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The Thursday After the Pandemic

by CHARLES L. MEE

A guy comes in wearing a crown of flowers

A decayed rotting beautiful tree stump
from the middle of the woods
is brought in on a little red wagon.

A girl or woman wearing a Viking helmet with two horns
brings in a blue toy car in the shape of a loaf of bread
with six small flashlights in a row,
sticking out the top of the car
that she pulls on a string

Somebody brings in a giant wire insect.

[[[[[[[[NOTE:

An inexpensive version of this piece can be done:
all the props and set pieces—
not the items mentioned in this script
but whatever else—
can come from the theatre's shop and store room
or wherever else

And just a few singers are needed
rather than the full chorus—

and the singers can also be the stage hands

etc etc etc.

a kid's red wagon
with three tv sets attached to poles that stick up from the center of the wagon

a cocktail bar and tv set
on top of a giant, bed-sized pillow

an orange body suit
made of bear's fur
with a ten foot "tail" coming out the front
and a brightly colored striped tie and white shirt collar at the neck

a pair of black rubber rain boots,
eight feet tall

two stone pedestals
each about three feet tall
one with a rooster on top of it
the other with a chicken on top of it

a baby carriage with wire frames on top of it
holding a boulder

a tower constructed of household furniture—
little chairs and bedsteads and guitars and socks
and women's high-heeled shoes
a mannequin
with a basketball head
and two little baseball bats for rabbit ears

The garage door opens.

20 people in brightly colored silly swimming suits
with drinks in their hands
dance on the beach
to what might as well be Italian beach boys music
it goes on and on and on
happily ecstatically

from which six slender four foot tall poles stick up.
On each pole is a painted cardboard cutout of a human figure—
a guy in a swimming suit, a guy in a business suit,
a woman in a fashionable dress,
a guy in work clothes wearing boxing gloves, etc.
And atop each of these figures is a head—
one head is a bunch of bananas,
one is a cluster of dark storm clouds,
one is a television set with a human face on the screen, one is a thick, u-shaped, wooden block,
etc.

a naked body of Christ
holes are poked in it
and blood gushes out

a dog walker with several dogs on leashes

a guy crosses the stage
with a skeleton on his back
its hands and arms over the shoulders of the guy carrying him
so the guy can hold the skeleton's forearms to keep it on his back

a young woman selling her own handmade jewelry
or T-shirts with stuff on them?

A guy rolls up his pant leg
puts one naked foot in the air
and paints it ten different messy colors with oil paint.

EDMUND

I think you are lying to me, Herbert.
You are always lying to me
because you wish something would be true
but it isn't.
You are a weak spineless person, Herbert,
feckless, feeble and ineffective.

But I love you like a cicada.

HERBERT
A cicada?

EDMUND
Yes.

HERBERT
Like a grasshopper you mean?

EDMUND
Do you know what a cicada is?

HERBERT
I thought I did.

EDMUND
There was a time long ago, in prehistoric times
when cicadas were human beings
back before the Muses were born.
And then when the Muses were born
and song came into being
some of these human creatures were so taken by the pleasure of it
that they sang and sang and sang.
And they forgot to eat or drink
they just sang and sang
and so,
before they knew it,
they died.

And from those human creatures a new species came into being

the cicadas
and they were given this special gift from the Muses:
that from the time they are born
they need no nourishment
they just sing continuously
caught forever in the pleasure of the moment
without eating or drinking
until they die.

This is the story of love.
If you stay there forever in that place
you die of it.

That's why people
can't stay in love.

But that's how I've loved you.
And how I love you now.
And how I always will.

The garage doors open and one woman is in the garage
standing against the back wall
which is filled with scrawlings,
black line drawings a child might have done of animals
that are lovely but that seem,
accompanied as they are by a lone woman in the garage,
a little sad and desperate.

This could be the bride.

She sings a lonely solo: A Crazy Girl Is Hard to Find
a lonely solo
a lonely solo

a lonely solo
a lonely solo

out of the other garage door:
comes a parade of dresses
both men and women in fancy clothes
both men's and women's clothes
men in men's clothes
and men in women's clothes
and women in men's clothes—
summer and winter clothes
kids clothes
pajamas
a guy with an immense woman's wig full of feathers
Christmas outfits
fantastic outfits
swimming suits
underwear
Halloween costumes

a fashion runway show—
coming down, strutting, then stopping for a pose,
turning, strutting off—
they enter, flaunt, exit
and then enter again in a different outfit
until they've all done two or three turns

a whole chamber orchestra enters, and we expect they will play, but they quickly put together two café tables and have lunch

HIROKO

I'm glad to see you again.

CATHERINE

So you say.

And yet

I don't know how it could be true.

HIROKO

How could it not be true?

CATHERINE

Because if you were glad to see me
you would never have left me.

HIROKO

Of course I would.

CATHERINE

No, because

if you love someone

you don't leave them.

You hold onto them for dear life

you hold onto them forever

unless you are a stupid person

which I don't think you are

so

what else can I think

except you never really loved me

I was just another one of your flings along the way

whereas I loved you

I knew
if you love someone
you don't let them go

HIROKO
And yet you did.

CATHERINE
I never did.

HIROKO
You said:
if one day you are going to leave me
then go now
don't just keep tormenting me.

CATHERINE
And so?

HIROKO
And so.
It's not that I left you.

CATHERINE
Excuse me.
I didn't leave you.
And yet, you are not with me.
What else happened?

HIROKO
It turned out
we were at different points in our lives
we couldn't go on.

CATHERINE
I could have gone on.

HIROKO
Shall we talk about something else?

CATHERINE

I see
in the world
people have wars and they die
entire countries come to an end
Etienne has died of cancer

HIROKO

I didn't know.

CATHERINE

How could you?
And yet
there it is.
And one day I will die
and so will you.
And yet
you could leave me.
I don't understand.
I will never understand
how it is if you have only one life to live
and you find your own true love
the person all your life you were meant to find
and your only job then was to cherish that person
and care for that person
and never let go
but it turns out
you can still think
for some reason
because this or that
you end it
you end it forever
you end it for the only life you will ever live on earth.
Maybe if you would be reincarnated
and you could come back to life again and again a dozen times
then this would make sense
to throw away your only chance for love in this life
because you would have another chance in another life

but when this is your only chance
how can this make sense?

Do you think
there will ever be a time
when we could get back together?

HIROKO
No.

CATHERINE
Not ever?

HIROKO
No.

CATHERINE
Not ever at all
even ever?

HIROKO
No.

CATHERINE
And yet
this is so hard for me to accept.

More than anything
I love to lie in bed with you at night
and look at your naked back
and stroke your back slowly
from your neck to your coccyx
and let my fingers fan out
and drift over your smooth buttock
and slip slowly down along your thigh
to your sweet knee
only to return again
coming up the back of your thigh
hesitating a moment

to let my fingers rest in the sweet valley
at the very top of your thigh, just below your buttock
and so slowly up along the small of your back
to your shoulder blade
and then to let your hair tickle my face
as I put my lips to your shoulder
and kiss you and kiss you and kiss you forever
this is what I call heaven
and what I hope will last forever

[Hiroko stands to leave]

HIROKO

I love you, Catherine.
I have never loved anyone in my life as I have loved you
and I know I never will.
But we cannot be together.

[she leaves;
Catherine watches her go.]

a girl enters with her computer held close to her head
listening to the music that comes to her from her computer
and dancing

woman in red dress
enters, dancing solo
with a floor lamp
with a lampshade made of underpants
looking for a place to put it
Benny Goodman or Guy Lombardo or Bing Crosby
trying the lamp here, not liking it,
trying it there, not liking it,

trying it somewhere else,
finally placing the lamp and exiting

Why does the chicken cross the stage?

A chicken crosses the stage—moving cautiously, stopping and looking around as he goes, scratching at the ground—maybe while we hear, as a voiceover, an astronaut talking to Houston base.

VOICEOVER FROM SPEAKERS

A man in a chicken suit crosses the stage.

[Silence, till the chicken is almost off the other side.]

Why does he cross the stage?

A kid's toy piano is brought out and put down.

A guy looks at it,

then turns his back to the piano,

and, squatting, sits on the keyboard,

and then “plays” the piano

by bouncing up and down on his butt.

The solo dancer returns

takes the floor lamp lovingly in her arms,

dances around with it,

dances around with it sweetly,

nostalgically,

spiritedly,

warmly,

regretfully,

and finally

is joined by others
with solos
with chairs
wheelchairs
the salad fork dance

three men do a chair dance together now
dancing on off and around the sofa

taking clothes from the clothes rack

a guy dances with a skateboard

everyone dances holding two high heeled shoes in their hands

they throw themselves to the floor
bounce off a mattress

some of these things remain solos
some of these things
—like bouncing off the mattress—
are things everyone does

there is a bucket dance

and a guy with his feet nailed to floor
(well, with shoes nailed to the floor that he slips into)
rocks back and forth

everyone has a guitar or violin or flute and plays it badly together

someone emerges from a dresser

someone else emerges from a refrigerator

The Beating

A guy comes on carrying a square of astroturf, a garbage can, and a baseball bat. He sets the astroturf down carefully, places the garbage can on the astroturf, takes out two earplugs and puts them in his ears. He beats the garbage can with a baseball bat. He exits.

An old village lady singer sings

and the installation art objects on stage sing the chorus

the pope on stilts

people just stand up and sing love songs

love songs
love songs
love songs
and love arias
sometimes step forward and do solos
sometimes the whole group sings a song together
sometimes a café waiter sings

They are all dressed in their underwear.

Tilly speaks to George.

TILLY

I would eat tarte tatins
and drink Châteauneuf-du-Pape
and sometimes a glass of rose
sitting in the garden in the afternoon
and, if it wouldn't hurt too much
or become a habit leading down the path to hell
I'd like to have just one cigarette every day
or even one every other day
with an espresso, in the café
one of the cafés
and then I'd drive out to the hospital
where Van Gogh spent that year
painting the cypresses and the olive trees
and you think:
he was crazy
and pathetic
what a tragedy
how he suffered
but you know
he turned out a hundred a thirty paintings

or a hundred and forty paintings
or, like a hundred and forty three paintings
like he turned out a painting every two and a half days
for a year!
that's where he turned out The Starry Night!
I don't even mention the olive grove
or the field with the red poppies
and that's what I would do
I would be a painter if I could even just hold a brush right
if I just had enough talent to dip a brush into some paint
and slather it on the canvas
because that is a perfect life
you just get up in the morning
and you get your cup of coffee
and you wander into your studio
and whatever catches your eye is what you do
you think
oh, that painting I was working on yesterday
that could use a little splash of red up there near the top
and so you dip your brush into the paint
and you splash some red
and then a little yellow
some green here over on the right
you think
okay
I could put a sailboat up there in the sky
and then you have another sip of your coffee
and you notice the little ceramic vase
you had been working on the day before yesterday
and you think
I could put some kind of flat, muted purple
right there where its stomach bulges out a little bit
and then you see that drawing
that fell on the floor
off that table down near the other end of your studio
and you go to pick it up
and you just can't resist
doing a little something to it
adding a little picnic table to the landscape

solo
solo
solo

while
the people in undies
take their places around the tables.

And then, while the woman still sings,
a rack of clothes is brought on,
and everyone gets up from the tables
and takes their time choosing just the right outfit
and getting dressed in dinner clothes.

blow up doll
women with blue wigs

guy repeatedly falling through an open door
all the while a guy sings a pop song and flings himself through a door

6 guys line up at front of stage
backs to audience
while 6 women danced for them
lonely, sad unison dance
while the soprano sings

Asian woman appears in chinky/junky outfit
looking like one of the dancers in the Strange Mushroom company

she leaves,
returns in red shirt, white undies
with a pillow in her arms
looking for someone
and turns abruptly and leaves at once

she returns wearing a white shirt and tie and glasses
like an office worker
—as though she has been trying out identities that will be acceptable

now 3 women only in underpants

3 naked people at dinner table
—this time including a naked man
one woman in evening clothes
a snapshot of society

the Asian woman returns
this time only in white underpants

5 people in undies
the elegantly dressed woman solos
2 guys play ping pong

again the song: 'Time is but a memory....'

a rack of clothes is brought on
and everyone dresses in dinner clothes

it is as though they had stripped down to the essentials
or 'desocialized' themselves
and now 'resocialize' themselves

but this time in their own choices of persona/fashion?

they all gather around the dinner table
breaking bread is the most basic social ritual
and, yes, here society is reconstituted

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

a woman comes out with a green picket fence,
sets it standing up by itself
stands in front of it, to one side, for a minute,
then picks up the fence and leaves;

several naked bathers in the plastic wading pool?
or one naked woman rolled on in a bathtub
sponging herself?
and then, a while later,
someone else comes along and rolls her out?

a piano is brought out for someone to play
and someone else steps over to the piano and sings along
sings along

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

dance
and dance
and dance
and dance

a couple dances tenderly
a couple dances tenderly

The End.

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