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Utopia Parkway

by CHARLES L. MEE

Queens.

A street.

Is there a concrete or brick wall
in which a big hole has been blown
so that we see a garden with trees through the hole?

Are there easy chairs around on the sidewalk
and in the street, or sitting in the dirt,
so here, outdoors, we have indoor furniture?

Casting note:
46% of Queens is foreign born.

1. The Prologue

A long, slow first scene
so as to make the second scene
even more stunning when it comes.

The doctor/apothecary enters quietly
and begins to set out his herbs
and other medicines neatly.
He speaks to us as though to a customer.

DOCTOR

How do bad things happen
(when most people are so good)?

[he sets out his herbs]

Nobody I know gets out of bed in the morning and says:
now, today, I am going to do something bad.
No.

[he sets out his herbs]

The worst a person might say
sometimes
is: today
I may have to choose the lesser of two evils.
And who can blame us for that?
This is the human condition.
Nothing comes without a price
and so on and so forth as they say.
We live a balanced life.

[he sets out his herbs]

The good
is a wonderful thing.
The generous
is a wonderful thing.
The benevolent
the charitable
the compassionate
the tolerant
these are all things we aspire to
even though we know
from day to day
for the most part
we must live without them
because
we have come to know who we are.

[while he speaks
a dentist enters
and begins to set up his dental office on the street
setting out his instruments etc.]

There was a man who lived here for example
not so long ago...

[The doctor, as he speaks,
gestures toward the dentist]

the dentist here knows about this.

DENTIST
Who is this?

DOCTOR
Mr. Lee.

DENTIST
I cut his hair.
What there was of it.
I told him:
you don't want a comb over
it makes it more obvious than it is.
You should shave your head.
Make do with what you have.
He never listened.

DOCTOR
He was a scholar, Mr. Lee.

DENTIST
He never listened.

DOCTOR
That's what I'm saying.
In any case,
his wife died, Mrs. Lee,

and left him with a baby daughter
whom he felt
he couldn't raise by himself
or even at all for that matter

DENTIST

he had to get on with his career

DOCTOR

had to get on with his work

[A cook enters,
begins setting up his grill.]

DENTIST

the truth is,
he had to make a living
this is how it is

COOK

Some people have to make do.

DENTIST

Their hand is forced.

COOK

A person without money
is like a turtle without a shell.

DOCTOR

And this was a man
all he ever wanted to do was to care for his daughter
This girl he loved, you might say, almost:
to distraction.

DENTIST

This is how it is for a parent sometimes
they love their children more even than themselves

so that
when they see that they themselves
stand in the way of a life for their children

COOK
they let them go

DENTIST
they give them up

COOK
to give them a life they never otherwise could have had

DENTIST
But to give her away
when she was only seven years old

DOCTOR
the old man wept and wept

DENTIST
I saw him weeping

DOCTOR
In any case, he went to a widow here nearby

[A T-shirt seller enters
to set up shop.

And others enter from time to time
and set up their little shops,
T-shirt stands
food stands.
There are people
with sewing machines

making dresses, cassettes, sneakers
giving each other haircuts, shaves, massages, acupuncture
throughout the piece.

The chorus is both a sweat shop and a market place.

And musicians enter
and set up their instruments—
including a toy piano—
and begin to tune up.]

DENTIST

He owed the widow some money....

DOCTOR

and couldn't pay it back
and so he thought
he would give his daughter to the widow
this was heartbreaking for him
but the girl could help the woman around the house
cooking, cleaning, whatever the girl could do

DENTIST

and that would settle his debt

DOCTOR

and also
he was also thinking
he not only settled his debt
he got the girl a home
and he also got her the prospect of a husband

COOK

because of the widow's son living in the house

DOCTOR

Yes, indeed,
because, naturally, it occurred to the man

that the girl
living in the same house with this young boy

T-SHIRT SELLER

This is the widow Jones.

DOCTOR

Yes.

T-SHIRT SELLER

Left with some money by her dead husband

COOK

And not only the money he left her
but after all
the widow used the money
to go into the loan business for herself

DOCTOR

Loaning money to those in need.

DENTIST

So that she became famous
as a person of some means.

COOK

Even infamous you might almost say.

T-SHIRT SELLER

And not only in her own neighborhood.

DOCTOR

In any case
the man thought
leaving his daughter with the widow
and with her son
who was the widow's heir and so forth
with this family that was

comparatively speaking
a family of some wealth
that the girl would be well provided for

DENTIST

because the truth is
he wanted to leave his daughter
with every advantage that he could
that he himself had never had

DOCTOR

because he loved her that's all
and she doted on him, too.
I never knew a girl
more loving
more respectful

DENTIST

More vulnerable when it comes to that.

DOCTOR

vulnerable
and so, as a consequence,
more compassionate toward others
knowing all too well, as she did,
one might say:
what a struggle it can be
for people to get from day to day.

DENTIST

Because, you might say, with the world the way it is,
this is the sort of thing that can happen.

THE COOK

We do what we can.

T-SHIRT SELLER

We shouldn't.

DOCTOR

In any case,
the girl was raised by the widow

DENTIST

And the father was never heard from again.
No one knew what had become of him
until the news came that he had died.

COOK

A sad thing.

DOCTOR

And then, when the girl was thirteen,
she married the widow's son

DENTIST

Which was the most amazing thing of all.
That he married her at all!

COOK

How he might have behaved instead
with a girl in the house
no one really to defend her

DOCTOR

And then, as it turned out,
the girl liked the boy.

T-SHIRT SELLER

The turns a life can take!

THE COOK

They got on very well.

DOCTOR

I won't say how well.
I won't say it was a love match.
It was a marriage of friendship and loyalty

and mutual regard—
finally, whatever else it may have been—
the boy, I gather, hadn't had too easy a time of it himself
being in some way
impaired
I don't know how to say just how.

THE COOK

No one knows these things from the outside.

T SHIRT SELLER

Just what sort of relationship they had had.

THE COOK

Whether it might even have been....

T SHIRT SELLER

Intimate.

THE COOK

Intimate.

DOCTOR

In any case,
before two years had passed
after the wedding of the young girl and the boy
the son had died
the girl herself was a widow at fifteen
still a girl and already a widow
and she was left living with the old woman
who,
by this time,
the girl had come to think of as her own mother
and she had come to treat the old widow with all the respect
and devotion
one could ever wish from a daughter.

DENTIST

Amazing.

THE COOK

A model person.

Of course, to be sure,

when you look more closely

you are likely to find a flaw or two

in any human being

but with this girl

it seemed to those of us who were merely neighbors

that she was as close to flawless

as a human being can get.

Through all this she remained as sweet as any girl could ever be.

As sweet as marzipan she was.

DENTIST

And beautiful.

DOCTOR

I'm not sure it would be appropriate

for an older man to comment....

COOK

Lovely.

T-SHIRT SELLER

I would even say ravishing.

DOCTOR

She had grown up to be radiant.

[The band plays.]

2. The Girl

[And the girl enters

a ravishing entrance

and sings.

It may be that she lip syncs her songs,
and that many of the songs throughout the piece
are done as karaoke.]

THE GIRL [singing]

When I wake up in the morning
and think of what's to come
I can't believe
that I'm so lucky
to be alive another day

to come out on the sidewalk
and see the passersby
these fine young men
and lovely women
each going their own way
so full of life and energy
it seems to me a miracle
a thousand thousand people
with their thousand thousand thoughts
how is it even possible
with all their different plans
that they can get along at all
and even more than that
sometimes
take pleasure in each other
help each other out
look out for one another
extend their hearts to someone else
put another's wishes
ahead of their very own
and end the day each day
some of them
in one another's arms?
It seems to me a miracle
and such a lovely one
it's this that wakes me every day

[and then she leaves
as everyone looks after her
mouths agape]

3. The Proposal

THE BOY

In fact,
I'll marry the girl
or I'm not a man.

THE WIDOW

The girl
The girl doesn't want to be married.

THE BOY

Doesn't want.
Doesn't want.
How old is she?
She doesn't know what she doesn't want.

WIDOW

She knows she doesn't want to be married.

THE BOY

Excuse me.
Are you the woman
my father and I just found in the alley on the other side of town
being strangled to death
by a dissatisfied customer

OLD MAN

someone to whom you had loaned some money

THE BOY

and he couldn't pay it back

WIDOW

And I thanked you for that.
Did I not thank you for that?

THE BOY

So now
my father's plan:
to make certain you never find yourself
in such trouble again
my father will take you as his wife.

THE WIDOW

His what?

THE BOY

In order to keep you safe in the future
my father is going to marry you
and I will marry your daughter-in-law.

THE WIDOW

Marry my daughter-in-law!
Oh, I don't think so.
Goodness me.
I am grateful to you
as I have said.
But marriage, no.
I am a widow of twenty years
my daughter-in-law is a widow, too,
respectable women.
Still,
if you will give me a chance to get back home
where I keep my things
I will see to it that you are very well rewarded
for what you've done for me.

THE BOY

Well rewarded?
With some little sum of money
some little little tip?

I don't think so.

Just because we are a couple of men
who happen to be passing through town
don't think we are going to be easy
to get rid of with some insignificant gratuity.

No.

We know who you are.

We know what you have.

My father will marry you,
and I will marry your daughter-in-law.

Because

we saved your life.

THE WIDOW

I've never heard of such a thing.

What do you think:

this is Uzbekistan?

Women don't marry men

just because

just because they

found them in an alley someplace.

THE BOY

I see.

Your gratitude goes only so far.

But look at the position you are in.

There you were

wandering around a neighborhood

where, for a woman like you to be alone

is asking to be mugged and murdered.

Do you think that fellow was the only desperate person
in the neighborhood?

Well,

but if that means nothing to you

then never mind

we'll take you back and leave you where we found you
if you think you can get out alive.

THE WIDOW

But

I don't know where I was.

THE BOY

Yes. Well.

There you are, then.

THE WIDOW

But if you will let me take you home

let me give you a good meal

and something to drink

and a handsome sum of money to send you on your way.

THE BOY

Widow Jones,

if I may call you that,

because

I know who you are,

we have been honest with you.

And you should give us the respect we deserve

and be plaindealing with us in return.

Without us you'd be dead.

You'd have nothing.

And we're not asking you for everything.

We're only asking for our half.

Don't think you can

fob us off with some little bribe

give us the slip

and send us on our way.

We know where to find you

we can always bring you back out where you were

and dump you there again.

We're offering you a perfectly respectable proposal
of marriage.

OLD MAN [soothingly]

A woman like yourself
well-to-do

what will happen to your money if you die

you have no children

you have the girl

you will leave your money to her

and then what?

Let's be honest.

She's a defenseless child.

What does she know of money or of business

or of unscrupulous people as far as that's concerned?

You don't want her to go unprotected.

Whereas my son

has gone to college.

THE WIDOW

Is he a graduate?

OLD MAN

Yes, indeed, he is.

I had the sense to put my money where it would do most good.

Because, after all, this is my future

and yours, too,

and also the girl's, as far as that's concerned.

Here's a boy who's been brought up to know

how to keep hold of what he's got.

How to play it safe,

when to take a risk,

how to hedge a bet

when to cut and run

when to put all his eggs in one basket

and watch that basket!

This is not the sort of thing you can learn very easily

if you haven't gone to college.

And the friends he's made.

A whole network.
I've helped him out myself
with the contacts that I've had
from over the years, the things I've done.
I'm not saying the whole world's corrupt
no, indeed,
quite the contrary
that's just the point!
You never know who you can trust.
But if you have some friends and you know your friends
you can be sure you won't run afoul
of the wrong sort of person.

And investment advice:
that's not the boy's only area of expertise
but protection, you know,
of the most basic sort
keeping your girl from people who might wish her harm
violent people
as well as connivers
people who might cause her physical damage
having the sense to know:
if some other fellow is a threat or not
and if he is
to strike him first
take him out
before he's had a chance to make a move.
We could be your partners.
That could be good for you
when you think what sort of people we are.

So you can leave your worries in my boy's hands
and sleep soundly every night
knowing that's all taken care of.
Because that's what I've raised the boy to do.

And how about yourself?
You've been a hard-working person, I know.
Going to bed every night

plagued by worry.
Maybe you'd like to have someone relieve you
of some of the strain of business.

You've been a widow now—
for how long?

THE WIDOW
Twenty years.

OLD MAN
And let's be honest
I am a widower myself
and I can't say that I enjoy going to bed alone
all these years
sleeping by myself.
They've done studies
I'm sure you've heard
of people living in retirement homes
and it turns out
they have very active sex lives.
But how about you?

THE WIDOW
Well....

OLD MAN
Of course, you've been as lonely as I have.
And it's so unnecessary!
You're an attractive woman,
may I say, a very attractive woman.
And I myself
some people say
am not an altogether repulsive specimen!
My family may have fallen on hard times,
but I do not come without a certain lineage
a certain social position
that frankly
I can bring to you.

Along with
let's be honest
a warm and open heart
a romantic nature
a longing
just as sure as I know you have yourself
for a real partnership
and a lasting love
with someone who doesn't just look on you as a friend
or companion for the later years of life
but someone who still believes
in passion
and fun
good times
and hot sex.

THE WIDOW

Oh.
I see.

OLD MAN

I know.
[sings]
You get a kick from champagne.

WIDOW

Well...

OLD MAN [sings]

You get a buzz from Biarritz.

WIDOW

I don't know...

OLD MAN [sings]

You like a guy with a certain
could be
knowledge of just how to please.

WIDOW

Oh.

OLD MAN [sings]

And that kind of guy could be me.

WIDOW [sings]

It's true:

I get a kick from champagne.

OLD MAN

I knew.

WIDOW [sings]

I get a buzz from Biarritz.

OLD MAN

C'est vous.

WIDOW [sings]

I like a guy with a certain
could be
knowledge of just how to please.

OLD MAN

Yes.

WIDOW [sings]

And that kind of guy could be you.

OLD MAN AND WIDOW [sing together]

I had a hunch when we met
You could be just my own sort
I've had a need for quite a long time
for someone who has what you've got
And you could have just what I lack.

OLD MAN [sings]

I've looked a long time for you

WIDOW [sings]

I've been alone for so long

OLD MAN [sings]

I need a woman

who has her own job

WIDOW [sings]

I need a man with an edge

OLD MAN AND WIDOW [sing together]

I had a hunch when we met

You could be just my own sort

I've had a need for quite a long time

for someone who has what you've got

And you could have just what I lack.

[The Widow and the Old Man

dance together.]

OLD MAN

Why don't you give my boy a chance?

THE WIDOW

I'm sorry?

THE BOY

I say, why don't you put my boy to the test?

See if he can be of help to you.

For instance,

try him with a math problem.

THE WIDOW

Oh.

I see.

Well,
what is \$15 times 200%
compounded every other week?

THE BOY

I don't think I'll be settling for 200%.

THE WIDOW

Come with me.

I'll show you where I live.

4. Street talk

The chorus sings:

When you're walking down the street at night
you see something that you like
you reach out and you take it
before you find it's gone

You take it
and you drive it
you drink it
or you eat it
you wear it
or you fuck it
because you know that if you don't
some other guy will get it

There was a kid
I knew one time
he lit a bum on fire
poured gasoline all over him
and lit him with a match
watched the flames light up the night
it was a lovely sight
the crowd that gathered
they were surprised

some said they were amazed
they said in all their lives
they'd never seen a thing like this
a man just lit on fire
and burning through the night
the kid I knew
he turned to them
and said:
where have you been?
where I come from
this happens all the time
we do it every night
we do it in the cold weather
because we need the heat
we do it in the summer
because we like the light
sometimes we do it
at midday
because it feels so good
to us this isn't an exception
to us it is the rule

— while the boy does a braggadocio performance piece,
showing off his skills
with a lacrosse stick
or a golf club
from the garbage can

and several others from the chorus join him
doing the same thing
with tennis rackets and hacky sacks from the trash bin
while the music continues.

5. Mother Breaks the News

The Widow, accompanied by the old man and his son,
finds the girl on the street.

THE GIRL

Mother, you're back.
Have you eaten?

THE WIDOW

Child, how can I tell you?

THE GIRL

Tell me what?

Who are these men?

THE WIDOW

These men saved my life.

THE GIRL

Saved your life?
Mother, what happened?

THE WIDOW

I went to see old Iserson
to collect the debt he owed
and he took me out into an alley
with the idea, it seems,
he would murder me
so he wouldn't have to pay his debt
and then along came this man and his son
who saved my life.

THE GIRL

Oh, thank you, thank you.
How can we ever thank you enough?
Let me give you a cup of tea
or something for you to eat.

OLD MAN

Thank you.

In fact, your mother has been very kind.

She offered us a place to stay.

THE GIRL

She has?

Where?

THE WIDOW

With us.

THE GIRL

With us?

THE WIDOW

The truth is

this gentleman has proposed marriage to me.

THE GIRL

Marriage?

OLD MAN

I have.

THE GIRL

How could you be married?

A widow of twenty years.

THE WIDOW

Many older women are marrying these days.

THE GIRL

Are what?

THE WIDOW

You know, just because a woman has attained a certain age doesn't mean she is no longer desirable or interested in marriage.

THE GIRL

Yes, yes, of course.

I didn't mean to say...

[to the OLD MAN]

I mean, of course, my mother is an attractive woman
and will be, I'm sure
till the end of her days.

[to THE WIDOW]

I only meant to say
it may be that other women feel they need to marry
they often do
that's the predicament they find themselves in.
But, luckily, your husband provided for you before he died.
So you have the chance to spend your later years in comfort
beholden to no one
to do everything just as you please
not have to answer to anyone
be an independent person
what everyone hopes for all their lives
and this is what you have
I think this is what your husband wanted
to leave you in a position
that you wouldn't ever have to be at the mercy
of people like these.

OLD MAN

Like these?

THE WIDOW

Still

many older women feel
their lives have not come to an end
just because they are widows.

OLD MAN

Many older women find
that age is a different sort of thing these days
just because you are over the age of 30
doesn't mean you never again think of love
or sex.

THE BOY

Just because a person is no longer a subscriber to
Teen Magazine
or Cosmo
doesn't mean she doesn't want to have a full life.

THE GIRL

Of course, of course.
Still. Whatever.
A woman doesn't want to marry just any man who comes along.

THE WIDOW

Sometimes in life
you have to understand
this is the hand that I've been dealt
now I'll play it the best I can.

OLD MAN [smiling, charming]

And maybe this is not the worst that could happen
when you've lived as long as your mother and I have
you'll see
that other people have to put up with worse than this
every day.

THE WIDOW

Sometimes
you have to take life as it comes.
And here is a man
I have to say
who has a certain charm
a certain worldliness
that is not altogether unappealing.

THE GIRL

A man finds you in distress,
saves you
and says you have to marry him
or he will leave you there to die
and you think this is an appealing man?

THE BOY

And don't forget
he has a son!

THE GIRL

A son, yes! A son!
And this is a good thing?????????

[the girl runs out in confusion;

the mother yells after her]

THE WIDOW

What are you saying to me?
You mean to say
a woman should never marry again
even if her husband has been dead for twenty years?

[the girl returns]

THE GIRL

Shouldn't marry any man who comes along
without a moment's notice
drop everything and think
all of a sudden
oh
I think I'll marry him
whoever he might be
even if he is a felon and a godknows what

THE WIDOW

I'm not a person who has made my way in life
entertaining romantic fantasies
of how my life could be
when I can see how things are.
I've had to deal in the facts
and when I see how things are in fact
I act accordingly
without wasting any time.

[The Widow storms out]

THE GIRL

Mother!
Don't leave me like this.
We can talk.
We can come to some understanding!

[The Widow returns.]

THE WIDOW

Easy for you to say,
woman of leisure that you have become
nothing threatening your survival
you can sit back and theorize all day long
about the way things can be
in a hundred years or two.
But for those of us who live on the margins
without some cushion against the harshness of the world
we have to see life as it is
and make the best of it.
And let's be honest
getting by for twenty years on my own
I'm getting a little worn out
maybe I could use someone to run the business for me
and let me finally stay at home
and think about
caring for my grandchildren.

[The widow leaves.
And the girl sings.]

THE GIRL [singing]
What is love?
I thought I knew
but it was not like this
the love I thought a woman finds
was absolutely bliss

I had in mind
some tenderness
some mutual regard
some caring and some fondness
it shouldn't be so hard

to find a guy
who likes someone
for everything she is
who treasures her and gives to her
everything that's his

who makes her think
he's like my dad
but even more than that
he's like my mom as well
he cares for me
and keeps me safe
he puts me first in every way
he thinks of all my needs
he gives me everything I want
he treats me like a queen

What is love?
I thought I knew
but it was not like this
the love I thought a woman finds
was absolutely bliss

6. Wedding Plans

[The Widow comes back
her wedding dress half on
her veil in her hand—
and everyone,
including the girl,
helps her get dressed
as they talk.]

THE WIDOW

Child, let me explain.

THE GIRL [not assaulting her mother but just confused and undone]

Mother, what could you explain?

I can't think how it is you would be married.

And how would the wedding be itself?

I don't think I know.

THE COOK

Would you have a country-themed wedding?

White picket fences, fields of wild flowers,

freshly baled haystacks?

a neighborhood get-together around the grill?

T-SHIRT SELLER

a flower-covered arch for an entrance to the wedding?

honeysuckle vines or floral garlands

hanging from the ceiling

lanterns hanging from trees

THE GIRL

[she is undone by this overwhelming avalanche of fears]

To me, it seems a nightmare

THE DENTIST

Or would you rather have a nautical theme?

THE COOK

Decorate your wedding cake
with chocolates made like seashells.
Serve foods that remind your guests
of a trip to the beach:
crab dip and lobster.

DENTIST

Hire a DJ or band
that specializes in beach music.
Like Jimmy Buffett, or The Beach Boys.
Think of tunes like "Under the Boardwalk"
or "I love Beach Music".

T-SHIRT SELLER

What is it that they say?
To ensure good luck,
should the bride step
with her right foot first into the church?

ANOTHER

What would you have on the top of the cake?

ANOTHER

the traditional bride and groom?

ANOTHER

a deep lavender heart
adorned with daisies in shades of lavender?

THE WIDOW

There's so much to decide

ANOTHER

Or you could do the golfer's wedding
and cut Astro Turf into little rounds
to turn each table into a different hole
from your favorite golf courses

ANOTHER

and make the long head table a fairway

ANOTHER

turn the waters' service wagons into golf carts

ANOTHER

and dress the staff in plaid caps to resemble caddies

ANOTHER

create a wedding cake
that looks like a complete golf course
with everything
from a sand trap to a pond

ANOTHER

a miniature bride and groom on top of the cake
dressed in their golf attire

THE DENTIST

Will there be a bachelorette party?
And everyone will play Scavenger Hunt?
And look for what?

ANOTHER

A business card.

ANOTHER

A chest hair.

ANOTHER

A condom.

ANOTHER

A pair of boxers.

ANOTHER

Or you could do the thing
where you get a t-shirt and put life savers all over it

that spell out the words
"A Buck a Suck"
and every guy who sucks a life saver off your shirt
has to give you a dollar

ANOTHER

And you can decorate the party room
with helium-inflated condoms

ANOTHER

and each of the guests gets a banana
or a cucumber
and has to carve a penis out of it
with her teeth

THE GIRL

This is not something a woman should be doing
at your age.

THE WIDOW

Don't you think?

THE GIRL

I don't think even I can carve a penis with my teeth.

[The old man
already dressed in his tuxedo
steps into the middle of the wedding hubbub
and sings
and the chorus backs him up
with humming
and taking a few bars from time to time.]

OLD MAN [sings]

I always knew the day would come
when wedding bells would ring
I'd wear a white carnation
and hear the register ka-ching

The bride would have her dowry
and I would have my thing
she'd come to me with her trousseau
my heart would go ka-ching

I'd settle down in my old age
to see what life would bring
when I lived at last on easy street
and the world would go ka-ching

I never thought I'd see the day
all I want to do is sing
my feet are up, I'm kicking back
my whole life goes ka-ching

7. From Bad to Worse

[The Widow is now dressed in full regalia.]

THE WIDOW [SINGS]

Who knew
at my age, too
I could fall in love like this
I could have such a feeling
like a week in Darjeeling
who knew

Who knew
I'd ever find
a fellow such as you
and even better yet
like no one would have bet
I'd make you happy, too

Who knew
you live this long
and still you find

what every man and woman wants
it's like a lifetime in Provence
who knew

THE GIRL

Oh, mother,
look at you.
I always thought
things can't get worse
but now I see they will
if there's any way they can.

THE WIDOW

I understand you may think
I'm too old for this sort of thing.
But perhaps you're not yourself.

THE GIRL

Not myself for what?

THE WIDOW

Not yourself too old for marriage.

You see I have a gown for you, too.

THE GIRL

A gown?
I'm not getting married, too,
if that's what you mean.

THE WIDOW

A woman needs to be realistic
even more, probably, than a man.

THE GIRL

Who would I marry?

THE WIDOW

The young man who saved my life with the help of his father
he can take care of you
long after I am gone.
He promised me he would.

THE GIRL

Promised you?

THE WIDOW

Yes.

THE GIRL

You mean he said he would marry me?

THE WIDOW

Yes.

THE GIRL

And you
and you
and you listened to him?
Are you saying you promised me to him?
You talked to him about marrying me?
And you didn't tell me?

THE WIDOW

They said they would leave me there to die
unless we both promised to marry them.

THE GIRL

Both marry them?
Both marry them?
You promised we would both marry them?
No one ever heard of such a thing.
Here it goes from bad to worse.
What have I done wrong?
Can it be that in my previous life
I did not burn enough incense?

Haven't I been a faithful daughter
haven't I cared for you all these years
put your wishes ahead always of my own
consoled you when your only son died
stuck up for you with your friends
and now
you hand me away
the moment some guy comes along?
Now what could I ever believe again
about anything at all?

[She collapses to the ground.]

Now the boy enters,
he, too,
already in his wedding tux,
and he sings his love song.]

THE BOY [sings]
I'm following in your footsteps, dad,
just like you said I'd do
I'm getting into someone's pants
and she's got some money, too

I always knew that you were right
that what you said was true
you have to follow your own bliss
and she's got some money, too

I know as I was growing up
I questioned a rule or two
but I'm old enough to know better now
and she's got some money, too

You always said there were two kinds
the old rich and the new
I'm getting married now, dad,
and she's got some money, too

8. Martial Arts

[And now the girl turns on the chorus
and berates them for not helping her.]

THE GIRL

Where is everyone when I need them?
All the things I've done for you
you've been happy when I've brought you tea
a warm meal in the winter
asked about your mothers when they were ill
taken soup to them
and now
where are you?
I'm going to be given to a guy
whether I want him or not?
And no one helps me out?
Do you understand that this is rape?
And you are all bystanders?

T-SHIRT SELLER

Well, I wouldn't say
"bystander" — exactly.

ANOTHER

We're here for you.

ANOTHER

Giving you our support.

ANOTHER

Speaking up
when spoken to.

ANOTHER

Because, after all,
what could we do?

ANOTHER

You have to learn
to stay out of other people's business.

ANOTHER

Other people have their own agendas
you never know.

ANOTHER

They could have other values
you'd just be interfering
with a perfectly valid different point of view.

ANOTHER

There was a time
we always knew
what it was we had to do
everyone agreed
we all knew what was true
and what it was we had to do
but now we have the questions still
and no one has the answers

THE GIRL

I've been abandoned by my father
my mother steps aside
my friends and neighbors all pretend
it's got nothing to do with them
now who will keep me safe?

THE BOY

That's why I'm here for you.

THE GIRL [singing]

All my life
I've waited all my life
to meet someone
that I would love
and all my life

I've waited all my life
to meet someone
who'd love me, too.

THE BOY [sings in reply]

All my life
I've waited all my life
to meet someone
that I could have
and all my life
I've waited all my life
to meet someone
who'd have me, too.

THE GIRL [singing]

I always thought
I'd find one day
some perfect guy
to come my way.
Not tall perhaps
not dark and handsome
but with a soul
and real compassion.

THE BOY [sings in reply]

I always thought
I'd find one day
some hot young girl
to come my way.
A blonde perhaps
who likes some action
not afraid of guys
with some real passion.

THE GIRL [singing]

I've looked for him
looked everywhere
looked for him
someone to care

an honest guy
and faithful, too
just simple love
just love that's true

THE BOY [sings with the girl but slightly different lyrics]

I've looked for her
looked everywhere
looked for her
someone to share
some lip and thigh
and buttock, too
just simple sex
that's what would do

THE GIRL [singing]

He could be anyone
or anything
if he'd be sweet
I'd wear his ring.
If he'd be good
and think of me
I'd give myself
to him entirely.

THE BOY [sings with the girl but slightly different lyrics]

She could be anyone
or anything
if she's sweet on me
I'd be the king
I'd be so good
the guys would see
she'd give herself
to me entirely.

THE GIRL

I look at you,
and I think:

What do I know about you
except that you move from town to town
living off the land?

THE BOY

Some would look
and they would think
now here's a clever person
who has everything it takes
to make his way out in the world
Not a person
let's be honest
a person quite like you
a layabout, a passive girl
taken care of by her mother
a girl who can't defend herself
even afraid to go out on her own

THE GIRL

But not a bully like you
not a person who takes everything
that isn't nailed down
and claims it for his own

THE BOY

Not a sponger just like you

THE GIRL

Not a bloodsucker like you

THE BOY

Not a dead weight
not a whiner
not a loser
not a skinny, skanky girl like you

THE GIRL

Not a jerk
not an anus

not a nincompoop like you
Not a greasy dickwad
not a foul-mouthed fart like you

THE BOY

not a nasty little malcontent
not a bitch, not a slut
not a nit picker like you

THE GIRL

So this is how you court a girl?
This is your case for marriage?
Who would want a guy like you
except to take out all the trash?

THE BOY

And who would want a girl like you
except to scrub the floor
and burn the food?

THE GIRL

You're a shifty little dimwit
skulking in the alleys
stealing from the blind and poor
What makes you think
we have what it takes for marriage?

THE BOY

What makes me think it?
I'll tell you what:
I think I'll have you
that's what I think
I'll have you and I'll have you
and then I'll have you yet again
as often as I please
that's what I think
and that's the way it's going to be
for me, and for you, too.

[He reaches out to grab her by the arm.
She breaks his grip.
He reaches out again.
She breaks his grip again.
He grabs her
and she throws him to the ground.

CHORUS

[shouts]

THE BOY

Now I think you'll regret
you got lucky once.
Now I'll show you what it is to be a man.

[He goes for her.
She throws him to the ground.
She grabs him,
picks him up,
and throws him to the ground.

The chorus goes crazy with shouting and jumping up and down.

He comes back at her
and she throws him to the ground.

Now someone in the chorus
shoves another member of the chorus
in general enthusiastic embrace
of the physicality of the day.

The one who is shoved
shoves back.
Another shoves.

And so forth.

Until the whole chorus is throwing one another to the ground
in imitation of the girl

each kicks the shit out of someone else
coming from the ceiling and down the walls

and SHE,
SHE KICKS THE SHIT OUT OF THE BOY
LEAVING HIM SPRAWLED ON THE GROUND
AND EXITS

so that
by the end
the whole stage is littered with beaten up guys

9. The Reversal

WIDOW
Oh.
Now I don't feel so well.

OLD MAN
You don't?

WIDOW
It could be my stomach
or my heart.
I have a pain
this is nothing like I've ever felt before.

Maybe the young people shouldn't get married after all.

THE BOY
Not get married?
The invitations have all gone out.

WIDOW

Still, this could be an omen.

THE BOY

What is this?

Some ruse to renegotiate?

OLD WOMAN

Certainly not.

THE BOY

What the hell is going on?

OLD MAN

It must be indigestion.

THE BOY

Indigestion, right.

I'll go to the doctor

and get some medicine.

10. The Poison

The doctor "re-introduces" himself with this song:

DOCTOR [sings]

I have a curative for your headache

a restorative for your back

I have a purgative for your worry

Relax: I have a knack.

If you have a contagionis

and you're feeling a little nequissimus

or insomnia has you infimus

and your heart goes palpitat

if you're suffering from anxietas

you have a dolor in your assinus
don't go getting in a swivet 'cause
I've got something just for that.

I have a curative for your headache
a restorative for your back
I have a purgative for your worry
Relax: I'm not a quack.

THE BOY
To speak plainly,
I'll be wanting to buy some poison.

DOCTOR
Poison?
Whatever for?

THE BOY
I don't know that it's any of your business.

DOCTOR
You just made it my business, didn't you?

THE BOY
Sometimes you find you have some vermin
messing with your life.

DOCTOR
My calling is to heal.

THE BOY
And that's what I'm asking for.
I'm engaged to be married
to a beautiful young girl.
But I find there's an obstacle in my way.

DOCTOR
Someone keeps her from you?

THE BOY

I'm not someone who deals in gossip.

DOCTOR

Her mother?

THE BOY

That's not for me to say.

DOCTOR

And if her mother were not around
there'd be no one to protect the girl?

THE BOY

I don't deal in speculation.

DOCTOR

Nonetheless,
under the circumstances
I don't think I'm going to be selling you any poison
I don't think I'll be wanting that on my conscience

THE BOY

I don't see what your conscience has to do with it
You know you're not responsible
for what I do with this poison.
If a person had always to worry
can I sell this guy a car
will he use this car in a bank robbery?
will he use this set of golf clubs to bribe a politician
the world would come to a standstill
Your job is to sell a good product if you can
and leave the rest to the government regulatory agencies.

DOCTOR

How much do you want?

THE BOY

How much will kill a rat?

DOCTOR
How big is the rat?

THE BOY
I'd say 107 pounds.

DOCTOR
That's \$2.95.

THE BOY
OK.
I'll take it.

11. The Widow's Soup

OLD MAN
Old woman, how do you feel?

THE WIDOW
I don't feel good at all.

OLD MAN
Is there anything you'd like to eat?

THE WIDOW
I'd like to have some lamb-tripe soup

OLD MAN
Child, your mother wants some soup.
Hurry it along.

[The girl makes soup
and, while she does,
she speaks or sings.]

THE GIRL [singing]
I wonder how it is
things turned out this way

when I was six or eight years old
I never thought this could be
I thought
in spite of everything
my life would be a long bright day
I wonder whether it can be
does any child know
the turns a life can take
that what starts out to be a blessing
is finally meant to break your heart.

12. Taking the Soup

THE GIRL

Mother, here is the soup.

THE BOY

Let me take it to her.

Wait.

It needs more salt.

THE GIRL

Here is salt.

THE BOY

You put some in.

OLD MAN

Son, is the soup ready?

THE BOY

Here it is. You take it to her.

OLD MAN

Woman, have some soup.

Let me help you.

THE WIDOW

I can't eat it.

You can have it.

OLD MAN

So, already we are sharing soup.

This is a good omen for a marriage.

You and I,

I think,

are going to come to care for one another

as we never have before

this is my prediction

and I've never yet been wrong

about a woman.

The way you feel for me

I think

it's the next thing to tenderness

and the way I feel for you

it is tenderness already.

[And, while the old man sits by the widow

and eats the soup,

the widow and the old man

sing a duet:

WIDOW AND OLD MAN [singing duet]

What does anyone ever wish for

except enduring love

we look for it all our lives

it's always beyond our grasp

sometimes we give up hope

and then

to our complete surprise we find

it can come at any age

we're so used to living in the cold

we can't believe it's true

and then we find

if we just let go
and trust this other person
then we slip right into joy

I've never known such happiness
such heaven here on earth
to finally have
what all my life
I've yearned and yearned and yearned for
and now the only thing I hope
is that it never ends

[The Old Man dies
while he is singing the song.]

THE BOY
He's dead!
You've poisoned my father.

THE GIRL
I did not.

THE BOY
Everyone knows you did.

THE WIDOW
My girl would never do that.
It must have been a heart attack.

THE BOY
Poison is what it was.
And you know the price for murder.
But I'm prepared to keep it quiet
if you know what I mean.

THE WIDOW
I don't.

THE BOY

Keep it in the family, as it were.
If the girl marries me
we can call it a heart attack.

THE GIRL

I'll never marry you.

THE BOY

Then there will have to be an autopsy.
What is it to be?
Shall we settle this privately
or do you want to make it public?

THE WIDOW

We'll take it to the authorities.

THE BOY

And who are they going to believe?
The man's own son
or two desperate women
that frankly
everybody hates
after all the years
you've gouged these people with your loans.

THE WIDOW

How can you be sure he's dead?

THE BOY

You can always tell
if his breath doesn't cloud a mirror
or
if that proves inconclusive
then you can stick a needle in him
and if the needle becomes oxidized
then he's alive
or if
a few hours after he has died

you cut an artery
and he bleeds
he is alive
or if the body fails to take on the temperature of the room
twenty-four hours after death
then he is alive
but I can assure you
I know about these things,
and he is dead.

[The chorus gathers around
as though at a funeral service.
Note: these texts are inscriptions
from tombstones in New England graveyards.]

T-SHIRT SELLER

On fame's eternal camping ground
His silent tent is spread
And glory guards with solemn rounds
The bivouac of the dead.

ANOTHER CHORUS MEMBER

Soon ripe
soon rotten
soon gone
but not forgotten.

ANOTHER

My life's been hard
and all things show it
I always thought so
and now I know it.

ANOTHER

Ashes to ashes and dust to dust
If the Lord doesn't get you
the devil must.

ANOTHER

Bury me not when I am dead
Lay me not down in a dusty bed
I could not bear the life down there
With earth worms creeping through my hair.

ANOTHER

Come view my tomb, as you pass by,
As you are now, so once was I.
As I am now, soon you must be,
therefore prepare to follow me.

[And, as the chorus finishes,
the judge enters.]

13. The Trial

THE GIRL

You have no evidence.

THE JUDGE

It's true
ordinarily that would be an impediment
to conducting a fair trial
and yet we have a corpse
and this corpse it seems safe to say
did not poison itself
so one must ask:
how did this come about?

THE WIDOW

And does my daughter not have a right
to a jury trial?

THE JUDGE

[gesturing toward the chorus]
This is the jury.

[and, to the girl:]
And I have to say,
a confession would simplify matters enormously.

THE GIRL

I won't confess to something I didn't do.

THE JUDGE

Ordinarily of course
I wouldn't countenance torture
the whole point of the 5th amendment, after all,
is to make certain that no one is ever tortured
since, if a person cannot be forced to testify against themselves
there's simply no point to torture
and this, we have to say,
however much the reputation of the founding fathers
has been battered over the years
was a brilliant stratagem on their part

although even so, sometimes we find it is beneficial to use torture
usually not at home
but more often abroad
and sometimes
you'll hear that at a police station in the Bronx
or Brooklyn, too,
that these techniques have been used to good effect
such things as:

A person can be shocked of course
with electrodes placed on the body
blindfolded and put inside a coffin
which is then rolled down a hill
hung upside down by the feet
inside a well
eardrums pierced
kicked and punched
hair grabbed
the head flung repeatedly
against the wall

a Mexican song
played over and over again
at full volume
that alone
while being kicked in the stomach
on the buttocks and in the groin
kneeling
standing
naked in the courtyard
baseball bats
injections of sodium pentathol
haloperidol and whatnot
held down in the water
fed human flesh
arms and legs broken
eyes burned out with cigarettes
lie down, lie down you're told
and anything could happen
your right hand ends up in shreds
you've lost an ear
and so forth and so on

And these are the sorts of things
we will do to your mother
if you won't confess.

THE GIRL

No.

If that's the way it is
then I confess.

THE JUDGE

Unhappily,
given your confession,
you leave me no choice
but to require your execution.

THE WIDOW

Oh, dear,
you were a good girl
took good care of me
for all these years
did all my bidding
cared for my son
always put me first
and what is it I've done now
in return

Now I will never be able
to give you anything in return
for all you've done for me.

THE GIRL

Oh, Mother
I can't keep myself from cursing the world now as I leave it

how could this happen
to a girl
who never brought harm to anyone?
who always wished
to give all she had to others

It is more than unjust
it is needless
it is cruel beyond all measure
such maliciousness upsets all order
now you will see
the universe itself
cannot help but bear witness
to the dreadful wrongs that you accept
as though they were the normal course of things
now you will see
the moment that I die
even though this is the sweet summer month of June
if what I say is true
it will snow

it will snow and snow and snow
because
what you have done is beyond human understanding
there is no bottom to it
the human species is itself
a dark abyss
when it can take a girl
and end her life like this.

[her throat is cut]

EXECUTIONER

Why is the sky suddenly overcast?

[And, as the girl sinks slowly to the ground,
the chorus sings:

I love the weather
any kind at all
I like the winter
I like the fall
I like the heat
I like the cold
I like the frost
I like the dew
I like the rain
I like the hail

[And it begins to snow.

Music for a while.

The widow joins the chorus in singing.]

WIDOW

I like the fog
I like the snow
I like the mist
I like the ice

[And then the girl rises from the ground,
takes the executioner's knife,
and she takes revenge
deliberately
one by one
first the boy
then the judge
as the widow continues to sing,
joined now by the chorus:

WIDOW & CHORUS

I like the sunshine
I like the leaves
I like the mountains
I like the trees
I like the sky
I like the dirt
I like the grass
I like the worms
I like the mold
I like the silt

[And, then,
the girl murders the widow,

and,
as that last murder is completed,
and the girl sinks again to the ground,
the chorus is left alone to sing:

I like the mud
I like the wind
I like the breeze
I like the wet
I like the hills
I like the clay
I like the streams
I like the frogs
I like the storms

I like the buzzards
I like the blizzards
I like the cows
I like the billboards
I like the valleys
I like the throughways
I like the overpasses
I like the underpasses
I like the trolleys
I like the planes
I like the subways
I like the stores
I like the dresses
I like the shoes
I like the lipstick
I like the children
I like the songs
I like the statues
I like the theatre
I like the cars
I like the cigarettes
I like the park
I like the pits
I like the cliffs
I like the dark
I like the clouds
I like the talk
I like the babies
I like the girls
I like the mothers
I like the toys
I like the outdoors
that's how it is
I like the holidays
and the weekends
I like Thanksgiving
and Veterans' Day
I like the wind
I like the buses

I like the buildings

I like the windows

I like the doors

I like the eaves

I like the swaying of the trees

I like the garbage

I like the trucks

I like the rocks

I like the stuff you see when you walk down the street anywhere you are because
wherever it is and whatever you see the main thing is you can see you are alive

another day

It continues to snow.

The End.

A NOTE ON THE TEXT:

Utopia Parkway is inspired by a Chinese story recorded in the History of Han, and in the Records of Spirits of the fourth century, dramatized by Kuan Han-ch'ing in the thirteenth century as Injustice to Tou-O.

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