saying I am not straightforward?
What have I done?

MARIA

What have I done?

FRANK

What have I done?

EDMUND

Well, what have I done?

MERIDEE

You know,
I've told Amadou all about my family.

MARIA

Oh!

FRANK

Good.

TESSA [to Amadou]

This is not perhaps the family you just always dreamed
of marrying into.

AMADOU

And where is your uncle then?

Was it your uncle

who was going to perform the wedding ceremony?

FRANK

Uncle?

AMADOU

Your brother?

FRANK

Oh, brother! No, no, no,

not my brother: my mother!

AMADOU

Your mother?

FRANK

Yes.

MARIA

Frank and his mother....

FRANCOIS

They are....

MARIA

Just as you would hope....

FRANCOIS

very close.

FRANK

She's on her way.

She should be here any moment

if she hasn't lost her way.

FRANCOIS

You found your way without any trouble?

FRANK

It seems everyone is always getting lost.

EDMUND

Are you saying in some roundabout way
that I am always getting lost?

FRANK

Certainly not!

FRANCOIS

Well, when you went to get the champagne...

EDMUND

The champagne was in a place
no one has ever gone before!
No one could find their way back!

FRANCOIS

Edmund, honestly it's not for me to say but
it seems to me you have practically I don't know
a persecution complex.

EDMUND

As you know, Francois, it is not a complex
if you are being persecuted and persecuted
and vilified and demeaned
and thrown down the stairs!

MARIA

Did someone throw you down the stairs?

AMADOU

No. No, I had no trouble finding my way at all.

MARIA

Good.

So. Well.

Here we are, then.

FRANK

The three young couples.

My lovely children and the partners they love
and have chosen for themselves.

I'm just glad to have lived to see the day.

All together at once.

As though it were programmed into the DNA
that sense of time.

The moment's come.

The springtime of life.

EDMUND

It's a perfect picture.

FRANK

A happy,

happy moment.

Better than I ever dreamed.

FRANCOIS

Absolutely idyllic.

MARIA

Are you Turkish?

AMADOU

I'm sorry?

MARIA

Not that it matters.

Not that you and Meridee shouldn't be married
because you are Turkish.

Or Indian?

AMADOU

Indian?

MERIDEE

Not that we shouldn't be married?

TESSA

Mother....

MARIA

Well, I'm not saying anything other than the fact that
he looks a little
Turkish.

MERIDEE

Turkish?

FRANCOIS

Perhaps he does look a little Turkish.
A little swarthy one might say
if it's not wrong to say the word swarthy these days.

FRANK

I say swarthy all the time.

TESSA

Of course it's not wrong to say swarthy.
What are you saying?

FRANK

I don't think your mother was suggesting
there's anything wrong with being
swarthy, darling.

EDMUND

Some people are swarthier than others
some people might be older

or younger
or of a different religion
these are not reasons for people not to be married these days.

MERIDEE

Not to be married?

FRANK

We are all different from one another.

FRANCOIS

Some of us are perhaps more different than others.

EDMUND

You can always find some difference
between two people who are going to be married
if it weren't something else
it would be that one is a woman and the other is a man.

FRANK

Or perhaps these days not necessarily.

EDMUND

Right. Or not necessarily.
One is a man and the other is a man, too.
But a different man:

MERIDEE

that's the whole point of a wedding
to reach out across the abyss
and embrace someone who is different

EDMUND

Exactly:
this is how it is
for all human beings everywhere
understanding who they are
and reaching into the depths of their own particular souls
and the civilizations they have come from

to find even a deeper connection
as they reach out across the gulf
and through the courage of reaching out to each other,
rediscover their self-confidence
this is why people cry at weddings probably
because they are so happy they can hardly bear it
that two people have done
what the whole world needs to do if life is to go on!

FRANCOIS

Still, it seems that to be a Turk
is to be different in some particular way.

MARIA

Or Indian.

FRANCOIS

Or Indian, exactly.

AMADOU

If you will excuse me,
I'm going to take a walk in the woods.

FRANK

Oh, a walk, yes of course, but not in the woods
no not in the woods;
you and Meridee might rather enjoy a walk on the beach

EDMUND

Down to the bay.

FRANK

Exactly.

EDMUND

It's very beautiful the beach

FRANCOIS

the driftwood

FRANK
the seashells.

EDMUND
It's a little bit of a rocky beach
but very beautiful.

FRANCOIS
There's nothing wrong with a rocky beach.

EDMUND
Well, I prefer the sand, of course.

FRANCOIS
The powdery sand how vexing it is
you can never get it out of your swimming suit

MARIA
Or your hair.

FRANCOIS
In France we prefer a rocky beach

MARIA
A pebble beach

FRANCOIS
Rocky or pebbly
like the beach at Collioure
if the beach at Collioure was good enough for Picasso
I guess it's good enough for anyone

FRANK
Was Picasso picky about beaches?

FRANCOIS
I'm not saying picky.

EDMUND

You can't lie out on the rocks to get a suntan.

FRANCOIS

Well, there's a technique for it, you know.

In France, we learn a technique.

TESSA

Honest to god!

AMADOU

I'll just take a walk in the woods.

TESSA

Who could blame you?

[he leaves abruptly;
the following exchanges come faster and faster
until everyone is talking at once]

MERIDEE

Amadou!

FRANK

Oh, but Amadou, not the woods!

No. No.

Not the woods.

JONATHAN

Why not the woods?

MARIA

What did I say?

TESSA

Oh, mother!

FRANK

Because he can get lost in the woods.

MARIA

What did I do?

EDMUND

And there is quicksand.

TESSA

What did you do?

Mother, you are such a total bigot!

JONATHAN

There's quicksand in the woods?

MARIA

I only asked if he was Turkish.

MERIDEE

How can anyone get married in a world like this?

TESSA

Look what you've done!

EDMUND

Of course there is.

JONATHAN

I grew up in this house

and no one ever told me there was quicksand in the woods?

MERIDEE

No one told me there was quicksand.

TESSA

I can't believe there's quicksand.

FRANCOIS

We can't let him go like this

we need to go and find him.

MARIA

I don't want you getting lost in the woods.

FRANK

I have a compass.

ARIEL

We can find him if we all spread out.

JAMES

We can start in one place
and fan out in the shape of a geometrical sort of
shape

[everyone stops to listen,
can't believe the stupidity of this idea
and, when he finishes,
they just resume what they were doing]

so that we can find our way back
to the starting point again
and then sort of
adjust the angle
and go out from the center again
and back
and this way we won't get lost ourselves.

EDMUND

We should bring a rope for the quicksand.

JONATHAN

I can't believe no one ever told me about the quicksand.

MARIA

I don't even know that he's Turkish.

[Everyone rushes out in different directions.]

Music.

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba with full orchestra.

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

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Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

Handel's Arrival of the Queen of Sheba

The walls of the house just fly to all sides and up to heaven

and we are in the fantastically, transportingly beautiful woods

in the midst of 100 cherry trees in full bloom.

Or else, it is green in the woods, and the cherry trees come in

one by one during the course of the play

slowly enough that their arrival is never noticed

until the stage is filled with cherry trees.

Everyone rushes frantically back across the stage and out again.

As they do,

Meridee lets her dress slip to the ground,

and she puts on her wedding dress.

One person runs through.

Everyone rushes back across the stage and out again.

Two people run through in opposite directions.

Everyone rushes back across the stage and out again.

One person runs through.

Everyone rushes back across the stage and out again.

Meridee, alone in the wilderness, calls out.]

MERIDEE

Amadou! Amadou!

Oh,

Amadou!

[James has remained behind
as all the others have run out.]

JAMES

Meridee,

do you wish I would stay here with you?

I mean,

if you'd rather not be in the woods alone.

MERIDEE

Oh. Yes. Thank you, James.

The woods are so
disorienting.

JAMES

Yes.

MERIDEE

To me.

JAMES

Yes, well, to me, too.

MERIDEE

I get turned around and

a little dizzy even

and it's a little scary to me.

Tessa won't mind?

JAMES

Tessa?

Oh, Tessa—mind, no,
well, she's a
you know, independent person.

MERIDEE

Right.

JAMES

I mean, of course,
you are an independent person, too,
it's just that your sister, she, well, she—

MERIDEE

She is an independent woman.

JAMES

Right. Exactly.
Which is why, I guess,
even though I propose to her and propose to her
she doesn't want to marry me
because I know she loves me
but
she is a self-sufficient person
and she's a person who thinks marriage is

MERIDEE

pointless.

JAMES

Right.

MERIDEE

And I'd like to be as sort of cool and self-sufficient as she is,
but when Amadou just walked right out the door,
I mean, I thought:
before the wedding at least he would sort of
stick around.

JAMES

Well,
just before a wedding
everyone feels a little nervous.

MERIDEE

I feel nervous, too, but
I didn't just dump him.

JAMES

Dump. Well.
That's a strong word.
Probably he was just a little anxious about your marriage
or upset
this is normal for a groom before the wedding

MERIDEE

Normal.
Still
life itself is full of anxieties
about money
and having children
and whether they will be okay
and heart attacks and cancer
even people dying suddenly
hit by cars or buses or crashing in airplanes
being shot or stabbed in a back alley in the middle of the night
or taken away in handcuffs
and you can't just run away
every time you feel anxious.

JAMES

Of course. Of course.
This is just how it is sometimes to be a guy.

MERIDEE

I don't know.
He might love me in his own way
but if in the middle of the night without any warning

the ceiling were suddenly to collapse
I'd throw my body over his to save his life.
I don't think he'd do the same for me.
I don't think that would be his instinct.

Whereas
now, when everyone has disappeared
and I'm left all alone
you offered to stay with me to make sure I was okay.

JAMES
Yes. Well.

MERIDEE
Is this just the sort of person you are?

JAMES
I don't know.

MERIDEE
Do you have the same instinct for Tessa?

JAMES
Tessa.

MERIDEE
Probably you do.

JAMES
Probably I do, yes
I don't
I don't know
I saw you standing here
feeling lost and abandoned and
my heart just
went out to you.

MERIDEE
Your heart?

JAMES

I couldn't help but feel
knowing how it is to feel suddenly abandoned
I couldn't help but feel
such tenderness for you.

MERIDEE

Oh.

[silence, while she thinks about this]

It's confusing I think
when a person steps into the middle of nature.

JAMES

Right.

MERIDEE

There are no guideposts
and all the rules are off.

JAMES

Exactly.

MERIDEE

You think you carry civilization with you
wherever you go

JAMES

Right

MERIDEE

and yet when you are in the middle of nature
and it's beautiful
so lovely it makes your head a little light
and you think
oh, well
nature!

JAMES
That's true.

MERIDEE
and so you just lose your head.

[suddenly she kisses him]

JAMES
Oh.

MERIDEE
I kissed you.

JAMES
Yes. Yes. You did.

[She turns and starts to run out
first in one direction
and then, confused, turning again this way and that,
and then she runs out in a different direction.

Tessa enters from still another direction.]

TESSA
James?

JAMES
Tessa.
Oh.

TESSA
Have you found Amadou?

JAMES
Amadou? Oh.
I don't know how we will ever find him.
The truth is I feel lost myself.

TESSA

James, you're always lost.
It's your most reliable quality.
You're lost when you drive a car.
You're lost when you walk on the beach.
You're lost in your own thoughts.
If you weren't lost
no one would ever know where you were.

JAMES

Right.
Still
I hope we find him
for Meridee's sake.

TESSA

She'll be better off
if he's lost forever.

JAMES

How can you say that?

TESSA

Here is a guy who
the moment he meets his fiancée's family
he turns around and runs away
and then
what?
he's going to make everyone run around and look for him
so that everyone gets lost?

JAMES

Maybe sometimes it's not bad to be lost, Tessa.
To be reminded how it is to step out into the unknown,
because,
whether a person is afraid or not
there is a certain sense of exhilaration
that comes from just throwing yourself into new territory
it sets you free.

TESSA
It does?

JAMES
Of course it does.
And what is life without an adventure?

TESSA
A guy will always say to you:
let's have an adventure,
when what he means is
he doesn't have a clue
where he is or what's going to happen next.
And then pretty soon he will end up asking you to marry him
because he doesn't know what to do next.

JAMES
It may seem like that
but it may be also that he knows
if I'm going to set out into the unknown
this is the person I'd like to set out with
because
even though she may seem a little
I don't know cynical and unromantic even
that could even be a good quality
when you need to face the difficult things in life
and even though it may seem she thinks the whole idea is
uh bullshit
that could just be coming from the place in her
that is vulnerable and scared
and you can tell
underneath that protective layer
there is a person who really wants something wonderful too
in life
and wants as much as you do
a life that is
thrilling.

TESSA
Really?

JAMES
Yes.

TESSA
I don't know if I'm the sort of person
who just relishes an adventure
in the unmarked trails of the wilderness.
I like the well-lit avenues
with street signs at every corner
a destination known in advance
and an up-to-date detailed map.

JAMES
Life doesn't come with maps, Tessa.

TESSA
Right.

JAMES
You can't let anxiety and fear and suspiciousness
and a lack of trust
yes there it is let's face it
a lack of trust
run your entire life
sometimes you have to let go
and just put yourself into freefall.

TESSA
You'll be there to catch me.

JAMES
Right.

[Ariel enters to the side.]

TESSA

James,
are you proposing to me?

JAMES

Proposing to you?

TESSA

Proposing marriage to me?

JAMES

Oh.

Well, yes,
proposing marriage to you.

Yes, I guess I am.

TESSA

Out of what?

All of a sudden what?

Out of anxiety?

JAMES

I think we're a couple, Tessa,
so maybe we should be a couple.

TESSA

We are a couple,
we are a couple,
we are each other's significant other

JAMES

What is that?

TESSA

We can be together
but I don't think we can be engaged, or married

JAMES

We could be together:
what would that be like?

TESSA

We could be like Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre.

JAMES

Jean Paul Sartre?

TESSA

We go to cafes together
we walk around together
we talk a lot
sometimes we sleep together
just not the bourgeois marriage thing.

JAMES

Because?

TESSA

Because
what is marriage anyway
if it isn't just part of the whole apparatus
of the control of people by
I don't even mention the patriarchy
but think of it
of control by the state
an arrangement where
the only way out of this system of self policing
is in fact
adultery
or murder
an arrangement where
the whole population just willingly gives itself up
to an intensely repressive social order.
I mean
think of it:
imagine that society is required to create certain

character types
and personality types
in order to achieve its goals of stability and order.
And ask yourself
what mind-altering substance
could possibly compel an entire population
to submit to such total social integration
without even noticing it was happening
without uttering the tiniest peep of protest?
What possibly could do this better than
love
and marriage?

No.
We can be together, James,
this is good to be together
but
marriage....
I don't think so.

[she turns and leaves]

JAMES
Oh.

ARIEL
James?

JAMES
Oh! Ariel!

ARIEL
I didn't mean to surprise you.

JAMES
No. No.
That's OK.

ARIEL

I just....

I couldn't help but....

Seeing you standing here
feeling lost and abandoned
my heart just
went out to you.

JAMES

Your heart?

ARIEL

I couldn't help but feel
knowing how it is to feel suddenly abandoned
I couldn't help but feel
such tenderness for you.

[he looks around— who's speaking here?]

JAMES

Oh.

ARIEL

It's confusing I think
when a person steps into the middle of nature.

JAMES

Right.

ARIEL

There are no guideposts
and all the rules are off.

[he looks around again]

JAMES

Exactly.

ARIEL

You think you carry civilization with you
wherever you go

JAMES

Right

ARIEL

and yet when you are in the middle of nature
and it's beautiful
so lovely it makes your head a little light
and you think
oh, well
nature!

JAMES

That's true.

ARIEL

and so you just lose your head.

I just

it's just

everybody went running out of the house
all of a sudden
everything fell apart
suddenly we're in the wild.

JAMES

Right.

ARIEL

And a person could feel totally unhinged.
I saw you here
you seemed so sweet and vulnerable
I thought:
am I falling in love with you?

JAMES
You did?

ARIEL
Is this just a feeling I never knew I had
and all at once
for no reason that I know
now I know it?

JAMES
You do?

ARIEL
And at the same time I think: no
of course not
because I'm practically engaged to Jonathan
and it must be that it's just that
seeing you
I thought of the first time I saw Jonathan
and how I felt for him in that moment
how it filled me with such a love of life
I felt so happy just to breathe the air
and then suddenly
I see you
and I think probably this is the same way you feel about Tessa
and your heart is broken
and I don't know what I'm doing.

JAMES
No.

ARIEL
Sometimes I think no one knows what they are doing
they just do it
and then they wonder and wonder.
All they can do is wonder.

JAMES

Yes.

Yes.

[Ariel kisses James.]

JAMES

Oh.

ARIEL

What was that all about?

[James backs away from her,
then turns and rushes out

and Jonathan enters]

JONATHAN

Ariel?

ARIEL

Jonathan.

Oh my god

I was just thinking of you.

JONATHAN

You were?

ARIEL

I mean

I've been with you for I don't know since when
and I don't even know why any more.

And sometimes you kiss someone
and you just spiral down and down
into a black hole.

Love.

People say love is wonderful and it is
but also

it's a horrible horrible thing

it comes and goes
you never know
you don't know how it is
when suddenly you fall in love
or out of love
or in and out of love at the same time
you were never expecting it to happen
and then
it just rips up everything and throws it away
you feel cut loose
you've become a person thrown into the woods.
And you think: what is this?

And so
I'd like to be a couple, Jonathan.

JONATHAN
We are a couple, Ariel.

ARIEL
We are?

JONATHAN
We are like Simone de Beauvoir and Jean Paul Sartre.

ARIEL
Simone de Beauvoir?

JONATHAN
Because
I've seen what it is for bourgeois people
to marry one another
and it seems to me it ends up meaning nothing
except constant habitual betrayal
bickering
sneaking around
feeling remorse
having a sense that you are a stupid person after all
what was the point

who can remember
meanwhile you've fallen in love with two or three
or fifteen other people
longed for them
had them even
and broken up
with misery on every side

It turns out
when you get married
you enter a whole set of rules
for things you never thought you even cared about
you can't leave the dishes for later
you can't load the dishwasher the way you think is best
you can't drink straight from the milk carton
you can't fall asleep on the couch
you can't eat in bed
you can't get out of bed right away after sex
no
no
this is nothing for a grownup to do
if you want to be with someone, be with them
that's all
and then when it's over
be with someone else
or not
be by yourself
this is how grownups behave

so, in a word,
no
no
we can be together, Ariel
it's good to be together
but
marriage....

ARIEL
Never?

JONATHAN

I don't think so.

[he turns and leaves

as Amadou enters]

AMADOU

Ariel?

ARIEL

Oh, Amadou, I've found you.

AMADOU

Found me?

ARIEL

We've all been looking for you.

AMADOU

Why?

ARIEL

Because you were lost
and everyone has come to find you.

AMADOU

I didn't think I was lost.

ARIEL

But I know how it is
I myself, coming into the woods
I got caught up or transported
whatever it might have been.
My heart was opened up
everything came rushing in
and my heart was just let loose.
I thought for a moment
I could just

rain or snow or thunder
the way things happen
like the squirrels and the elephants
and you're just blown around by your passions
and your whims
and your
whatevers.
Because we are
all of us
fundamentally natural people
who just shout out or sing
and run jumping over rocks
or swinging from the trees
when we're not huddling in the darkness
out of fear

[Meridee enters during this.]

this is how it is to be a free person
and this is what we want to be
because otherwise what's the point?

AMADOU

Yes, I know exactly what you mean.

ARIEL

Sometimes my spirit feels so light
it feels like air or light itself
the leaves fluttering in the breeze
and I could weep and weep because
I am so happy to be alive.
And then sometimes
just when you think you will live the rest of your life in sunshine
there are hurricanes and tornadoes
and you don't know all over again
where you are or what is happening to you.

[he kisses her]

ARIEL

Amadou, you kissed me.

[he backs away from her]

ARIEL

Oh, Amadou! My god!

Now I'm so confused.

Nature!

Nature, it turns out,

nature is just a wilderness of lust

a swamp of appetite

a wild

a wild slut!

[She turns and runs out;

he turns in confusion and backs out.

They are gone.

Meridee is alone.]

MERIDEE

So, I find you at last,

and it turns out that you're in love with Ariel?

I thought the next big event of my life

would be getting married

but now I see

the next big event will be dying.

Because it's over and

you went so fast

in the arms of someone else

how could anyone ever trust love again

when it can disappear so fast

and leave me all alone forever

I was thinking all this time:
we're so important to one another
and it turns out I was wrong about the biggest thing in my life
how can I think I can be right about anything else?
the time you came home from being away
I said to you, "you've come home"
and you said yes
and I said but I don't think so
I think you left two months ago
and you are never coming back because
when I called one time
I felt something had happened
I heard it on the phone
and you said
I don't know
What don't you know?
I don't know if I can come back.
Because you've fallen in love, I said?
What?
Because you've fallen for another woman?
Don't trivialize it, he said.
it felt as though all at once the city had been bombed out
the house had been burned down
I asked him: Have you had a love affair?
He said no.
You've fallen for someone else
He said no.
You've had a fling. A one night stand.
My heart had stopped.
No, he said.
I said I don't believe it.
Believe what you want, he said.
And now I've stopped breathing.

And I think the truth is
I always came last
and I hate you for that
and now I see I'm dying

the only person I've ever loved in my life
my life itself
and now you're gone
and I will never have you back
and if you do come back
I will say to you
just go
just go
because you are always just leaving me
every time you go away and come back
you say you can't come back to me
and I always felt from the very first,
from the first night we spent together,
the pain of your rejecting me.

so go this time
you are going to leave me eventually
I have always known it,
so leave me now
I've pursued you and pursued you and pursued you
in every way for all these years
and you have rejected me and rejected me and rejected me
I have to rip you out of my heart
but it just tears me apart like a rag
you say I say these things
to manipulate you
but how can I manipulate you?
when you stick a knife into an animal
it will kick and jerk and cry out
before it dies
it can't help itself
I keep waiting for my love for you to stop, to stop
but it won't end
and I can't bear it
I miss being with you,
just hearing you breathe
holding you through the night if I would dare
I couldn't help myself either
pretending I didn't care

turning over myself in bed, turning my back to you
hoping you would see my behavior as a mirror of your own
seeing you should turn back to me
not giving you everything I could
everything you wanted
every single thing because you sweet sweet soul
you had deserved every single thing in life you wished
And I so regret
not finding a way

[Ariel runs back in, stops short.]

to find you,
instead of withdrawing from you —
and so making you feel, I suppose,
not loved, not pursued, not treasured
not precious as I felt you were.
Not giving you all the things I felt for you
And so I keep trying over and over
to let you go,
and even as I say that
it takes my breath away
to think that I would let go
of the only person in my life I have ever loved so completely,
you've been my life itself to me,
that's what I find so hard to let go of
and why, when I come close to letting go,
it feels like the only death I'll die.

And is this the way I'm going to feel the rest of my life?
Or will it go away like a single breath?

ARIEL
Meridee....

[Ariel puts her arms around Meridee;
they weep together in one another's arms,
console one another with caresses.

Music.

Schubert's Ave Maria
Geoffrey Parsons on piano
Dame Janet Baker singing.
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria
Ave Maria

Or, from another place in the woods, just slightly removed,
someone sings a love song
or an operatic aria.

The caresses turn into embraces.

And then kisses.

They rise from where they are sitting,
still lips to lips

and circle around one another
still kissing and kissing

and they sink to the ground
still kissing and kissing

and they roll over and over in the grass
kissing and kissing.

A permanent, locked kiss
while they roll all over one another wildly, passionately,
inching from the ground up against a tree trunk,
rising to their feet,
pinned against the tree,
turning round and round with one another
dancing?
sinking to the ground again,
rolling over rocks or hillocks,
on and on and on and on and on.

And then, at last, dazed,
Ariel rises and turns and runs out at full speed

as the Radical Fairies enter
—tough looking,
no bullshit guys
one of them might be dressed like a highway car hooker
another wears a straw hat with a flower and a T-shirt that says:
Faggots Are Fantastic.

They are carrying crystal and white linens and candles and flowers.]

MERIDEE
Ariel! Ariel!

[a moment's awkward silence]

ISAAC
Oh, dear. I'm sorry.
We didn't want to be intruding.

MERIDEE
Oh.
No.
You're not.
You're not at all.

DIETER
You might be
the bride?

MERIDEE
Yes,
yes, I hope so
although
yes.

And
who are you?

DIETER
We
are your wedding planners, darling.
We came looking for you at the house
and we were told you'd come out into the woods

ISAAC
we'd been thinking of a sort of nautical theme for you
setting out on a voyage together
that was the idea
but if you prefer it here in the woods
we can change it

DIETER
no problem

ISAAC
we can change it to a woodland theme
or a rocky hill and crag theme

DIETER
And we could do the handfasting ceremony
calling on all the four directions
for the blessing of the deep and fruitful earth

ISAAC

The blessing of the inner fire of the sun

DIETER

the blessing of the sacred waters of the pool

ISAAC

the blessing of the the clear pure air

DIETER

invoking the God of Love

ISAAC

whose name is Aengus mac Og

DIETER

Or a golf course theme.

ISAAC

Or a golf course theme. Absolutely.

All the bridesmaids dressed as caddies

little golf bags on every table holding wedding candies.

Anything is possible.

And the other young woman was....?

MERIDEE

Oh,

that was my friend Ariel

I mean, really, she's the friend of my brother Jonathan

which is to say, she and Jonathan are going to be married.

DIETER

One might almost have thought

the two of you were getting married.

MERIDEE

Oh, no!

We just

you see

we're just good friends

we've gotten lost in the woods.

ISAAC

Yes, these things happen.

DIETER

So we've come to bring you back home

or not, or not

or to join you here

whatever you like

because

this is your day.

JULIAN

It's lovely here.

Nature.

All untrammelled and untamed.

HEINER

I hate nature.

The muck.

The tangle of it.

Mile after mile

of empty meadows.

Nothing has been arranged with any sense of economy

or restraint.

I like a landscape that shows some evidence

of having been touched by human hands.

JULIAN

And yet

here in the natural world

you don't have to put up with people who
lie and lie and lie
manipulate and bully you

Here you have the open air
fresh water
the companionship of animals
in their natural homes

HEINER

I look at nature

I think:

did god have any taste at all?

The shapes are grotesque

The colors are garish

The smells are horrid

And your feet are always wet

JULIAN

Still,

here you have

the sun-blown rose

the morning dew

meteors in the night sky

HEINER

Back there you would have

plum cake

thick cream

scones and butter

hot cocoa

Silk garters

JULIAN

Here you have

pebbles

moss

hail

the sighing of the night wind

the scent of the violet
birds nests from China
an orange gathered from the tree that grew over Zebulon's Tomb

HEINER

Handkerchiefs of lawn,
cambric,
of Irish linen, of Chinese silk
initialed handkerchiefs
embroidered with satin stitch
trimmed with lace
hemstitched
Necklaces and rings and nose jewels
A tweezer case, with twelve sets of tweezers,
one for each hour of the day
An ostrich egg, incised with a picture of the Coronation
the complete head and body of Father Crispin
buried long ago in the Vault of the Cordeliers at Toulouse;
a stone taken from a vulture's head;
a large ostrich egg on which is inscribed the famous battle of Alcazar
a toothpick case
an eyebrow brush
a pair of French scissors
a quart of orange flower water
a quill pen
a red umbrella

[silence]

ISAAC

I see you already have on your wedding dress, darling.

MERIDEE

Oh, yes, I'm ready for the wedding.

But

I've lost my fiance.

DIETER

Lost him?

MERIDEE

Yes, there was
there were some words
and then he just came running out here,
and I've lost him.

ISAAC

Relationships these days.

DIETER

Exactly.

ISAAC

The complications and so forth.

DIETER

Exactly.

ISAAC

The nervous strains of a long engagement.

JULIAN

And then
if we do get married
we discover that another person might finally
have different tastes than we do
whether one likes to go out to the theatre or to the opera
or would rather stay at home

HEINER

whether a person likes to be spanked or whipped
spanked or whipped by an older or a younger person
by a person in costume
or what costume exactly
and what sort of whip
hard or soft
a wet towel or a bamboo cane
a riding crop made of peacock feathers

JULIAN

the eyelashes of a Tibetan goat

HEINER

or the hair cut from the head of a Franciscan nun

JULIAN

the spit curls of a Hasidic diamond merchant

ISAAC [cutting him off]

there are, really hundreds of thousands of genders

when you come to it

not just one or two

if there were one or two

human relations would be a simple matter.

You know what they say?

MERIDEE

No.

No, I don't know what they say.

ISAAC

They say

there are as many kinds of love

as there are human hearts.

DIETER

And then, who knows how to be faithful any more?

What I want is someone I can count on forever.

I look around at all my friends

they're all looking for another conquest

but to me the greatest adventure of all

is absolute fidelity.

ISAAC

I agree completely.

DIETER

Someone you know is there for you
no matter what
and to whom you can be faithful, too
because
of all human qualities
this is the finest quality of all
to give and receive absolute trust
a person is never more vulnerable
than when he gives his life to another in this way
and never more protected
you fly above the earth
you live then in a place...:
one might say
that it feels divine

ISAAC

Faithfulness:
then you know
you've transcended the messiness of daily life
and achieved something immortal.
That,
to me,
is love.

MERIDEE

Are you getting married?

ISAAC

Oh, no. No, thank you very much.

MERIDEE

From the way you spoke....

ISAAC

I believe in faithfulness.
But marriage—
I'm not against it for others
but for myself

I've always thought I was
well, frankly,
a little special
and even though these days
it seems
anything can happen
and absolutely everyone is marrying
I'm not the sort who wants to just be leaping into the mainstream
and losing my
specialness

MERIDEE

The truth is
I don't think I'm getting married either.
It turns out
I don't have anyone I can count on
since my fiance just dumped me
and ran off.

DIETER

Well,
I think we can help you find him.

ISAAC

and then after we have him back
we can decide just what sort of wedding you prefer.

MERIDEE

Oh, thank you.

ISAAC [as they leave]

It could even be a simple wedding brunch
nothing elaborate
a simple quiche
a white wine
wedding cake and champagne
some little white silk things
whatever it is you want, dear,
that's what we want for you.

[Julian, almost all the way out with all the others,
stops,
turns back,
and, because it's beautiful here, and he is alone,
and because he has so few chances just to do what he likes to do
without someone criticizing him,
he steps forward
to sing.]

JULIAN SINGS

The good Lord makes both kinds of flowers
the good ones and the evil
the good flowers are our lifelong friends
the evil our undoing

The tawny gray, the regal royal
the creeping and the bloody red
the kidney-shaped
the wrinkle-leaved
the sugar-bearing, evergreen

the sweet-scented, pale blue
pure yellow, fruit bearing
holy moss
the Gorgon-like
lizard-headed
scorpion in the rocks

the ever flowering, semi-winged
the white haired scarlet leaf
the silky flowered, late bearing
yellow-green serpentine
the bristle-like horny-headed
helmet shaped ripening fruit

the hunchbacked new swollen
pouch-like speckled
smooth spiral

openmouthed
the star burst
winter flowering

The good Lord makes both kinds of flowers
the good ones and the evil
the good flowers are our lifelong friends
the evil our undoing.

[Does Ariel run in from one side,
turn and turn,
and run out the other side?

Or do you want to save this till after this next scene?]

FATHER THANE

Hello.

[Julian jumps, startled, and turns.]

JULIAN

Oh! A priest!

FATHER THANE

Sorry.

I didn't mean to frighten you.

I'm Father Thane.

And you are?

JULIAN

Julian. I'm Julian.

FATHER THANE

Hello, Julian.

People these days

they just assume

because you are a priest

you only want to have sex with them in some way.

JULIAN

Oh, no, no, no, no, no.

I didn't assume that at all.

Probably people think, some people:

celibacy

it's an unnatural state

and so of course it seeks some

outlet

and one never knows whether one oneself

will turn out to be

an outlet.

FATHER THANE

Right.

JULIAN

Whereas you yourself

you might not be seeking an outlet of any kind

you might be just happily

chaste.

FATHER THANE

Right.

JULIAN

Will you be conducting the wedding service, then?

FATHER THANE

No, I'm just a friend of the family.

I'll be attending as a guest.

JULIAN

Oh. Good. Good.

I always thought I might like to be celibate.

FATHER THANE

Really?

JULIAN

because my life has become so complicated
otherwise.

FATHER THANE

And yet,
it's not as though your life becomes so simple
if you are celibate.
You find then you still need to struggle
with all the human impulses
that continue to rise up within you.

JULIAN

Yes.

But then you can deal with them
like a hermit in a cave.
Because
all the complications of life
come from adding a second person on the earth.
In the earliest days of the theatre
you just had one actor on stage
telling a story
and then the Greeks added a second actor
and so you had
conflict
and then a third and fourth actor
and then you have plot complications
just like in life
so that finally a person is just adrift
in an entire society
frustrated at every turn
or helped along by strangers
whose motives are never entirely clear
wars break out and famines
young men get up on the rooftops of McDonalds
and shoot the innocent people in the parking lot
all these things become possible
as soon as you have more than one person on the earth.

FATHER THANE

And yet it could be
that a life without a second person
is not quite human in some way
and when you try to live such a life
your head simply fills up with uncontrollable imaginings
of what life would be like if there were another person in your life.

I myself find
when I am alone at my prayers
for no reason at all
my mind might suddenly turn to nature
and I will find myself thinking about
Releasing the Butterfly in Search of Fragrance
where the woman sits on a gnarly rock with her legs apart
and the man sends his jade whisk into her vagina
and moves it from side to side
to seek the heart of the flower.

Or the Lost Bird Returns to the Wood
where the woman lies back on the embroidered couch
with her legs in the air
grasping the man's thighs to guide him through the woods.

Or Letting the Bee Make Honey
where the woman is lying on her back on the brocade quilt
raising her legs aloft to meet the jade whisk.

Or the Starving Horse Races to the Trough
where the woman lies flat on the couch
with her arms wrapped around the man
and he supports her legs on his shoulders
so that the whole of the jade whisk enters the barn
and leaves not a trace behind.

Or Two Dragons Fight Till They Drop
where the woman's head rests beside the pillow
and her hands droop in defeat
as soft as cotton floss
and her soul is about to depart
on dreams of the future.

Do you see what I mean?

JULIAN [smitten, having fallen in love with the priest]

Yes.

Oh.

Yes.

Yes, I do.

I'm...

you see...

I have to leave.

[In complete confusion,
Julian runs out as fast as he can.]

The Priest's Lament.

With guitar and chamber orchestra

Father Thane sings part 9 of Bach's Cantata 208

Sheep May Safely Graze:

Schafe können sicher weiden,

Wo ein guter Hirte wacht.

Wo Regenten wohl regieren,

[If she hasn't done it just before Father Thane arrived,
does Ariel now run in from one side,
during his song, turn and turn,
and run out the other side?]

Kann man Ruh und Friede spüren

Und was Länder glücklich macht.

[He leaves.

Maria rushes in

shouting out.]

MARIA

Frank! Frank! My God,

the wedding guests are arriving.

Hello!

FRANCOIS [entering]

Maria!

MARIA

Francois!

Where has everyone gone?

The guests are coming....

DJAMILA [entering]

Hello! Hello!

Is anyone home?

[she is followed at once by her husband Vikram and her son Willy]

MARIA

Hello?

DJAMILA

Are we in the right place at all?

VIKRAM

Can this be it, out here in the woods?

[speaking to Maria as though assuming
she must be another of the wedding guests]

For Christ's sake

if they have to get married

why don't they do it at the courthouse

so they can go right down the hall and get a divorce afterwards?

MARIA

I beg your pardon?

FRANCOIS

Ah, you must be Amadou's father!

VIKRAM

Yes, Yes, I am.

FRANCOIS

I am Francois.

This is Meridee's mother.

[others are entering during this]

VIKRAM

Oh!

How do you do?

DJAMILA

Hello.

I'm so pleased to meet you.

MARIA

Maria.

DJAMILA

Maria. Maria.

I am Djamila, and this is Vikram.

MARIA

Frank, this is Amadou's mother and father.

FRANK

Ah! Delighted! Delighted!

VIKRAM

Are we in the right place
out here in the woods?

DJAMILA

And this is Amadou's brother Willy.

FRANCOIS

So!

The in-laws!

DJAMILA

And this is your brother?

FRANK

My brother?

MARIA

Ah. No. This is Francois.

DJAMILA

Francois.

MARIA

Francois is my very special friend.

DJAMILA

Ah.

VIKRAM

And where's your brother then? Was it your brother who was going to perform the wedding ceremony?

FRANK

My brother?

Oh, no, not my brother.

My mother.

VIKRAM

Your mother?

FRANK

Yes. She should be here soon. Very soon.

MARIA

Frank and his mother

FRANCOIS

They are

MARIA

Just as you would hope

FRANCOIS

Very close.

FRANK

Well, Willy!

What do you think of your brother being married, eh?

WILLY

What is the point of marriage
any more these days anyway?

MARIA

I'm sorry?

DJAMILA

Willy!

WILLY

Do they think something is going to change
because they've had a wedding?

VIKRAM

Willy!

EDMUND

How do you do?

I am a friend of the family.

I am Edmund.

DJAMILA

Hello, Edmund.

WILLY

And then everybody has the same boring thing,
with the same boring speeches,
the same boring white dress,

the same boring food.

I would rather go to a funeral than a wedding.

At a wedding

everyone is supposed to have the greatest day of their lives
and they never do.

At a funeral no one expects to have a wonderful day
and so usually it turns out to be really nice.

Why was this idea of marriage ever invented?

because women

because they have menstrual periods

are subject to chronic shortages of iron in their systems
and so they require constant infusions of meat

but because they were not hunters

they were never hunters

they had to find a way to manipulate men

with sexual favors

into bringing home blood-soaked dinners every night

and if they were good at it

to marry them

to have a steady supply of meat

FRANCOIS [cheerfully]

Well, a relationship is hard to sustain these days.

FRANK

Oh, yes.

Getting married is not the end of the story, that's for sure!

[One by one

nearly all the characters enter during the following scene
and gradually fill the stage and join the conversation.]

EDMUND

The main thing in love, I think, is trust

the trust of another human being

this is what we want

and what breaks our hearts
if we think we have it
and then we lose it.

VIKRAM

Trust, yes.

DJAMILA

Yes. Trust. Absolutely.

FRANK

Of course trust.

I would never argue with that.

VIKRAM

And then, too,

I like big women with a full figure.

And the female figure

as it appears in all the great works of art throughout history

These days all the fashion magazines

show those bony, anorexic women.

They're bulimic.

They vomit up their food.

FRANK

Right.

FRANCOIS

Right.

DJAMILA

Vikram....

EDMUND

They all feel bad about their bodies.

FRANCOIS

It's a sad thing.

VIKRAM

If I were a designer,
I would design clothes that looked great on those curves,
on those full, round shapes of the female figure.

DJAMILA

Vikram....

VIKRAM

And I don't like girls who dress in high heels.
It's not attractive.

FRANCOIS

What do you like then?

VIKRAM

Oh. A Catholic-schoolgirl outfit.

FRANCOIS

A Catholic-schoolgirl outfit?

VIKRAM

Yes. Definitely. A Catholic-schoolgirl outfit.

DJAMILA

Vikram, I don't think people want to know this.
This is more than people want to know when you first meet them.

VIKRAM

Dja, we are not secretive people with things to hide.

DJAMILA

Still....

VIKRAM

When Djamila first met me,
she used to dress up to suit my fancy.
And then she kind of got tired of that.
She used to put on white knee socks

DJAMILA
Vikram....

VIKRAM
and these little schoolgirl outfits.
She was a lot chubbier in the early days.

DJAMILA
Vikram....

VIKRAM
Now she's gotten quite thin.
It's a little disheartening to see her derriere go down.
But she's happier being that way, so what the heck.
But she's still quite muscular.
She says her ideal body type now is Lance Armstrong's.

EDMUND
Lance Armstrong...

VIKRAM
Whereas, I remain basically a bottom connoisseur, you see.
Djamila lured me to France you know
to get me away from all the big-bottomed American women.
That's where the biggest keisters in the world are —
America.
That's where I lost my virginity.

DJAMILA
I lost my virginity in a ritual deflowering.

FRANCOIS
I'm sorry?

DJAMILA
A ritual deflowering.

VIKRAM
Dja....

DJAMILA

Where I grew up
the priest would take the young girls
when they were eight or nine or ten years old
into a sort of a tent
and spend the night with them
of course there was music
and there was a feast beforehand
and then the priest would deflower the girl

VIKRAM

Dja....

DJAMILA

and the bodily fluids that flowed in the process
they were believed to be extremely precious.
So they were collected very carefully in a bowl
and mixed together with wine
and the next morning
this mixture would be rubbed
on the foreheads of the girl's family and friends.
Some even tasted it.

VIKRAM

Dja....

DJAMILA

What?

VIKRAM

Maybe this is not what people want to hear.

DJAMILA

They want to hear about your Catholic school girls
but they don't want to hear about my deflowering?

VIKRAM

It may be just a little more than everyone wants to know
at this moment

that's all I'm saying.
I was trying just to break the ice
with a little casual conversation
but here,
I don't know,
this is perhaps a little more....

DJAMILA
Are you saying I am embarrassing to you?

VIKRAM
No, no, certainly not.

DJAMILA
I think that's what you're saying.

VIKRAM
No....

DJAMILA
You say you take me as I am.
You love me exactly as I am.
And then it turns out not to be true at all.

VIKRAM
Oh, Dja....

DJAMILA
I don't have to stay around and embarrass you, you know.
I can leave.

VIKRAM
Dja....

DJAMILA
I can just leave!

[she goes]

VIKRAM

Dja!

MARIA

Oh, my
I'm sorry.

FRANK

Is it something we said?

VIKRAM

No, no, of course I've done it, you know.

MARIA

Is this true
that she had a ritual deflowering?

FRANCOIS

Well, everyone has a ritual deflowering in a way
only with a different ritual.

HEINER

I don't think I had a ritual deflowering.

JULIAN

Of course you had a ritual deflowering.

HEINER

What do you know about my ritual deflowering?

EDMUND

I had a ritual deflowering.

[Djamila returns, talking as she enters.]

DJAMILA

Or I could tell about my circumcision.

VIKRAM
Oh, Dja....

DJAMILA
Everyone thinks
oh what a terrible thing
this must be stopped!
But where I grew up
if a woman was not circumcised
she was not a grownup
she was an outcast
the only women who were not circumcised
were the prostitutes!
And this was not about love and romance.
This was about patriarchy and property
and handing girls over to new owners
and not about big keisters and people marrying each other
because they have fallen in love!

VIKRAM
Dja....

DJAMILA
When you were a girl,
people would say to you
"It is our culture;"
or, "It is our religious obligation;"
or "All normal people have done it,"
or "It makes you clean, beautiful, better, sweet-smelling."
So everyone did it.
And what are you saying to me now?
That because I have done this
Now I am not beautiful?
Now you are embarassed about me?

[she leaves again]

VIKRAM
Dja....

MARIA

Is this true, what she says?

VIKRAM

That she is circumcised?

MARIA

Yes.

VIKRAM

Yes.

MARIA

I had no idea
this is still done.

VIKRAM

It turns out
it doesn't matter
how you were raised
or whether you had an arranged marriage
or you married for love
because the complications of two people living together
you end up with the same problems.

When my my first wife left me
I came home and found
the house was empty
I went from room to room
and every room was empty

she left flowers on the kitchen table
but on her bedside table
her books were gone
the shelves were empty of her books
all her clothes were gone from the closet
every dress, everything of hers was gone
I felt my heart had been removed
my life was gone

FRANCOIS

Well, we've all been there
the bare floors

HEINER

the empty walls

FRANCOIS

Right.

[as this goes on,

clearly all those who are joining in the regrets of Vikram
are feeling, with their own memories, their own sense of
regret, bitterness, anger, melancholy, scorn, etc.]

FRANK

and all her clothes

VIKRAM

every dress

EDMUND

all the hangers in the closet empty

FRANCOIS

all the bottles and jars the lotions and other things in the bathroom

VIKRAM

everything was gone
and I went to the phone and called her
crying
no sobbing
like an abandoned woman
how could you have done this
oh god you must feel such hatred and such anger
she was gone
she was just gone

ISAAC

as though you were a dime a dozen

JULIAN

it took your breath away

DIETER

to see how it was he had felt about you all that time

[Meridee enters

and watches the crowd from a distance

with a growing sense of horror

at human relationships.]

HEINER

the absence

keeping a distance

JULIAN

not softening an edge of possibility

HEINER

keeping all doors firmly closed

no hint of any future possibility

no breath of hope

no dinner, no late night coffee

no date of any kind

not even a phone call

JULIAN

such indifference

HEINER

such lack of any care

WILLY

to turn from love to such coldness

so suddenly

suddenly having a torrent of water in the face

as though the whole floor of the earth
dropped from beneath my feet
was no longer there
and I fell
an animal can't understand what's happened all of a sudden
when the forest floor just disappears from beneath his feet
he flails and falls through space

VIKRAM

Sometimes you think,
oh,
men's lives.

FATHER THANE

Right.

MARIA

But then you think:
well, I mean: women's lives, too.

JULIAN

And then what happens
when this is the way that people have grown up.

A friend of mine was in a friend's apartment
when their little boy cried out in the next room,
No Mamma, No!
And then they heard a thud,
and the boy was silent.
They ran into the room
and saw the woman Rachel standing over her son,
with a lead pipe in her hand.
The boy lay there in a pool of blood,
his head split open.
Rachel said: They won't get him now.
And then, before anyone could do anything,
she ran to the window and threw herself out.

HEINER

Yes, well, then:

What I'm told is

during the fighting

sometimes they took the babies by the feet,

and swung them around

and smashed their heads against the side of the truck,

or against a wall.

As for the mothers,

they couldn't even cry.

JULIAN

What I heard

a woman was holding a baby in her arms,

begging that she be shot first

and that the baby be spared.

There was a crowd on the other side of the fence,

raising their hands to take the baby

if it should be passed over to them.

The woman was about to hand the baby to the crowd,

when the soldier took it from her,

shot her twice,

and then took the baby in his hands

and tore it

as you would tear a rag.

[Everyone now is holding their heads in their hands.]

Djamila returns,

addressing Vikram.]

DJAMILA

Probably you think,

wouldn't it be convenient if I would just leave

and not embarrass you in front of Meridee's family?

But, no, Vikram,

I will not be insulted.

I will not be humiliated.

I am a person who needs to be accepted

and loved
like anyone else
for exactly who I am.

VIKRAM

Oh, Djamila, I do love you.

DJAMILA

And accepted!
Not, oh, yes, I love you
but now, please
would you become an entirely different person?

VIKRAM

Dja, you know I love you for exactly who you are.

MARIA

Although, let's be honest,
woman to woman
and now that we are to be members of the same family
maybe he deserves a little bit of a break
because,
let's face it,
what you said
it was just a little embarrassing.

DJAMILA

Oh!
Were you embarrassed?
Is that what you're saying?

WILLY

Well, mother,
sometimes you are embarrassing to people.

DJAMILA

Am I?

VIKRAM

Let's not be attacking your mother, Willy.

FRANCOIS

Ah. Things are moving much too fast.

WILLY

No one would need to attack anyone
if you ever stood up for yourself.

Look who you've become!

You've become a complete spineless amoeba.

EDMUND

I don't think it's ever useful to call anyone an amoeba.

DJAMILA

And who are you to attack my son?

FRANK

And who are you to attack Edmund?

To be honest,

from the moment you arrived

have there been any niceties of any sort?

Has anyone said anything nice to Maria

about what a wonderful job she has done
arranging the wedding?

[Willy throws a ball of mud at Frank.

Frank looks down at his chest

where the mudball nailed him.]

FRANK

What is this? What is this?

WILLY

It is a mudball.

If you want to sling mud

I will sling mud!

[A moment's silence.
Then Edmund reaches down into the mud pit,
picks up a fistful of mud
and throws it at Willy.]

MARIA
Edmund!

EDMUND
What does he think?
That he can just throw mud at someone all he wants?

[Vikram throws a fistful of mud at Edmund.]

EDMUND
Are you throwing mud at me?

VIKRAM
Yes, I am!
I am throwing mud and throwing mud
and I will throw mud all I want
because I am throwing mud!!!!

[Frank mudballs Vikram.]

MARIA
Frank!

FRANK
If you throw mud
you should know
you are only throwing mud at yourself!!!!

VIKRAM
I will mud you and mud you
if you mud me
I will mud you all over!

[Djamila takes hold of Frank's shirt
and drags him into the mudpit!

Music crashes in
at full, deafening volume—
possibly Widor's Toccata
from Organ Symphony Number 5.

Mud wrestling.

Frank and Djamila grapple in the mudpit.

Willy drags Edmund into the mudpit.

Maria drags Vikram into the pit.

Does Ariel run in from one side, turn and turn,
and run out the other side?

Francois jumps in to gang up on Vikram.

Various people are yelling things as this goes on.

And then suddenly someone cries out!]

MARIA
Wait!
Stop!

[the music stops at once]

Stop!
Help!
I'm sinking!
This is quicksand!

FRANCOIS
Quicksand!

EDMUND
Quicksand!
Help!

[everyone begins to help everyone else
pulling those in the middle toward the edge of the pit]

FRANCOIS
Take my hand!

DJAMILA
I'm sinking!

VIKRAM
I've got you!
I've got you!

EDMUND
Don't struggle, that's the thing!
Relax!
Go limp!
Go limp!

FRANK
No, no, no, it's not quicksand!
This is
not
quicksand!
This is mud!

MARIA
Oh.
Mud.

EDMUND
Right.
Mud.

[Meridee steps forward.]

MERIDEE

So this is how married people talk?
This is how it is to be married?

MARIA

Oh, Meridee, darling!
We thought we had lost you!

MERIDEE

This is an absolute nightmare!

[Amadou enters.]

AMADOU

Meridee!

MERIDEE

Amadou!

AMADOU

I'm so sorry, Meridee,
behaving the way I did,
running off the way I did
panicking
that's what it was
and I have no excuse
it was just cowardly
I guess I was just thinking
the way I suppose all grooms do
I was about to lose my freedom!
and what was the point?
it felt suddenly like lifelong prison!
and I have so enjoyed being a free person
answerable to no one but myself
able to do just anything I want
on the spur of the moment
and I beg your forgiveness, Meridee,
thank god I've found you before it's too late.

MERIDEE

I've looked for you everywhere.

I've thought

of course you were nervous

and meeting my family for the first time

it hasn't been easy for you,

but the truth is, Amadou,

it hasn't been easy for me either

and now

it is too late.

I've had time to think about it,

and I hate you.

Because

the way you can tell if someone loves you

is they never let go of you

never

they just never let go of you

that's how you can tell.

And I just hate you.

I hate you and I hate you

and I hate you forever

and I will never ever marry you!

[she turns and runs out]

AMADOU

Meridee!

No!

No, Meridee!

FRANK

What's happening?

MARIA

Don't let her run away!

FRANCOIS

She can't mean it.

HEINER

I'll bring her back.

ALL [variously]

We can catch her!

Don't let her get away!

I'll come with you!

Come this way!

Meridee!

Meridee!

[Music

at full volume,

Wagner's Wedding March from Lohengrin:

"Here Comes the Bride"

as everyone dashes this way and that

out into the woods after Meridee

leaving Amadou standing alone in the woods.

Does Ariel run in from one side and out the other?]

Act II

[Music.

Brahms or Alessandro Marcello.

The coffin arrives.

It is carried in by Bob and Karl.

As they bring it in and put it down on the ground,

Bob is talking.]

BOB

Oak,

cherry,

poplar,

walnut,

and of course mahogany and maple
the hardwoods
you don't see a pine coffin so often these days
too cheap too cheap
not a big enough profit margin for the undertaker
although, when my time comes,
I'll be wanting a plain pine box
for the simple fact
they disintegrate faster than any other
return your body to the earth
where it belongs.
The main thing you'll be wanting to avoid
is your metal coffin
because when you seal a body into a metal coffin
you see
it doesn't decompose the way it ought to
because of the lack of oxygen.
In a metal casket
your body will just turn
to ooze.

KARL
Ooze?

BOB
Ooze.
That's not what I'll be wanting for myself.

KARL
No.

BOB
96% of the human race
will fit in a casket six feet six inches long
two feet high, two feet wide.
The great equalizer.
Except for your unusually obese American
they will be needing one of your special-made Goliath caskets.
But your ordinarily obese person you can turn a little to the side.

The tall ones you can flex the knees,
take off the shoes,
or, if you need,
remove the feet
because, ordinarily,
they don't show.

KARL

There's a lot to learn.
Most people think your common gravedigger
is a nincompoop.

BOB

Yes, they do,
but experience is going to count,
as it does in any profession
and then there are the specialities of course.
We made a casket for a fisherman
that had an outboard motor on it.

KARL

That's nice.

BOB

And then your parish churches will often use a "slip coffin"
for burying their paupers.
When you bring that style of coffin to the grave,
you just sort of

tilt it up at one end

and the body will slip right out into the grave
you can use a coffin over and over again this way,

[They have set the coffin down,
and leaned their shovels against it,
and now they sit on the coffin, mopping their brows.]

but, of course, no matter who you are
the worms will consume you in the end.

KARL
Will they?

BOB
Oh, yes, they will.
Indeed, if a body be left out in the woods after death
your fleshflies and your blowflies
will arrive within seconds
attracted, it seems, by what is known as
the universal death scent
within an hour there will be maggots
and the flies will lay thousands of eggs
in a body's mouth, nose, and ears,
and when they have finished feeding
they will be replaced by beetles
and then by spiders and mites and millipedes
that will feed on the body itself
or on the other insects that are feeding on the body.

KARL
I don't see why a person wants to be buried.

BOB
And yet they do.

KARL
In spite of the risks.

BOB
A person loves the idea of forever.
A thing that lasts.
Eternity itself.
Not like so much of life
that comes and goes—
and you have to wonder:
where did it go?

Was I committed to anything?
Did anything ever matter?

KARL

Still I'd rather not be buried.
I don't see the point.
And then, if you are buried,
why make such a thing out of it with a crowd of people
you never wanted to see while you were alive
and have the priests and rabbis get up
and say all sorts of things
that no one believes any more
so that you start out on your journey into eternity
based on remarks you think are a total lie?
No.
No, I don't think so.

BOB

Many people seek an alternative these days
although I must say, for myself,
a good old fashioned burial is what I'll be wanting.

KARL

No, it's not for me.
I don't think so.
And then the whole idea of burial
has taken such a hold on the culture
that a person may be wondering:
what are the chances of being buried by mistake?
while I am still alive?

BOB

And we can only say:
it happens.

KARL

There was that unhappy case of the young girl
who died of diptheria

and the family, fearing a spread of the disease,
buried her quickly in the family mausoleum

BOB

and then several years later
one of the family's sons was killed in the war

KARL

and they took his body to be placed in the mausoleum
when the tomb was opened
they found inside a tiny skeleton
the size of that young girl
huddled just by the door.

BOB

So of course, people will wonder:
is it possible I will be an archaeological find one day?
how safe are corpses?

KARL

why are corpses stolen?

BOB

can a cadaver be ground up for tooth implants?
how widespread is cannibalism?

KARL

how does my name get in the newspaper?

BOB

Sometimes people are consoled
when they know that the departed stay with us
longer usually than we think.
Your unembalmed body will take ten to twelve years to turn to dust
that is to say
to decompose down to its little bony skeleton
if it is buried without a coffin.
A body in water will decompose four times faster
and a body left out in the open

will decompose eight times faster.
But for a body buried in a coffin
your bony skeleton may take from months to millenia
to turn to dust.
There are those who wonder
what will my disposal do to the environment
to the soil and to the air?
What will happen if you cremate a person, say,
who has a plutonium powered pacemaker?
Will they release radioactivity into the environment?
Why do dead bodies float?
What will happen to a body adrift in space?
Are bodies buried at sea eaten by the fish?
How permanent are individual graves?
Can a corpse be held accountable for unpaid debts?
If I change my mind, can I be buried after I have been frozen?
Can only part of me be buried?
Who is entitled to a parade?
What is meant by the phrase "stripping the flesh?"
What is necrophilia?
How do you shrink a head?
What is meant by death?

What can we do about it?

[long silence
while we consider this]

FATHER THANE [entering, clutching his prayer book]
I beg your pardon.
I'm told there's been a death?

[and then he is immediately
completely marginalized as the scene goes on.

Maria and Francois and Edmund
and Isaac and Dieter all enter talking at the same time.]

MARIA

If the whole family wants to get lost in the woods

FRANCOIS

She has no sense of direction this is her only problem

EDMUND

Like mother like son isn't this the way it always is

BOB

Oh, excuse me.

ISAAC

I agree with you completely

DIETER

Let them find their own way back to civilization.

MARIA

the boy has no more sense than his mother

BOB

Excuse me.

FRANCOIS

if it weren't for the danger of the quicksand who would care?

EDMUND

and now we should all get poison ivy looking for them?

ISAAC

I agree with you completely

DIETER

I don't see why they can't find their own way back.

BOB

Excuse me.

FRANCOIS

Yes, excuse me. Just a moment.
I think as far as we are concerned,
we have done all that can be expected.

BOB

Beg your pardon,
but we've brought the coffin.

FRANCOIS

Coffin?

ISAAC

Did we order a coffin?

DIETER

I don't think so.

ISAAC

I didn't.

BOB

We were told to bring it here.

DIETER

I don't think anyone here ordered a coffin.

ISAAC

No one here wants a coffin.

BOB

Nonetheless,
we were told to deliver it here.

EDMUND

No one wants a coffin!

BOB

You see,
my friend and I
we've carried this coffin all the way out here
into the woods
and I don't think we are in any frame of mind
to carry it all the way back again through the woods.
So we will be needing one of you to sign for the coffin.

EDMUND

Sign for it?

BOB

We'll be needing a signature
on the delivery form.
Possibly the next of kin?

FRANCOIS

Next of kin?
Is there a body in the coffin?

BOB

Well, of course there's a body.

ISAAC

What body?
We're not expecting a body.

BOB

It's not my body.
I am simply delivering a body.
And somebody will be accepting delivery.

MARIA

Whose body is it?

BOB

Well, I wouldn't know.
I suppose it must be on the delivery form here.

[taking out a piece of paper]

Let me see,
it would be Georgette Sedgwick.

MARIA

Georgette Sedgwick! What are you saying?
That's Frank's mother!
Are you certain you mean to say Georgette Sedgwick?

BOB [reading from the form]

Georgette Sedgwick, that's what it says here.

MARIA

Oh, my god, Georgette! Georgette!
She's dead?
She's in the coffin?

FRANCOIS

What happened?

BOB

We don't know that.

MARIA

Oh, my god!

BOB

We were told she was on her way here
and had a heart attack
something of the sort.
I'm not a doctor
this is what we were told.

KARL

If you like
I can conduct a service
because I am
a deacon of the church.

FATHER THANE

Or, in fact, I might....

MARIA

Oh, Georgette!
She was coming to perform a wedding ceremony
for my daughter and her fiance.

BOB

I'm sorry.

MARIA

She had some difficulties with her heart,
yes,
but, oh, no,
no one thought she was going to die.
She was much too young to die.

BOB

These days.

ISAAC

These days exactly.

KARL

Much too young to die.

BOB

Where are the bride and groom, then?

MARIA

They've called the wedding off.
O my god, what a disaster
how this has all turned out.

[some of the others begin to enter
Vikram, Willy,
the young couples,
everyone filters in one or two at a time]

VIKRAM

What's happened?

MARIA

Frank's mother,
she's been delivered in a coffin!

WILLY

A coffin?

VIKRAM

I'm sorry.

MERIDEE

Mother! What is it?

MARIA

Oh, Meridee, my dear,
your grandmother Georgette is dead.

MERIDEE

Dead! How can she be dead?

JONATHAN

How do you know she's dead?

EDMUND

She was just delivered in this coffin.

FATHER THANE

If you like, I think I could....

TESSA

Who brought her here?

JONATHAN

Was she with someone?

MERIDEE

Does dad know?

FRANCOIS

Where is Frank?

EDMUND

No, he doesn't know.

MERIDEE

Oh, my god, how did it happen?

FRANK

Maria, what's happening?

MARIA

Oh, Frank, your mother has died.

FRANK

Died!

MARIA

She's just been brought to us
in this coffin.

FRANK [instantly wailing]

My mother died!

Oh, god. Oh, no!

[he collapses to the ground]

EDMUND, MARIA, FRANCOIS
Frank!

FATHER THANE
Frank, perhaps I could....

MERIDEE, JONATHAN, TESSA
Dad! Oh, Dad!

FRANK
What's happened?
How could this be?
I spoke to her this morning!
Oh, my god!
I just spoke to her!

[the others gather around Frank,
help him to sit up

he sobs uncontrollably]

My mother!
My mother!

[Edmund begins to weep.

Karl starts to keen— why?
because that is his job at funerals?]

EDMUND
Oh, Frank, I'm so sorry.

MARIA [about Karl]
What is this?

[Bob shrugs.]

FRANCOIS
Here, Frank, let me help you.

ISAAC

I have him!

[trying to help Frank stand up,
he collapses again to the ground]

MARIA

We just saw her last week.

BOB

Karl....

FRANK

We had dinner with her!
She had the salmon with wild rice.

MARIA

No, Frank, she had the risotto.

FRANK

Who had the salmon?

MARIA

I had the salmon.

BOB

Karl....

FRANCOIS

How can things happen so suddenly in life?
You think there is always time
and then
poof
it's all gone
the whole world
the universe
it's all gone
and you don't have another moment of it
and you can't say

oh but wait just another moment
you can't talk your way out of it
everything is changed all at once
and forever

BOB

Karl, that's enough.

[Karl stops keening.]

FATHER THANE

Sometimes you think....

FRANK

I want to see her!

Let me see her!

BOB

It's a sealed coffin.

FRANK

I want to see her.

I want to hold her hand.

[he is trying to get to her coffin,
the others helping him]

I can just hold her hand one last time

[he hugs the coffin]

Oh, mother.

My dear mother

I loved you so

I loved you so

MARIA [holding him]

Frank...

Frank...

FRANK

Never mind.

I'll go with her!

I'll go with her!

I'll lie down in the ground
and go to sleep beside her

[he takes a shovel and begins to dig]

FRANCOIS [an effort to be reasonable]

Frank....

FRANK

how can I ever leave?

EDMUND

Let me help you, Frank.

[he takes the other shovel and starts to dig]

JONATHAN

Should we get another shovel?

Here, Dad, let me help you.

[he takes the shovel from Frank]

FATHER THANE

And yet, you might think....

FRANK

No one knows.

You think your life will go on and on

just the way it is today

and then

it could be you forgot to say goodnight

you might have had some difference of opinion at the dinner table

or you might even have had an argument

and then your grandmother falls into a coma

in the middle of the night

you wait by her hospital bed
hoping she will wake up again
just so you can say you are sorry
and then she dies
you think
it could be that she had a stroke
because of the argument that you had
and you can never speak to her again
the times you had together
the stories she told you
the advice she gave you
the walks around the block
all gone forever

[Frank throws himself to the ground
and begins digging a grave with his hands]

MERIDEE

Dad...

Dad...

MARIA

Let me help you, Frank.

[She gets down on the ground and digs with her hands, too.]

MERIDEE

I can help you, Dad.

[She gets down on the ground and digs with her hands, too.]

NOTE:

THE REMINISCENCES THAT FOLLOW

CAN JUST BE CUT

IF THIS ALL SEEMS TOO LONG

OR THEY CAN BE KEPT

IF YOU LIKE THEM

OR

IF MORE TIME IS NEEDED FOR GRAVE DIGGING

DIETER

I remember
the wail of my mother when my brother died,
we thought she was laughing
and I went into the kitchen,
she was holding onto the counter,
she had collapsed there
and the phone was dangling from its cord
and I'd never heard a sound like my mother was making.

[Everyone is down on the ground, digging with their hands.]

DJAMILA

I remember
the happiest times of my life as a child
were with my brothers
collecting the shells along the shore
and then one day
when he was a small boy
it seems my brother just decided to walk out into the ocean
he loved it so

[by now several of them,
including Frank,
are sitting on the edge of the grave
with their feet in the grave]

JONATHAN

I remember my dog George became deaf and blind,
and finally
just walked around the outside of the house all day,
Around and around the house,
and as he got older, the path got wider and wider
until one day he just fell into pool and drowned,
and so we had him cremated
and spread his ashes in a circle around the house.

AMADOU

My grandfather was dying in hospital,
and then one day he escaped,
and went home,
shot his wife,
and then went back to hospital to die.

TESSA

Every funeral I've ever attended:
it ends up the guys outside comparing cars,
looking at all the cars with the hoods up,
and talking about who has the best car.

WILLY

Usually whenever I go to a funeral,
I'm mostly thinking I'm so certain
I'm going to do something inappropriate,
and then I do.

FRANK

Oh, mother!
I'll go with you!

[he throws himself down into the grave and disappears;

everyone looks around at one another,
not knowing what to do;
one by one they step back out of the grave,

and finally

Father Thane sings
the beautiful, quiet
Vaughan Williams' "The Call"]

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, My Light, my Feast, my Strength:
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move:
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a heart, as joys in love.

Or else he could sing
Purcell's Hark! Hark! Each Tree!

or Purcell's Elegy Upon the Death of Queen Mary:

O Dive custos Auriacae Domus
Et spes labantis certior imperi;
Orebus adversis vocande,
O superum, o superum decus in secundis!
Seu te fluentem pronus ad Isida
In vota fervens, in vota fervens Oxonidum chorus,
Seu te precantur, quos remoti
Unda lavat properata Cami,
Descende, descende coelo non ita creditas,
Visurus, visurus aedes praesidiis tuis,
Descende, descende visurus penates,
Penates Caesaris, et, et penetrati sacrum.
Maria musis flebilis occidit,
Maria gentis deliciae breves,
Maria, Maria occidit,
O flete Mariam, o flete Mariam,
Flete Mariam, o flete Camoenae,
O flete Divae! Flete dea moriente.

[Frank stands up in the grave.]

FRANK

People say that
in time
we recover from the tragedies of life

but this is not true

we never recover

we take them with us as we go

we take them along with our good days as we go

and this is who we are

none of us ever escapes from life itself
as we do from the difficulties of each day

in the end
life consumes us

and in the end
finally
the curse of life is that
either you die before you want to

or else you live until you live in such pain
or
confusion

that life itself becomes the worst torment of all

so that life has embedded in it
the most appalling predicament there could be
the tragedy of life is inescapable in the end

and why is this?

you think
if you had a choice
you wouldn't choose to put yourself in such a position
and yet you would
and if you could
you would put yourself in the same position
over and over and over again

MARIA
Frank....

FRANCOIS
Here, Frank. Let me give you a hand.

[Maria and Francois and Edmund
all help Frank step up out of the grave.]

JULIAN
If you like
if you wish there would be a little ceremony
I think we can help
because normally
we do funerals as well as weddings

HEINER
Right.

JULIAN
Heiner and I
we are usually the specialists for funerals
Isaac and Dieter do the weddings
but we do the funerals

HEINER
we weren't prepared really for a funeral, so
we haven't brought everything with us
but some things are easy to do

You can take an apple, for example,
and carve the loved one's name into it
and bury it.

JULIAN

This is very environmentally sensitive
and many people like it.

HEINER

No.

HEINER

Well. Or,
we can do some portions of the Japanese ceremony
You know, customarily
the body is cremated.
And then the guests take their first meal
in the crematorium with the ashes.
And then after the meal
the relatives pick the bones out of the ash
and pass them from person to person
with their chopsticks.

JULIAN

I don't think....

HEINER

No, this is not what you want.

JULIAN

We have also from time to time
done the Zoroastrian ceremony

HEINER

this is very popular with some people

JULIAN

with the drinking of the consecrated Haoma juice
and the pomegranate

and then the part of the ceremony called the sagdid
where a dog is brought in to see the body of the deceased.

HEINER

But perhaps this isn't....

JULIAN

No....

HEINER

And of course
people no longer want to do
the breaking of fingers
or the cutting off of earlobes
and the beating of themselves with stones

JULIAN

and you can't break the bones of slaves
these days

HEINER

or kill a person's spouse
to bury them with the body.

JULIAN

Still, there are some things that are easy to do
we brought some cannon to fire off at the wedding
and we can shoot the cannon for the funeral
this is often done
and people seem to like that
we can spread flowers and the teeth of dogs on the ground
and certainly we can all join hands
and sit in a circle around the coffin
let's do that
let's start with that

[everyone begins to do this]

because, in a sense,
this is the most basic ritual of all
the sense of community gathering
around the loved one
the circle of life going on
and then people can do whatever it is they feel moved to do

[everyone is sitting now in silence

and Heiner begins to sing

the extremely, extremely low-voiced vocalizing of a Tibetan monk

and, as this goes on for a while,

soon the vocalizing is punctuated by the sound of cymbals,
the Tibetan Rolmo and Sylnyen cymbals
that Julian can do

the low-voiced singing continues with cymbals

and then soon is joined by the Tibetan drum, the rGna
which Dieter can do

and Julian joins in the vocalizing

and then Isaac and Dieter join the vocalizing

and then we hear the long, low, sustained blast
of the Tibetan trumpet, the Dung

and soon after the piercing reed instruments, the rGaling
and the shell trumpet, the Dung-dkar
and the high-pitched trumpet, the rKangling

cannon are shot off

and the keening begins

the wild, high-pitched keening and ululating
and then Bob and Karl pick up the coffin
and, holding the coffin high above their heads,
walking in wide, wide circles
yelling and keening as they go
as drums and trumpets cut loose in wild, deafening chaotic music
everyone (except the wedding planners) is at first confused by this
they look around uncertainly from one to the other
until Frank gets up and goes after the coffin
soon Edmund rises to join him
and then Maria
and Francois
and the children and all the others
except the wedding planners who remain chanting and keening
they walk around and around and yell and keen
[Ariel runs in, joins the others, and runs out again]
until, at last, exhausted,
the coffin is brought back to the center of the circle
and everyone sits again
it is quiet for a time

and then Djamila begins quietly to sing a moving South African song

which is serious and heartbreaking.

Here is a place saver, not the real song:

DJAMILA [singing]

Aih, dia deh aku Kumang Jawai ti bejalai,
Nengah tembawai udu panjai matang lensat,
Aku meda sibau pemadu mansau, udu pengelebat,
Ka aku niki wai menyadi,
Tulang aku lemi enda alah pakap,
Ka aku nyarau iya Kumang Kumbau,
Isau aku lembau enda uluh mantap;
Ka aku nyulok iya Kumang Demok,
Laban penyuluk enda ulih datai sipat;
Tang bisi buah Kumang beremah,
Labuh ka tanah ka arung lengkap,
Ka aku pakai, nyawa aku enggai,
Enda ulih nyuap

[silence]

FRANK

The truth is
I will miss her.
And I only hope she will come to visit me
in my dreams.
I think she will
I think this is how generous she is
that she will come back to me
again and again
at least for a while
for a year or two
to help me through this time
and I only wish
I could help her, too.

MARIA

There, there, Frank.

[Edmund puts his arm around Frank.

Bob and Karl lower the coffin into the ground.

Meanwhile Isaac and Dieter and the other wedding planners
have slipped out
and now return with champagne and glasses.]

ISAAC

I know it is not entirely appropriate—
champagne—
but
perhaps something to drink—
and we had the champagne for the wedding.

[glasses are poured and handed around]

KARL

If you will permit me
I know it may be a little inappropriate
for a stranger to speak on an occasion such as this
and to speak of love
and yet
if any moment is appropriate to speak of love
it seems to me this would be such a moment.
Because,
well,
in my life
I've had some time to read
and I remember in the Symposium
Plato asks: "What then is Love?"
And he answers:
Love is neither mortal nor immortal,
but a great spirit,
and like all spirits
Love is intermediate between the divine and the mortal.

FRANCOIS

Right.

This is very true.

KARL

And what then is the power of love?

The power of love

is that love interprets between gods and men,

Love is the mediator who spans the chasm which divides them,

and therefore in him all is bound together,

and through him the arts of the prophet and the priest,

and all of prophecy and incantation, find their way.

[silence]

FRANCOIS

What does this mean?

KARL

I'm sorry?

FRANCOIS

What does this mean what you say?

KARL

It means:

the leap of faith

the hope in the future

the sacredness of the shared life

this is what we feel

when we have lost someone

at the moment of death

just as this is what we feel

when we find someone

when we fall in love.

[silence]

FRANCOIS

I see.

EDMUND

Right.

DJAMILA

I think this is true.

VIKRAM

This could be true.

JULIAN

This is why

really

I have always felt

most connected to life when I am present

at a wedding or a funeral.

WILLY

Well, I would say

more at a funeral than at a wedding.

JONATHAN

Yes.

WILLY

Because a wedding is stupid.

JONATHAN

But a funeral

you don't expect to have a good time,

WILLY

and then you find for some reason

you really like it.

JONATHAN

Because, probably

after a funeral you find you love life more
because you have seen the dark side for a moment

WILLY

and so you always leave the cemetery
with mixed feelings
of sadness and happiness
and guilt that you've had such a good time.

JONATHAN

The trouble is
guys marry charm.
They marry a sweet smile.

WILLY

They marry clear skin and bright eyes,
soft lips, warm hands.

JONATHAN

They marry curves in a pretty print dress
and silken hair that smells like warm milk
and new-mown grass.

WILLY

They marry necking on back roads
with crickets chirping in the woods and warm breezes
and then they don't understand what went wrong.

JONATHAN

Fifty percent of marriages end in divorce.

JAMES

That doesn't seem bad to me.

WILLY

What?

JAMES

Fifty percent of marriages fail?
You know, like 80% of new businesses fail
but that doesn't stop people from being capitalists.
Fifty percent success rate is really high.
And then everyone gets married again and again
until almost everyone is married
even if it takes two or three times to get it right
it's like baseball.
You're like an allstar if you get a hit one out of three times at bat!
And a home run
that's like hardly ever
but you don't hear people booing anyone
just because they don't get a home run
every time they come up to bat!

JONATHAN

This is insane!
Trying to raise your batting average?
Trying to score?
And then people tell you they marry for love?

WILLY

It has nothing to do with love.

JONATHAN

It has to do with progeny and property.

WILLY

So what is this with gay people getting married?

JONATHAN

Last time I checked gays and lesbians
could not breed among themselves.

WILLY

Please note that semen
dripping out of some guy's butthole

does not constitute a child.
So why are gays getting married now???

JONATHAN

Why is it
when the institution of marriage is sinking like a rock
the people who consider themselves the coolest people
on earth
want to throw themselves onto the sinking ship?

WILLY

And now every gay man I know wants to get married
and for what?
Just when every sensible heterosexual
has finally discovered what a dreadful thing matrimony is
gays and lesbians rush in to embrace it?
Did you see Christians rushing in
to go and live in concentration camps
at the end of World War II?
No. No, you didn't.

When the Berlin Wall came down
did West Germans rush East
to try to get into jails run by the Stasi?

JONATHAN

When Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo
were men everywhere clamoring to join the French Army?

WILLY

When the Roman Empire fell
were barbarians still trying to learn to speak Latin?

JONATHAN

When houses were invented
were Neanderthals still trying to find
caves to live in?

WILLY

Remember your worst days with her.
When she was at her bitchiest,
her most sarcastic,
her most manipulative and whiny.
Ask yourself, could you live with that
every day for the rest of your life?
Then don't marry her.
Because it's the good days
that are the anomaly.
All of the time,
every day,
she is acting.
She's being nice to you
because she's trying to make a good impression,
because she wants something from you.
Only when she's under stress,
or when you cross her,
does the mask come off
and you get to see what she can really be like!

[silence]

FRANK

And yet,
I have to say, finally,
to me
one of the greatest sorrows of the moment
is that mother was unable, finally,
to officiate at the marriage of her granddaughter
and this was why she was coming to join us
this was to be a real joy for her.

MARIA

This is true.

FRANK

A joy she will never know.

MARIA

And yet, her spirit is still here, Frank.

FRANK

Yes, I'm sure, her spirit is still here.

DJAMILA

I myself

even though I knew her only briefly

can feel her spirit.

FRANCOIS

And in truth

if you like

she could still preside over a ceremony

in spirit

if one wanted to have it.

FRANK

Preside over a ceremony.

FRANCOIS

In her spirit

because

this is what she wanted.

EDMUND

Yes. Right. This is true.

FATHER THANE

In fact, I think you could....

MARIA

and that might be the best thing we could do in her memory

FRANCOIS

the best we could do in the spirit

of giving her new life

FRANK
letting her live on.

FRANCOIS
Yes.

FRANK
This is true.

Of course,
I must say,
I wouldn't want you young people to get married just
for your grandmother's sake.
Not at all.
Still, it does seem to me
it is also true
a sobering moment like this
should be a lesson for us all
to embrace life while we have it
because if we turn our backs on the prospect of happiness now
when will we ever again have the chance?

FATHER THANE
On the other hand, I...

MERIDEE
Frankly, Dad,
what you say sounds lovely
but
I wouldn't marry Amadou now
if he were the last chance of happiness in the universe.

AMADOU
Don't imagine for a moment
I'd marry you either, Meridee.
One little slip
and a man is just dropped like that
no second chance
what kind of love is that?

I told you I was sorry.
I begged for your forgiveness.
and what did you do?
you iced me just like that
you made no effort to save anything
you never said I hope it'll work out later
or please please stay in here with me while I try to work it out
you froze me out
you let me know
if anyone were to try to save this relationship
it wouldn't be you
it wasn't worth it to you
I wasn't worth it to you
OK, I see that clear enough
so for me, too, now
it's over.

VIKRAM

Let's not be too hasty.

AMADOU

Over.

VIKRAM

You know, Amadou,
a person doesn't want to turn away from marriage
without giving it some serious thought
because
I don't know where I'd be if I hadn't married your mother.
Probably I'd be alone somewhere
living in a basement
or just going from airport to airport
trying to make a business deal

AMADOU

Or chasing girls with big keisters

VIKRAM

Or chasing girls with big keisters
and not happy at all.

When you come to the end of your life,
what do you think will have mattered to you at all
except that you knew another person
and loved her?

AMADOU

I'm sorry, Dad.
For me, it's over.

DJAMILA

And yet
here we are
the wedding preparations are all made
what a shame to waste them
it could be
one day soon you will change your mind
but then it will be too late
because the wedding planners
will have taken back all the plates and glasses
all the table linens and the cake
then what?
you will have to be married in the basement
with some bottles of Coca Cola.

ISAAC

I think this is true.
I could weep to think
all the work we have done
the nautical theme
and then the woodland theme
the cake the ribbons
and then
at the last minute
we changed it all to an Indian theme
because we were told the groom is Indian
and it was no trouble

we were happy to do it
because we are all multicultural people
all of us who live in the world as a whole
who think of ourselves as human beings on earth
so that the poori and the papadoms
the chicken tikka masala, the pork vindaloo
the tandoori naan and the onion bhaji
but now to think
we would just throw it all away
I think you don't understand
not just that it would be wrong
but also
this is all we do
this is our art
this is our lives
would you have Leonardo da Vinci
come over to your house
and take out your penknife
and cut the Last Supper up into pieces?
I don't think so.
To have all this treated with such disrespect:
It can't be done.
It makes me weep.

DIETER

What he said is true.

ISAAC

All the work my dear friend Dieter has gone to.
And now you would
what?
just throw him out the door?
This is all you care for him?

I tell you, Dieter,
I can't let this happen
and
I have to say:
if you will have me,

I would like to marry you today.
This may be sudden
and if you refuse I will understand
but I think
here I am
and I agree with Plato, too
and with Karl
and I love you
as you know
and always have
and just because I think
you and I
we are too special to be married
so what?
here is a wedding all set out
we set it out
we've put it together, you and I,
let's have it for ourselves.

DIETER
Have it for ourselves?

ISAAC
Yes.

DIETER
You are
proposing
to me.

ISAAC
Yes.

DIETER
Oh, Isaac, I accept.
I accept.
Oh.
I accept.
I propose to you, too.

I propose and propose to you.
I propose and propose and propose.
Let's us get married
and live happily ever after.

[Suddenly:
music.

Bollywood music.

Isaac and Dieter sing a duet
with the entire cast joining in as chorus.

And the entire cast dances a big Bollywood number in unison,
led by Dieter and Isaac.

For instance, it could be this song from the movie Lagaan.

And it could be sung in Hindi or English or Dutch.

ISAAC

O re chhori, o ri chhori, maan bhi le baat mori
Oh girl, believe my words
Maine pyaar tujhi se hai kiya, ho
I have only loved you
Tere bin main jeeya to kya jeeya
Without you, what life have I lived?
Oh, tere nainon mein yeh jo kaajal hai
The eyeliner that is upon your eyes
Sapnon ka baadal hai
Is the cloud of my dreams
Mann tere hi kaaran paagal hai, o goriya
My mind is only crazy for you, oh girl
Ho oh, oh, oh oh oh

DIETER

O re chhore, dil se nikle, bol more
Oh boy, out of my heart come my words
Maine pyaar tujhi se hai kiya, ho

I have only loved you
Maine tujhko hi maana hai piya
I have only believed you to be my lover
Oh, tune thaama aaj yeh aanchal hai
Today you have grasped my scarf
Mann mein ek halchal hai
And in my mind there is confusion
Main na bhoolongi yeh woh pal hai, saanwariya
This is the moment I will never forget, lover
Oh oh, oh, oh oh oh

CHORUS

My heart, it speaks a thousand words
I feel eternal bliss
The roses pout their scarlet mouths
Like offering a kiss
No drop of rain, no glowing flame
Has ever been so pure
If being in love can feel like this
Then I'm in love for sure

[Does Ariel run in and join the dancing?]

ISAAC

More mann mein
In my mind
More mann mein thi jo baat chhupi
The words that were hidden in my mind
Aayi hai jabaan par
Have now come to my tongue
More dil mein kahin ek teer jo tha
The arrow that was somewhere in my heart
Aaya hai kamaan par
Has now come to the bow

DIETER

Sun sun le sajan rahe janam janam
Listen lover, birth after birth let us remain
Hum prem nagar ke baasi

In the city of love
Thaame thaame haath, rahe saath saath
Grasping each other's hands, let us stay together
Kabhi doore ho na jara si
Let there not be any bit of distance
Chaloon main sang sang teri raah mein
I will walk with you in your path
Bas teri chaah mein, ho oh oh oh
With only longing for you
O re chhore
Oh, boy

ISAAC
O ri chhori
Oh, girl

DIETER
Oh, I'm in love, I am in love, yes I'm in love

CHORUS
Mm, koi poochhe
If one asks
Koi poochhe to main boloon kya
If one asks, what will I say?
Ke mujhko hua hai kya
What will I say has happened to me?
More ang ang mein hai sughand
In my body there is a fragrance
Jo tune hai chhoo liya
Since you have touched me

ISAAC
Tan maheka maheka, rang daheka baheka
Your body is fragrant, your colors blaze
Mujhe tu gulaab si laage
To me you seem like a rose
Jo hai yeh nikhaar aur yeh singhaar
When there is such beauty and adornment
To kyon na kaamna jaaga

Why wouldn't desires awaken?
Tera ujla ujla jo roop hai
This bright bright beauty of yours
Yovan ki dhoop hai, oh oh oh oh
Is youth's sunlight
O ri chhori
Oh, girl

DIETER
(Oh, I'm in love)

CHORUS
O re chhore
Oh, boy

DIETER
(Oh, I'm in love)

[Father Thane wanders in.]

CHORUS
Dil se nikle
Out of my heart come

DIETER
(Yes, I'm in love)

Bol more
My words
Maine pyaar tujhi se hai kiya, ho
I have only loved you
Maine tujhko hi maana hai piya
I have only believed you to be my lover
Oh, tune thaama aaj yeh aanchal hai
Today you have grasped my scarf
Mann mein ek halchal hai
And in my mind there is confusion
Main na bhooloongi yeh voh pal hai
This is the moment I will never forget

ISAAC

O goriya, ho oh, oh, oh oh oh

Oh, girl

DIETER

(Yes, I'm in love)

[Or, for other possible

Bollywood music and dance numbers

see

<http://www.bollywoodlyrics.com>]

During the Bollywood number
the petals of cherry blossoms rain down.

The singing and dancing ends.]

MARIA

Oh, this is such a lovely surprise.

So we will have a wedding after all!

Now, children,
we'll all be needing to dress for the wedding.

FRANCOIS

Right. Good.

EDMUND

Yes. OK.

[EVERYONE takes off all their clothes
and changes into wedding outfits
during the following talk:

MARIA

Everyone will want to have a special wedding outfit
so that we are all in a proper mood of celebration.

[to Djamila as they are dressing]

I had a friend once
who loved to sew dresses for her daughter
all sorts of things
and one day she happened to make a little dress
her daughter was only three years old
a little dress with a long train behind it
and then she made a little veil
why not, she thought
and when her little girl was all dressed up
my friend realized that
without knowing what she was doing
she had made her daughter a wedding dress
and she said, now all you need is a husband
and the little girl ran around and around the living room
calling out: I'm looking for a husband, I'm looking for a husband!

These days, of course,
a woman has so many choices
and wants nothing more than to live a full life

DJAMILA
not defined by motherhood alone
as it was in the olden days

MARIA
exactly
to have no chance for any life
other than to stay at home
care for the children, cook the meals
even though, I would be the first to say,
this could be good
this could be fulfilling

DJAMILA
many many people, both men and women
still believe it is

MARIA

but now how much better it is for a woman
to enjoy an absolute equality with others
be an astronaut, go to Antarctica
take lovers in foreign countries

DJAMILA

run for public office, have her own car,
leave her family in the dust if they are not nice to her

MARIA

this is good, this is good
this is a world to which I wish
every human being would be entitled

DJAMILA

but even so
any mother with grown children
thinks of weddings all the time

MARIA

it can't be helped

TESSA

It should.

MARIA

and so now
to have a wedding at last
it makes me happier than I can say.

JONATHAN

Mom, could you fix my collar?
I seem to have
have my collar turned under my,
what is this?

WILLY

Here. Let me see.

[he tries to adjust Jonathan's collar]

Oh, you have an Indian shirt.

JONATHAN

Yeah. Sure.

It's all I ever wear for formal occasions.

WILLY

Really. I didn't see it before.

JONATHAN

I had it in the car.

WILLY

You have a car?

JONATHAN

Sure. Sure, I do.

WILLY

What kind of car?

JONATHAN

68 Olds.

WILLY

A 68 Olds!

What have you done to it?

JONATHAN

Not much,
you know,
it's chopped, blocked, shaved, channeled.

WILLY

Channeled?

[Gradually,
everyone else has finished getting dressed for the wedding,
and now they are all just standing around watching these two guys
with their boring car talk that goes on and on,
waiting for the guys to finish,
so they can all get on with it—
or else, if the car talk just slows down the momentum too much,
it can be cut.]

JONATHAN

Sure.

WILLY

And lowered?

JONATHAN

Yeah, right. Lowered.

You know about cars?

WILLY

I know something about cars.

JONATHAN

What have you got?

WILLY

I have a 55 Chevy 210 2 Door.

JONATHAN

With a hardtop?

WILLY

A hardtop

and, you know,

Chrome Rally Wheels

dual carbs

Lower Body sill Moldings

JONATHAN
Fender Skirts?

WILLY
Yeah, sure, Fender Skirts.

JONATHAN
Wow.

Maybe we could see it after the wedding.

WILLY
Sure.
Maybe I could see yours.

JONATHAN
Sure. Sure.

WILLY
That would be really great.

[and are they all finally dressed in different outfits?
Indian, nautical, traditional, etc?
a multicultural event]

MARIA
Are we ready?

FRANK
I think we are.

EDMUND
Yes. I'm ready.

FRANCOIS
Ready.

MERIDEE

Oh, Mom,
now I see everyone dressed up for the wedding.
And now I see
I've been wrong.
I've just been all wrong.
And I realize
the truth is
I would like to get married, too!

TESSA [disgusted]
Meridee....

MARIA [in joy]
Oh Meridee, how happy this makes me feel!

VIKRAM
Well. Well! Lovely!

DJAMILA
Wonderful!

EDMUND
Amazing, really.

TESSA
Are you sure, Meridee?

MERIDEE
Yes.
Yes, I am.

TESSA
Really sure?

MERIDEE
Yes.

AMADOU
Meridee....

MERIDEE
Oh, Amadou,
the thing is
I was so quick to judge you
so quick
just as you say
to seize upon any excuse to call off our wedding
you were right
and I apologize
I was in a panic, I see that now
I was so confused
I think I've been confused for ever so long
that's the trouble
I didn't know what it was
and now at last
I see clearly exactly
what I've hoped for all my life
and what I want with all my heart
is to be married to Ariel.

AMADOU
Ariel?

ARIEL
Me?

DJAMILA
Who?

MARIA
Ariel?

FRANK
She said: to Ariel?

EDMUND

Ariel?

MERIDEE

Yes, Ariel.

It's you who came to me, Ariel,
when I was sad and desperate
you who knew just how I felt
you who had such empathy for me
who stayed with me and cared for me
I see how I've loved you since the moment that we met
and I beg you to marry me.

ARIEL

Marry you?

MERIDEE

Yes.

TESSA

Marry her?

ARIEL

Oh, Meridee,
you want me to marry you?

MERIDEE

Yes. I do.

ARIEL

Nothing would make me happier.

[they embrace]

MARIA

Oh, darlings,
darlings, darlings,
I'm so happy for you.

FRANCOIS

Well! Congratulations!

Best, best wishes to you both.

MARIA

You see, this is a wonderful thing

because love

love is a wonderful thing.

FRANCOIS

Indeed it is.

TESSA

If a person has only one life to live

they may as well live it with the person that they love.

JONATHAN

What?

JAMES

Do you think so?

TESSA

Yes, I do.

What's the point, you know?

If you live on earth,

you live with other people.

And sometimes you happen to bump into someone

and you realize oh

I'd like to just sort of hang out with this person

all the time.

And you might have an attitude about it

or a principle

or even a set of principles

but what does that all mean

when this is really how you feel

and probably it's true you won't live more than once.

JONATHAN

What is this all of a sudden?

JAMES

I've never heard you talk this way.
That's what you've always thought?

TESSA

Yes.

JAMES

Do you mean
now
you would live your life with me?

TESSA

Oh, James, I'm so sorry.
You've been such a good friend
and I love you
the way a person loves a friend.
And the last thing I ever hoped to do
was hurt you.
But the truth is
if I have to tell the truth
I'm in love with Amadou.

AMADOU

Amadou?

VIKRAM

Amadou?

TESSA

All this time
when he's been with Meridee
I knew it would be wrong of me to say anything
to get between them
when after all
it seemed they were getting married!

But, Amadou,
I fell in love with you the first time I saw you
and I couldn't get you out of my mind.
And if you would have me
or not
maybe this is too sudden for you
I mean, of course it is,
I'm sorry to embarrass you this way
you should take your time
I mean, we should take our time
but if you would even consider
getting to know me a little bit
spending some time together
maybe one day you would come to love me
and we could spend our lives together.

AMADOU

I don't need time, Tessa.
This is the reason I've been less than
a good, steady person for you, Meridee
behaving like I don't know what
peevish and sullen
not quite a grownup
and I apologize for that
I've been so confused myself
not knowing whether I was just suffering from anxiety
about our wedding
thinking I was making such a mistake
or wondering if I was just having a crazy fantasy
about a different life
the way people do when they are in a panic
or if that was the life I really wanted all along
that was truly how I felt
but I fell in love with you, too, Tessa,
the moment that we met.
And if you would marry me
I would live happily ever after.

TESSA

I will.

I will.

[they kiss]

JAMES

Oh.

Well.

So.

I don't know what's going to happen

to me

now.

But

if you really care for another person

all you really wish for is their happiness

so

I guess

I

I wish you

all the best.

[he slumps to the ground, his head in his hands]

MARIA

It's a triple wedding, then!

Just what I've always dreamed of!

Just what I've always hoped for.

This is just what we had been planning for, Frank!

Oh, dear, what a perfect day this turned out to be.

VIKRAM

I would like to propose a toast if I may.

To the brides and grooms after all:

may they live long and happily ever after.

OTHERS

Here...here....

FRANCOIS

To those who plunge into life
over their heads
and risk everything they have to follow their loves.

MARIA

And to my lovely children
however they may live
they live always in my heart

FRANK

So here it is finally
just as my mother would have wished
and even though I myself might be
discredited and falling apart
my body as well as my mind
my outmoded views, bankrupt values
decrepitude consuming my flesh
and with every word I speak
my children just hold me in greater and greater contempt
for me, for fathers in general
for grownups as a whole
for the entire structure of society, really,
indeed of life itself moving as it does
toward maturity and antiquity and uselessness
nonetheless
I am happy

[he begins to weep with joy]

because life
and love itself
and not just a fleeting love
not just a brief romance
but the commitment to
the project of enduring love
through all the difficulties life has to offer

FATHER THANE

the commitment, as they say, to
the ongoing construction
in domestic microcosm
of a better world

FRANK

This is the hope of lovers
over and over again
as often as we give up on it
as hopeless and old fashioned
nothing can put an end to it
we come back to it even in the midst of war
because it is our deepest need
it cannot be stopped
this urge, this urge thank god
even as everything is collapsing into total chaos
on all sides
and death and people falling on all sides
and buildings and civilizations
and pointless dieting and despair
and the older you become the more you think about
incontinence
and whereas it used to be that
your appetite for life
made you think of nothing but ingestion, ingestion, ingestion
all the time
now all you can think of is elimination
we become preoccupied with our bowels
the flowers reach toward the sun
the grass beneath our feet
the sun and the little little white clouds in the blue sky
because life will persist in molecules
or dust
even dust itself
on into eternity
and we all live under the same sun
and we all breathe the same air

[he is smiling and almost laughing and weeping at the same time]

because this is the human condition
we are all made of the same phenotypes or strands of these things
whatever that scientists
are only now discovering
have always been true as far as we know
you children you children
the very glue of the universe
I lift my glass to you
in joy.

[Sweet, gentle, romantic music comes up.
It could be Bach's Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring
from Cantata 147,
or Francisque's Courante from Three Lute Dances
or Mozart's Adagio from Sonata in E-Flat.
If it is the Mozart, maybe it wants to be timed
so that it stops finally
after the lights go to black
at the end of a phrase,
but not at the end of the piece.
Or it could be Frank Sinatra.
Or maybe it would be nice to end
with a brand new love song from the present moment.

Maria extends her hand to Frank,
and they begin the wedding dance.

Other people couple up.

In time, Maria goes to Francois,
and Frank to Edmund,
and all the couples dance together
Meridee and Ariel
Tessa and Amadou

Dieter and Isaac
Djamila and Vikram
Bob and Karl and Heiner and Julian as a foursome

and
Willy and Jonathan.
Or, if Willy and Jonathan don't dance together,
maybe one of them has found a rear-view mirror
that he shows to the other one,
and they leave together,
one guy with his arm around the other's shoulders,
talking cars as they go out.

James sits disconsolate off to one side
his head in his hands.

Different couples take the spotlight at different times:
Meridee and Ariel
Tessa and Amadou
Dieter and Isaac

Finally, the couples and groups begin dancing out together
in twos and threes and fours

the brides throw their bouquets into the audience

and, at the end,
only Father Thane remains,
with James,
alone

and then, after a moment,
Julian returns
[with Heiner, who remains behind, just at the edge of the stage,
waiting for Julian]
puts out a hand to Father Thane
and, accompanied by Heiner, takes him out.

And then James takes his head out of his hands,
gets up,
and
what the fuck
he dances solo
happy, even ecstatic.
and dances out.

Frank returns
and goes to the graveside.

He takes a moment,
reaches down to take a handful of dirt,
and slowly lets it pour out of his hand
onto the coffin in the grave.

The End.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

A Perfect Wedding was composed with the dramaturgical collaboration of Pier Carlo Talenti and began in a workshop at the Mark Taper Forum. The text for the piece was in part inspired by, or taken from, the work of the participants in the workshop as well as Gottfried von Strassburg, Li Yu, Kenneth V. Iserson, Bill Neal, Laura Kipnis, the internet, *Soap Opera Digest*, and, of course, William Shakespeare.

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