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# The Talking Flower Pots

by CHARLES L. MEE

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

## WOMEN SPEAKING

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

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

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

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

psychiatrists!

Boy babies should be flushed down the toilet at birth.

ARIEL

I love you, with all my heart.

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

and the way you fuck up

because even when you fuck up

and it makes me so mad

you are actually so incompetent at it

such a wild, untargeted loser that I love you

because I think the reason you are such a loser

is that your heart is good

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

when you are acting like a nasty shit

so that people don't have to take it seriously

and they can just wait till you realize

how wrong you've been

and also right

also right

because I don't think you are a pathetic loser

that people love out of pity

or because they want to be with some weak

useless guy they can manipulate

you really are a winner

because of your heart

which is always there

and when you come around

we all see it

and see you always were a good human being.

ELLA

The point is, you came on way too strong.

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

The damage has been done.

That's why people, when people play bridge,

they lead with the three of clubs,

they feel it out

and then they can build from there.

But when you throw down the ace of spades,

what is it?

You're going for a grand slam or what?

I've been thinking of us being together

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

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

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

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

Everyone was dressed in long silk gowns.

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

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

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

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

What do you think that means?

ARIEL

You

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

ARIEL

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

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

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

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

## MEN SPEAKING

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

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

## CONSTANTINE

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

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

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

with no brakes to hold them

this noxious world

and then when it's over

suddenly

when this impulse isn't called for any longer

a man is expected to put it away

carry on with life

as though he didn't have such impulses

or to know that, if he does

he is a despicable person

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

in her bedroom

or in the midst of war

slamming her down, hitting her,

he should be esteemed for this

for informing her

about what it is that civilization really contains

the impulse to hurt side by side with the gentleness

the use of force as well as tenderness

the presence of coercion and necessity

because it has just been a luxury for her really

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

to let a man do it for her

so that she can stand aside and deplore it

whereas in reality

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

on which she depends

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

and food and clothes

dining out in restaurants

and going on vacations to the oceanside

so that when a man turns it against her

he is showing her a different sort of civilized behavior really

that she should know and feel intimately

as he does

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

to know this is part not just of him

but also of her life

not go through life denying it

pretending it belongs to another

rather knowing it as her own

feeling it as her own

feeling it as a part of life as intense as love

as lovely in its way as kindness

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

NIKOS

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

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

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

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

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

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

because I admire you

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

but maybe this isn't quite the thing you want

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

I talk too much.  
I'm sorry.

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

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

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

#### DEBARGO

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

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

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

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

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

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