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# Salome

by CHARLES L. MEE

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I had a friend:  
when she first met her husband  
he was preoccupied with young girls.  
All the time.  
Paul. His name was Paul.  
Looking at pictures of them.  
Looking at them on the street.  
To her it seemed strange.  
And, then, the first time she helped him get a young girl into the car  
to take her home,  
she was,  
my friend was,  
well,  
quivering,  
a knot in her stomach,  
that sick excited sensation.

After that it was easy.  
I don't mean she doesn't still get excited,  
but it was never again like the first time.  
The first time is always different, with everything.  
I mean,  
obviously.

You might say  
I'd never do such a thing

how do you know?

you say: because that's not the kind of person I am

But you don't know.

Because one day you will do something

and then you will find out what sort of person you are.

[she smiles]

You see a woman when she is grown up

you see how she has turned out

and you think then you could say, oh, right

this was inevitable

the way she grew up

you could tell how she would turn out

this is the person she would be

because Freud bla bla bla

and the social dynamics

her background bla bla

hindsight is so good

all the theories of hindsight are foolproof

but you don't know

you never know-

she could be a hundred people

before she's through with her life

that's how it is these days

As a child

I thought about numbers a lot.

First there was the question

could a woman have several husbands all at the same time

or only one after the other?

And then, as the years went by,

I thought about how many children a woman might have.

And then,

a few weeks after I lost my virginity

I had group sex.

There were five of us altogether,

three boys and two girls.

[she stops and smiles-

a bright, engaging, innocent smile]

We were finishing our lunch in a garden  
on a hill above Lyon.  
It was in June or July  
it was hot  
and somebody suggested that we take off all our clothes  
and jump into the pond.  
I could hear Andre saying  
his girlfriend would be with us in just a minute  
but his voice sounded a little muffled  
because I already had my T-shirt over my head  
and then, in the end,  
no one went in the water.

Andre fucked me first  
quite slowly and calmly  
which was his way.  
And then Ringo came and took his place on top of me.  
Ringo's body was different from Andre's  
and I liked it better.  
Ringo was taller, wiry,  
he was one of those men who can isolate  
the action of his pelvis from the rest of his body,  
so that he could thrust without smothering a woman,  
supporting his torso with his arms.

you look at history  
not to know how things are going to be  
and not for the rules of how things have to be  
but to tell you that  
the way things are is not the way they always have been  
or the only way they can be

and now  
looking back  
whatever there has been  
it's all available to us now  
to pick and choose

have one of these and one of those  
and make a life of that

I won't say how many shoes I've got  
but I have no regrets about any of them.  
In fact, there are some shoes I love so much  
that I'll go out and buy double colors.  
Because if it's like a great red shoe that's fabulous for the summer  
and I love it  
and it's the right color red  
then I've got to have two-  
because I know I'll live in the shoe  
and it will get destroyed  
and I'll need a new one.  
And men don't understand this.  
My husband used to say  
darling what have you done?  
It looks like you've been to a fire sale!"  
And I would think, "honey, you wish!"

How a human will turn out  
well  
they just turn out how they do  
and then you know  
but you don't know before  
and then, later on, maybe they change their minds  
and they turn out another way  
and then they turn out another way yet again  
and you never knew  
because the human creature is a surprising, fluid event

oh, you can say, bla bla bla

but I don't think so  
you didn't know how Elizabeth Taylor was going to turn out  
you didn't know how Simone de Beauvoir was going to turn out  
you didn't know how Celine Dion was going to turn out  
neither did her mother  
because, if you did, you would have been able to predict feminism

which you didn't  
or Brigitte Bardot or Saddam Hussein  
which you didn't  
because you didn't know

This guy said to me one time  
I can't pin you down  
like a butterfly, you mean?  
I don't know he said  
well, I said,  
I don't think I want to be pinned down.

[she smiles]

One time I was offered to my masters  
I was going to be whipped in that humiliating position-  
arms and legs spread-  
and I was perspiring  
my body was taut with the pain  
but pain turning into pleasure  
and then when Pierre began to put the pincers on my breasts  
well that always makes me suffer a great deal  
and I thought I couldn't endure it  
but when I was suspended by the handcuffs  
and I felt the pain in my thighs  
and I couldn't turn my head to see anyone in the room  
and Fiona put something on me  
I don't know what it was  
an electric drill and miniaspirator of some kind  
while she was touching me with such a soft hand  
and the sugar-sweet smell of her perfume filled my nostrils  
so that it was very sweet and unbearable at the same time  
this dizzying shiver shot through me  
and I was afraid I was going to piss myself with pleasure  
like a stark beginner  
my thighs were trembling

I was soaked  
I was soaked  
so that I thought for a moment that the juices ran as far as my thighs

There was a time I thought after the first time  
never again

OK

never again.

What you have done once is not your fate  
not something you have to do over and over again  
and so you say  
never again

but then you do it again

But, first of all

the dance of the seven veils

no one ever did that.

There is no such thing.

I mean there is the belly dance

and there is the strip tease

but the dance of the seven veils

this is the pure invention of later literary people

and of, you know, finally,

a lot of dancers at the end of the nineteenth century

people who invented the striptease

and it was all the rage in London and Paris

but, before that, there was no such thing.

I mean, if I had been reincarnated 100 times

never once in all those times

would I have ever done the dance of the seven veils.

I have danced.

I have danced a lot.

I still dance.

I will go on dancing.

[a long pause to let this sink in,  
and then she smiles]

But there is no such thing as the dance of the seven veils  
You can look all though dance history  
and you won't find it.  
Scholars have done this  
they have looked for it,  
and it doesn't exist  
that is the first point.  
It may be that other dances have been done  
I am not commenting on that.  
That would be a whole separate thing.  
And what dances I may or may not have done in the past  
well,  
I'm leaving that alone.

The second point is  
as for the other part of the story:  
if a person faces a life or death situation  
the choice on behalf of survival is justified.

Let's say  
for a woman  
there are all these possibilities  
and they can all inhabit one body  
and she can choose anything  
and why she chooses one or the other  
remains a total mystery  
and how it can switch in a moment  
this remains a total mystery  
and you don't need to choose only one  
you can never tell  
when she will choose some alternate possibility within herself.  
This is how it is to be a woman

she can go from monogamous  
to polygamous  
without feeling it violates her nature

My favorite summer activity is getting in touch  
with sides of my personality that don't find expression  
in the bustle of the city.

I'll rent a cottage in the Wye Wye Valley in Wales-  
a beautiful landscape of rolling hills and woods,  
untouched by civilization.

I'll pack pens and paper  
and a copy of Wordsworth's *Prelude*.

these are the possibilities  
and where they come from  
when they will well up  
is a complete mystery  
you never know

So let us say  
someone comes along and says  
oh,  
what you are saying is you want to play with fire  
this can lead to anything  
yes, well,  
there have been times I wished I had boundaries  
but, you know,  
not everyone has boundaries  
and I know that can be dreadful  
as we have seen in the history of our times  
but what I am saying is yes  
I am playing with fire  
because you have to play with fire  
or else you do not plunge into life  
and the anti life people are death trippers

Lust will show you the dark truth about nature.  
Lust is the animal reality that will never be tamed by love.  
Lust is elemental, aggressive, unfettered, asocial.  
This is where we live  
in the lush, disorderly fullness of the flesh.



this is not just my power as a woman  
it is my power as a human being  
it is my power of life  
and when someone threatens  
to destroy the life force itself  
the place from which all life comes  
this is life or death

And so this guy wants to snuff you out  
let's say he has his way of snuffing you out  
maybe he doesn't come at you with a knife  
but his intent is to snuff you out  
as surely as if he did  
then you can snuff him out  
you are entitled to it  
that's all there is to it  
I have no regrets  
and I would do it again  
and I have done it again  
and I will do it again  
I will do it again and again and again  
and then I will do it again  
because I will not roll over  
and let my life be snuffed out  
and I make no apologies for it.

SHE SITS AT THE PIANO  
PLAYS A CURRENT POP LOVE SONG AND  
SINGS  
AND THEN:

At one of the clubs  
my usual place was in one of the back rooms  
lying on a table  
which was one of the most comfortable positions I know  
my cunt on a level with the man's genitals  
as he stands facing the table

my vulva well opened  
and the man in exactly the right place to thrust straight ahead  
and deeply  
and not having to stop  
it makes for a very precise fuck  
and very vigorous  
and other guys standing around the table  
a lot of hands running over my body  
and me reaching out and taking hold of cocks  
on all sides  
turning my head from left to right to suck  
while other cocks rammed into me,  
twenty guys could take turns during an evening  
and sometimes they were so violent  
I had to hold on to the ends of the table with both hands  
and for a long time I had the scar of a little gash  
above my coccyx  
where the base of my spine had rubbed against the rough wood.

[a moment's pause]

Society has looked down on stripping  
as the refuge for dumb beauties for many years.  
But let's look at that:  
being born genuinely stupid is no one's fault  
any more than being born crippled or deformed.  
Stripping is one of the very few ways  
that these women can truly empower themselves  
and command that kind of income,  
and there's nothing they can do about that.  
Does that mean that they should simply resign themselves to their fate  
and live in some sort of caste system  
in which those born with less advantage  
may not transcend their station in life?  
Just because some women dance because  
they have no other skills  
doesn't mean that they hate being there.

Women want to be strippers  
for the same reason people take any job.  
When you meet a telemarketer,  
even though it takes very little talent or education  
it's very rare to assume that she has that job because  
she's not able to get another one,  
to wonder what she does in her spare time,  
or to assume that telemarketing is a lifestyle instead of a job.  
Strippers do it because they like the money -  
who doesn't want to be paid well?  
Some strippers do it because they like the attention -  
is that bad?  
Humans are social creatures  
who learn through praise and validation.  
Wanting and enjoying attention isn't necessarily unhealthy.

The blue-collar worker is the backbone of our society,  
Society needs the services and products they provide, whether the workers  
themselves dream of something better or not. Many of them love their jobs, too -  
that doesn't change that quite a few of them  
aren't qualified to do much else.  
There's no shame in that.

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

[she picks up a magazine,  
turns some pages to the back of the magazine  
and reads]

Very Pretty, Stylish, Gay White Female-40-something  
seeking pretty, white, sweet, intelligent,  
feminine wife, 35-45  
I am a hopeless romantic  
very fit, socially outgoing,  
yet shy at other times.

I am mentally strong  
yet emotionally tender.  
I wear dresses/high heels by day  
and jeans/sneakers at night.  
I love excitement and spontaneity  
yet balance and security.  
I am financially stable and I do not look gay-  
neither should you.  
I am looking for a woman capable of emotional intimacy  
and committed to a partnership-  
and not just after 5 PM.  
I have flexible working hours  
and believe weekdays were made for play, not just work.  
If you have worked on your relationship skills  
and you are what I am looking for,  
be prepared to meet a woman  
with a generous heart, quick mind, good sense of humor  
and lots of integrity.

[she looks up from the magazine,  
thinks for a moment  
and then says]

I could do that.

[she returns to the magazine  
and reads]

Distinguished-Looking, Successful Man-  
Company president, grey hair, tall,  
sense of humor.

Two residences. Variety of interests  
including music, horses, sailing, etc.  
and just "hanging out."

Interested in meeting woman in her 30s or early 40s,  
to share good times and friendship.

[she looks up from the magazine,  
thinks for a moment  
and then says]

I could do that.

[she returns to the magazine  
and reads]

Warm, Loving, Happy  
Accomplished Professional-  
very youthful, active, 55  
fit, fun, full of life and love  
bright, kind, sensitive,  
communicative and involved,  
seeks fine-valued, accomplished soul mate  
to share love, laughter, family, and friends.

[she looks up from the magazine,  
thinks for a moment  
and then says]

I could do that.

I lost my virginity at seventeen and I thought,  
"this is great, everyone should know about this.  
How come nothing is being done about this?"

I think that losing my virginity  
was one of the happiest days of my life  
up to that point.  
A year later I moved into prostitution  
and that was another really happy transition for me.  
When I discovered sex, I thought,  
"I've got to learn more about this,  
this is the greatest thing."  
And that's really been my focus in life.

I was always told  
there were ten ways to know  
if he really liked you.

Like:

- when he talked about the future  
he casually included you in his plans
- he still had the ticket stub in his wallet  
from the movie you saw on your first date
- he doesn't just respect your opinions,  
he quotes them directly
- he invites you to "meet the parents"  
because they want to know the person  
their son can't stop raving about,  
and he wants them to know you too!
- if you call him,  
he always gets off the other line,  
no matter who he's on the phone with
- he admits he replays your voicemail messages  
just to hear your voice
- he loves a corny ballad,  
which totally doesn't fit in with the rest of his music collection,  
because it reminds him of you
- he doesn't hesitate to hold your hand in public  
even if front of his best friends
- he remembers odd details  
about things you just mentioned in passing conversation
- when his friends call him "whipped"  
he just smiles,  
as if to say,  
one day maybe you'll be lucky enough to fall in love, too.

So Paul.

Paul was so wild in bed.

A person would do anything to keep his love.

Which is how a person might go along with it  
when he wanted to sleep with her sister.

And if that person, let us say, worked in a veterinary clinic  
and had some knowledge of sedatives for animals  
it would be really easy to figure out how to put Tammy to sleep

for long enough that Paul could have sex with her  
and so halothane  
the drug was halothane  
which animals inhale before surgery  
and it wasn't anyone's fault that Tammy just never woke up  
because they felt they knew what they were doing  
so it wasn't what anyone meant to do at all.  
Although the step from that to picking up young girls  
along the highway  
and taking them home  
the woman luring them into the car  
and the two of them taking the girls home  
and Paul having sex with them  
it wasn't somehow such a big step  
because, as I was saying,  
the hard part is the first time  
usually  
but after the first time  
it's never quite as hard again.

Then there was this girl  
call her Leslie  
who was really,  
let's face it,  
a troubled teenager  
with a very independent personality  
ignoring her curfews,  
engaging in promiscuous sex,  
skipping school  
shoplifting.  
So one night she went out for the evening  
and came home way after her curfew  
and her parents had just locked her out of the house  
so what was she to do?  
And then it so happened  
that, when she was wandering around the neighborhood  
she just, like, saw the lights on in Paul's house  
and so he took her in  
and he videotaped her

naked and blindfolded  
and then Karla woke up  
and he told her to make love to Leslie, too,  
and he videotaped them together  
and then he did some rough things  
while Karla held the camera  
these things happen all the time.

And so this young girl Jane  
just idolized Paul's wife  
I will call her Paul's wife  
so that  
when Paul's wife invited Jane over to dinner  
Jane was thrilled  
and Paul's wife gave her lots of sweet drinks  
laced with Halcion  
and when Paul came home  
and found this gift waiting for him  
he was just very pleased  
and so they undressed Jane  
and Paul videotaped his wife  
as she made love to the sleeping girl  
and then Paul had sex with her  
a sort of brutal kind of anal sex  
but Jane never woke up  
because of the Halcion  
and then Paul's wife was left to clean the blood off the girl  
and put her to bed for the night  
but anyway the next morning  
Jane who was really sick to her stomach  
and really sore  
still she had no idea what had happened to her.

Well,  
I think it's normal.  
There's this pendulum of freedom and repression  
that goes back and forth in relation to sex  
as well as to many other things.  
But sex is not going away.



Sex cannot be repressed.  
And there is a lot of great stuff happening in terms of sex these days.  
You have more freedom to be gay and lesbian  
than you ever did before.  
You go to high school and there are all these little  
baby dykes everywhere.

The Taoists would have orgasms in their womb  
or their heart.  
Wherever they needed healing  
they could actually have an orgasm there.

I was in Tijuana teaching a workshop.  
This woman came to me who had a pounding headache,  
she had a horrible migraine.  
I got the vibrator and I sat her in a room.  
She put the vibrator on her clit and relaxed  
and breathed the sexual energy up to her head.  
She had this orgasm and let it shoot out the top of her head  
and it cleared the headache out.  
So this woman came to take a workshop on sex  
and she learned how to cure her migraine!  
In scientific tests, you know,  
it was proven that just thinking about sex  
creates disease-fighting neuro-peptides.

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

For me,  
about one in four was pretty lousy,  
one in a hundred sucked  
and maybe five in a thousand were a nightmare.  
But hundreds were wonderful, mutually beneficial experiences.  
I liked the sex.  
Even the lousy sex I liked a lot.  
I was lucky,  
I don't claim that all prostitutes are like me at all.  
Most of them absolutely hate it,  
and I think that they love that they hate it.

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

These days, you see men dressing as women wearing monkey boots,  
and women dressing as men but with false eyelashes.  
Now, everything's getting mixed together  
which I really like.  
And strap-on dildos, of course,  
are really being used a lot to play with gender.  
Women are getting these big dicks -  
it's great.  
And they really know how to use them.  
It's so real.  
And of course it never gets soft.

My friend Trish is really good at thrusting.  
Women aren't generally as good at thrusting,  
but she has really got it down.  
Her dick is totally real to her  
and I suck it like it's real  
and I feel like she feels everything that I do.  
It's just beautiful.

The technology has vastly improved.  
When I first got into porno movies  
they were tied on with pieces of elastic  
and were really flimsy.  
These were invented by men,  
but now women are designing these fabulously beautiful  
leather strap-on things.

But this is all in the past  
all this.  
We live in the suburbs now.  
Usually  
now  
I go from day to day  
thinking of what I do  
of the clothes I wear  
of where I am living  
whether I want to live in the city or the country  
thinking of my friends  
and when we will see each other  
what plans we might make to get together  
the bookshop I want to go to  
the book I want to pick up there  
and of the little basket I might buy to keep ribbon in  
I think of a room in a little hotel in Provence  
where I once stayed  
with its faded yellow walls  
and the shutters opening out onto the interior courtyard  
the white arum lilies, purple irises,  
a hundred little tulips with pointed cups,  
and pittosporums whose scent paralyzes the will  
this is why the world exists  
so that we might enjoy it  
and these men drift in and out of this world  
and sometimes one of them seems a natural part of my life

When my mother brought me a glass of rose  
in the garden at Malrome  
and we sat in the shade of the lemon trees

where it was cool  
and I could lean back in the reclining chair  
surrounded by things that sought a resting place in the soil  
and were not expected to move  
the trees, the potted flowers  
the stone walls and footpaths  
things that could sink to the ground  
and stay there  
in their rightful place  
and I sat back  
and listened to the light voice of my mother  
in the summer breeze  
telling me of my grandmother  
of my uncle Odon, Uncle Bebert and aunt O.  
and all those who had never felt the need  
to make the trip to the city  
but had stayed at home in the country  
carried along from year to year by the familiarities of daily life  
and taken to the grave by their neighbors  
as easily as any other of the quotidian events of their lives.

SHE SITS AND LISTENS TO  
THE ENTIRETY OF BEETHOVEN'S MOONLIGHT SONATA

OR SOME SWEET, MELANCHOLY PIANO SOLO

OR SHE DANCES TO IT

OR SHE DANCES TO A SELECTION FROM STRAUSS'S  
TANZ DER SIEBEN SCHLEIER FROM HIS OPERA SALOME:  
NOT THE OPENING BOMBASTIC SECTIONS OF THE MUSIC  
BUT JUST THE SLOWER, SWEETER SECTIONS.  
AND SHE DOES NOT DO A STRIPTease  
OR ANY SORT OF DANCE OF THE SEVEN VEILS,  
BUT JUST HER OWN DANCE.

## Home

its cove of green sea  
its complicated rocks  
the little woods  
old and new trees  
the warm terrace  
the rosebushes  
my yellow room  
and the beach to which the tides bring treasures  
mauve coral, polished shells  
and sometimes casks of whale oil or benzine  
from far off shipwrecks  
and I have a rocky perch  
between the sky and the sea  
this was the world of my childhood  
long gone, long, long gone

what wild orchids  
almost a meter high, deep purple  
growing in the meadows  
and roses and medlar trees in blossom  
the white rose vine covering the front of the chateau  
so white with flowers  
that at night it seemed to trace the milky way  
and the nightingales  
that didn't have time to eat or drink  
they sang from four in the afternoon  
to seven in the morning  
and from four in the morning  
to four in the afternoon  
so that I have to wonder  
when do they have time to make love?

And now I know:  
this is who I am.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

Salome was composed with the dramaturgical collaboration of Tom Damrauer. The text was in part inspired by or taken from Catherine Millet, Gustave Flaubert, Camille Paglia, Annie Sprinkle, Colette, [www.bethworld.com](http://www.bethworld.com) and various other texts posted on the internet.

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