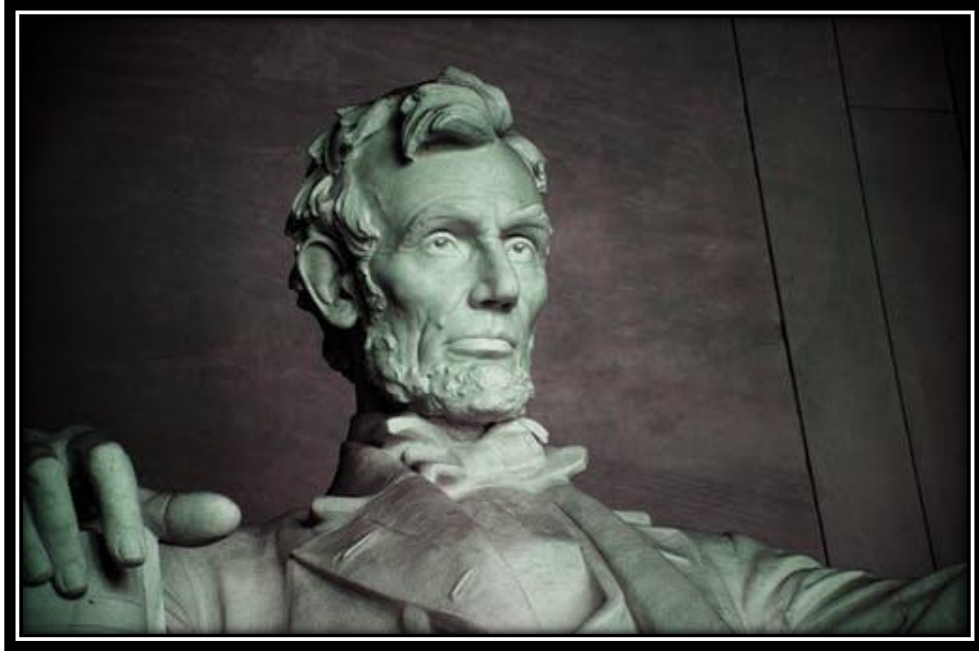


LINCOLN

By Jerold London

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LINCOLN

TIME AND PLACE

May 27, 2020. Social Hall of the Lear Retirement Community. Evening of the second day after George Floyd's death. Around a table MAGGIE, SARGE, PREACHER, and PRINCESS will be seated to pass the time in conversation and building structures out of Lincoln Logs, as they have done many evenings before.

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE. 70's. Female. Blonde. Flashy.

SARGE. 70's. Male. Wearing cammies.

PREACHER ("Pastor" or "Professor"). 70's. Male. Dressed in black.

PRINCESS INDIA. 70's. Female. The solitary black in the cast. Dressed in white with a black belt.

... in the dialogue indicates a thoughtful break.

... // in the dialogue indicates interrupting (but **not** overlapping) text.

FIRST

PREACHER and SARGE enter, and take seats at the table.

PREACHER

I haven't seen Princess since George Floyd got killed.
I think she's holed up in her room. Maybe she's not doing okay. You think?

SARGE

It's a tragedy, what those policemen did. No argument there. Way outta line.
But we don't want things going overboard because of a few bad actors, do we?
We have to keep law and order, don't we?

PREACHER

I couldn't come down last night, it made me so sick, what I saw on TV.
Not knowing what I could possibly say to her. Or even look her in the eye.

SARGE

Our table here was empty, and I watched a movie instead.
The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly. In my room. I have the DVD. Got it on eBay.

PREACHER

What *do* we say?

SARGE

In my experience it's best to let the women say the first word.
Just my experience.

PREACHER

What if nothing's done? Where's the justice in that?...
You know, Sarge, sometimes I think I could ...

SARGE

[*beat*] Could what, Preacher? *You*? A preacher. Get a gun? Like Jack Ruby?
What's it to you anyway, you'd do something crazy and screw up your life?
You're not black. Or do you think you're down with the message?

PREACHER

I'm not all white, either. None of us is all black or all white. There is no pure black
and pure white when the world's in color. We're allies of each other.
Oh Heavens! Here she comes.
Let's just not say anything. Okay?

MAGGIE and PRINCESS INDIA enter, and take their seats at the table with SARGE and PREACHER. In initial silence they start building from the large piles of Lincoln Logs on the table. Throughout the scene they generally occupy themselves with the building of various structures. Some buildings eventually merge. Occasional accidents do not interrupt the action. A half-full pitcher of lemonade sits on the table.

PRINCESS drops a piece on the floor. Bending over to retrieve it –

PRINCESS

Muthafucking logs!

SARGE

What did you just say?

PRINCESS sits back up and slams the piece down onto the table.

PRINCESS

Sweet Jesus, why'd I ever come down here tonight?
All white faces in an all black nightmare.
I'm hatin' livin' in this place, Sarge.
An' growin' old in here.

PRINCESS stands and slams another piece down onto the table. PREACHER stands, goes to her, and gently coaxes her into a calming hug.

PREACHER

[hugging] Shh. We're all on edge tonight, Princess.

PRINCESS

[near tears] Nothing matters anymore, Preacher. Nothing.
Till they get them muthafuckers in jail.
I'm mad, and nothing matters.
It's the same old, same old. Life's a bitch, and nothing changes.

MAGGIE

What are you talking about, Princess? What have I missed?

PRINCESS

Bein' black is what I'm talkin' 'bout, Maggie.

An' bein' mad is what I'm talkin' 'bout.

An' if you ain't mad, you ain't black. An' I'm anger in the flesh.

PREACHER

Let's talk about it. I'm angry, too.

PRINCESS pulls away from PREACHER.

PRINCESS

Can't tonight, Preacher. I need some place to think alone.

PRINCESS starts to walk off.

PREACHER catches her by the hand.

PREACHER

What you have to say, *I* need to hear. *No. We all do.*

We just couldn't say anything till you did.

**PRINCESS pulls away from PREACHER
and starts to walk off.**

PRINCESS

Black lives don't matter to none of you. I'm the only black here.

PREACHER

You're wrong about that. And I'm walkin' with you, Princess. Lead on.

We're all your friends. And if black lives don't matter, no lives do.

I don't care if I look white. It doesn't keep black out of my thoughts.

It's the color of the soul that matters. It's the eternal moment that counts.

PRINCESS stops abruptly, and turns.

PRINCESS

What did you say?

PREACHER

I said, we're all in this together.

And speaking from my perspective I can *feel* black, even if my skin's not.

It's what a preacher is.

PRINCESS

No. Before that.... I mean, after that.

PREACHER

I don't know.

What I'm trying to say is, we love you, Princess, come black or white. Things don't always have to be the way we were taught. Things can change.... Please.

PRINCESS returns to her seat and sits back down. PREACHER sits, too.

PRINCESS

Preacher. You don't know a thing you say.

You might think you do.

But you don't know a thing, how much the Devil's in your mouth.

PREACHER

Why?

PRINCESS

'Cause my Pa used to say stuff like you.

Like live for the eternal moment. And look what happened to him.

SARGE

I've never heard you say a word about what happened to him.

PRINCESS

[beat] What the Hell! It don't matter anymore. I guess the time has come. 'Cause I ain't about to hear no talk about George Floyd goin' be dead and forgotten in a month. Not if I have a voice. It's about time I told.

MAGGIE

Told what?

PRINCESS

Black people. We get killed. George Floyd's not the only one. My Papa was one. Some on the streets. Some in our homes.

Sometimes by the same cops gettin' paid to protect us. And no place to hide.

PREACHER

Your Dad got killed, too?

PRINCESS

And my turn's a-comin'. Just you watch. I see it a-comin'.

SARGE

Nobody's comin' after you, Princess.

PRINCESS

Don't patronize me, Sarge.

You don't know my nightmare.

You don't know what I seen. An' you don't know what I done.

An' you don't know a damn thing about me.

SARGE

[*taking it personally*] Me? I thought we all were friends here, at our table.

PRINCESS

You? You, Sarge? Milk white, law-and-order?

SARGE

What happened to George Floyd *is* a crime; and they *should* go to jail. I agree.

MAGGIE

Who's that?

PRINCESS

I cried all night. Screamed.

Threw things at the wall. Knives, in my mind.

Blacks gettin' killed. Floyd. And my Pa.

An' they get away with it. 'Cause nobody cares. An' nobody does a thing.

SARGE

Maybe he said something.

PRINCESS

My Papa said nothing.

He just ran.

SARGE

I meant Floyd.

PRINCESS

The only thing I heard him say was, "I can't breathe. I can't breathe."

And call for his mama.

PREACHER

What happened to your Dad?

PRINCESS

I was all he had. Nothing but me. Nothing that was any good.
Me, and the eternal moment. That's what he told me.
He told me he loved me. Loved me more than God, Preacher man.
That night he died he was good and mad. And drunk, too.
He used to tell me: Princess, whenever a cop comes up, never disrespect him.
No matter how you feel. No matter what he says. No matter what he has you do.
We were home. Alone. The two of us.
A woman screwed him over good, at some juke joint, and he was pissed.
He threw a couple of things.
And a rat came out. In the kitchen.

MAGGIE

A rat??

PRINCESS

Yeah, Maggie. Like rats aren't everywhere. Runnin' and scurryin' around.
And I screamed. I shouldn't have. But it startled me. And I did. And pointed.
And he got out his shotgun, and shot 'em.
But a cop was drivin' by. And stopped sudden. And turned on his siren....
[*pause, looking around the table*] I can't do this. I can't tell anymore.

PREACHER

You can trust us, Princess.
I promise.

PRINCESS

Maybe *you*, Preacher, I can.

MAGGIE

You can trust *me*. Of course.
Who doesn't seem to know much at all, what's goin' on.

PRINCESS

You ever breathe a word of this, and I'll swear on the Bible you're lyin'.
And kill you the same. You swear?

PREACHER

I do.

MAGGIE

Me, too.

SARGE

I do too.

PRINCESS

That if you hear anyone tell any of this, you'll swear on the Bible they're lyin'?

SARGE

I'll swear, Princess, on the Bible.

PRINCESS

What do I have to lose, anyway? Truth can't sit quiet forever. An' I can't either. That night the policeman bashed in our door. My Papa was out the back. Runnin'. But the cop chased him down. An' shot him in the back. Dead. I screamed, "Why? Why'd ya do that?"
"Cause no nigga's goin' shoot a gun in my town, an' get away with it."

PREACHER

My God! I can't believe it.

PRINCESS

Believe it. I was ten. I was there. An' went with Mama. An' we moved away. But I swore to livin' Jesus I'd be back.

SARGE

He got away with it, the son-of-a-bitch.

PRINCESS

There's a poison from Africa that's like a nail bein' driven in your skull. Dr. Schweitzer wrote about it. You pull like crazy, tryin' to get it out, an' only wanna die. The Devil's face comes right up next ta yours, kissin', smellin' you, stinkin' wet. And finally you choke to death. In eight minutes. Or kill yourself first.

PREACHER

He didn't get away with it, Sarge.

PRINCESS takes a small bottle from a pocket, pours a clear liquid (water) into the half-full lemonade pitcher, and puts the empty bottle back into her pocket.

PRINCESS

A cop does something bad, and people just say nothing. What I'm sayin'. Nothing.

MAGGIE

If you did what I would have done, good for you!

PRINCESS

After I grew up some, I moved back.
But never stopped thinkin' 'bout him.
I got a place where he could spy on me. Drivin' by in his cruiser, at night.
Me, showin' my curves in the window.
I had a good, firm figure back then.
And some special lemonade fixed. With cubes floatin' in it.
And he'd always drive by. I knew when.
Thas why I rented it in the first place.
Standin' by the window, brushin' my hair in the light of a silver kerosene lantern.
He never knocked. Just came right in.

MAGGIE

He broke your door down?

PRINCESS

Didn't have to, did he? It weren't locked.
I was wet. From the heat. Sweat runnin' down me.
He ripped my nightie and panties off, and raped me on the floor.... Fast.
And when he was done, he licked one of my breasts, and called it a dirty lolly.
Said if I ever told, he'd finish the job with his gun.
It was steamin' hot. He saw the lemonade. And drank it all. Outta the picher.
And shot his brains out, in the morning.

PREACHER

I don't believe it. I won't. But if I did, you're innocent. He deserved every ounce.

PRINCESS

Innocent as acid rain. An' I'm goin' to Hell for it, ain't I Preacher?

PREACHER

No, you're not. Hell's on Earth. If you're not there here, you won't be there later.

PRINCESS

But *I am* in Hell here. Thas what I'm tellin' ya. Last night an' every night,
I can't get him outta my mind. It's gotten more than I can take.
I dream about him, rapin' me on the floor. And then lickin' me afterwards.

SARGE

It's over. Forget about it. Nobody remembers a thing.

MAGGIE

We're free to kill, and get away with it?

PREACHER

We're in a world where the powerful have been freely doing that for ages.

PRINCESS

I fled my conscience down the nights and down the days. Can't get away from it.

SARGE

Conscience is for theatre, Princess. Religion washes it away. Free of charge.

PREACHER

Who was *your conscience*, Sarge? In the Service?

SARGE

What do you mean, Preacher? The military police? Is that what you're gettin' at?

PREACHER

In theatre there are no military police. Only conscience.
It's the last bastion of conscience.

SARGE

Theatre's doomed by coronavirus. Just like religion's doomed by lack of theatre.

PREACHER

That's my life: *Doomed*. That's why I'm building castles in the sky.
Great walls and towers to forget her. I should have given up hope when she left.
But here I am, still the fool, searching for people who feel the tragedy.

SARGE

Tragedy? What tragedy?

PREACHER

Racism and misunderstanding. Racism festers because it hasn't choked on its
own tragedy. Tragedy should be honored for what it is.
Just as Princess should be honored for what she's been through.

SARGE

You're morbid and makin' no sense. It's not tragedy that matters, it's justice.

PRINCESS

I don't understand. Was it a sin what I did?
Is revenge a sin? Or just self defense? Just standin' your ground?

PREACHER

Why don't you ask?

PRINCESS

Ask who?... Ask the cop I killed?

PREACHER

I'll play him. Ask me. Pretend I've raped you. On the floor. And licked you.

PREACHER drinks down the lemonade directly from the half-full pitcher.

PREACHER

Christ Almighty! it's hot in this hole.

PRINCESS

Did you like it?

PREACHER

You'd like to kill me, wouldn't you? I can see it in your eyes.

PRINCESS pulls a knife from a pocket and lays it down.

PRINCESS

Cut your head off, maybe.

PREACHER

My bloody head smilin' in your hands?

PRINCESS

I might like you better.

PREACHER pulls a gun (a water pistol) from his pocket and lays it on the table.

PREACHER

Why not just shoot me?

No? You'd rather slit my throat. Right? *That* would be your victory.

PRINCESS

[*beat*] Why did I have to kill you at all?

PREACHER picks up the water pistol;
squirts **PRINCESS** in the face; and then
puts the pistol back in his pocket.

PREACHER

Same reason I would have to kill you.... *Property*.... Got to run, Luv.

PRINCESS puts the knife in her pocket.

PRINCESS

He killed my Pa. He raped me. An' I pity him.
An' I never been able to love another man.

SARGE

A man no woman finds pitiful ever gets loved.

MAGGIE

[*to SARGE*] I pity you, Sarge.

[*to PRINCESS*] It's all made up, isn't it? You didn't really do it, did you?

PRINCESS

[*dripping sarcasm*] Never, Maggie. Never. Like you could understand.

PREACHER

Never lifting *my* fist did I shake stars like Princess.

PRINCESS

What are *your* morals, Preacher? How is what I did moral?

PREACHER

Three ways: You have a life to live. It was fifty years ago. That's forgiveness.
He was an active predator who'd forfeited protection from a corrupt system.
And, third, would you do it again?

PRINCESS

Would you? Would *you* be preacher enough to back up your preachin'?

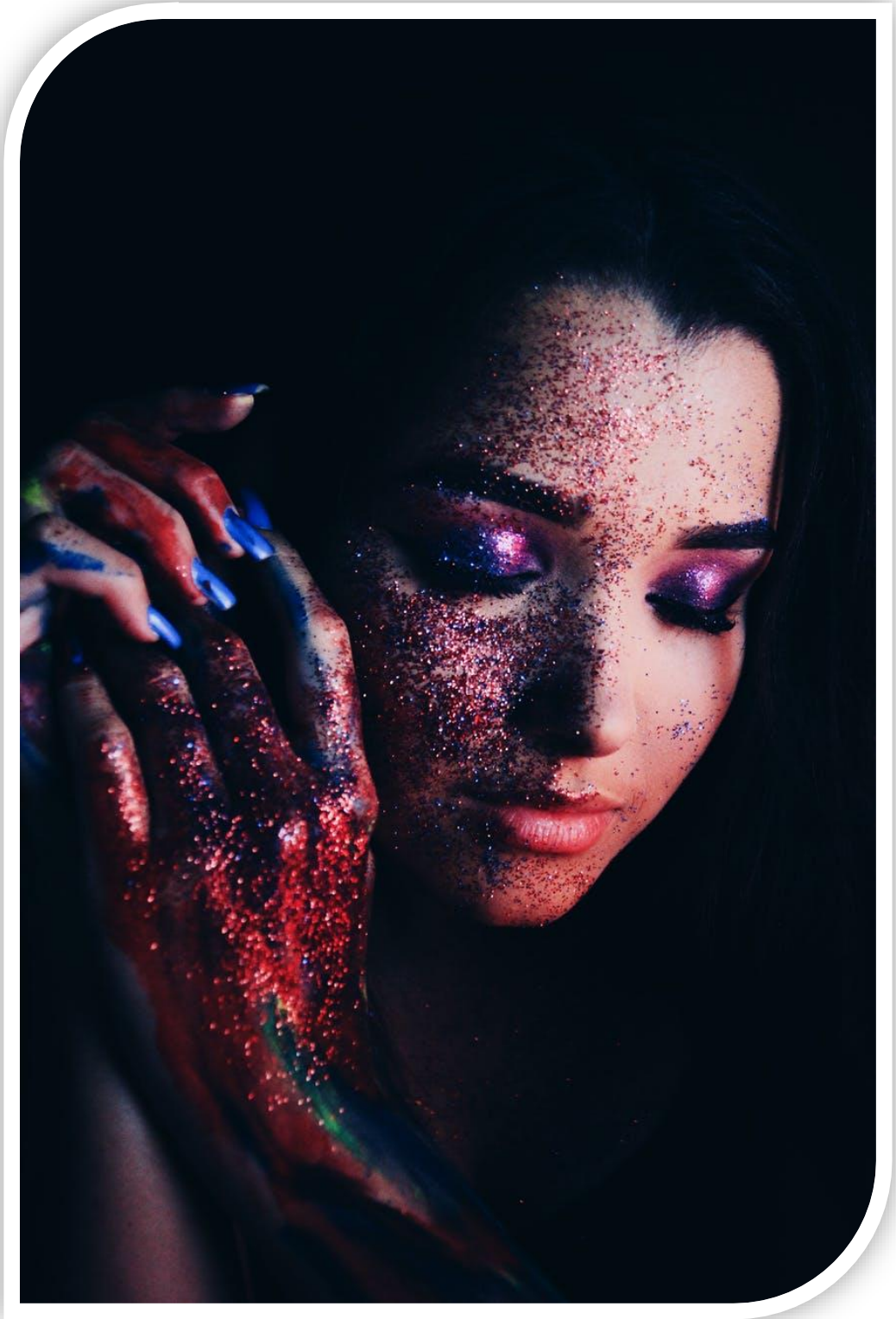
PREACHER

A question like killing Hitler, isn't it?

MAGGIE

I feel all hollow-y inside. I need a man tonight.

BREAK



SECOND

SARGE

Preacher, you remind me some of my crazy uncle Carl. Ever been to Switzerland?

PREACHER

Never.

SARGE

Didn't think so.

He was a sharpshooter, in World War One. One of the best.

A sniper behind enemy lines. Lucky to make it out alive.

You're not a sharpshooter, are you?

PREACHER

Most definitely not.

SARGE

Didn't think so.

He wouldn't talk about it much; but one story I remember was epic.

He had a companion, his little brown brother he called him.

They were in Switzerland together, in 1917, shortly after America got in the War.

All night they hid, waiting by a narrow, rocky path in the high mountains.

Just as dawn was breaking they could hear the horn from the Prince's car.

It echoed over the mountaintops in triumph, like trumpets from heaven, he said.

They knew it was him by his audacity alone.

He drove boldly and proudly along the steep, winding road.

The world was his oyster, and soon would be Germany's too, he presumed.

As he came around the curve in front of them,

they could see his blond hair, waving, his crystal blue eyes, his head held high.

Oh, he was a hero, all right.

And they fired, simultaneously.

And, well, you get the picture. Half his skull blown off. His car, down the cliff.

Quickly they jumped out of their hiding places to get away.

No telling who would be coming along, and heard the shots.

Suddenly a huge rain came out of nowhere, drenching them to the bone.

And my uncle got hit by a desperate sense of worthlessness.

He said, overwhelmingly, he felt like killing himself. Right there on the spot.

And might have done it if his buddy hadn't said,

"Holy shit! Isn't life one fucking absurdity after another?"

[beat] Do you get it?

PREACHER

I suppose, in another few minutes they would have missed their chance.

SARGE

Exactly.

And Uncle Carl got it. Which saved his life.

The barbaric logic, in the rain, washed his thoughts of suicide away.

Like a confession.

And they left.

It was being a sneak-thief assassin he hated the most. Gutless.

He knew he was good enough, but not brave enough.

And he hated himself for it. But he'd done his duty.

How was he supposed to know that killing the Prince would give the Nazis an in, to kill the Jews in twenty-five years?

PREACHER

How do we ever know?

I don't much trust dawn myself. I prefer the sunset.

For dawn is the hour when sin creeps out back doors,
and down pissy alleys with the cats.

MAGGIE

Been there.

SARGE

Sometimes, Preacher, you say the damndest things. Like my uncle.

Anyway, as they'd planned, Uncle Carl and his friend split up.

His friend went east. Uncle Carl walked west.

And, as it turned out, they never saw each other again. But that's another story.

The rest of the day nothing much happened.

At twilight he came upon a house in a dark hollow covered in blue shadows.

It had columns, and a particularly large tree with a mountain stream next to it.

As my uncle looked down, he saw a beautiful young woman come out.

He thought she saw him. But then he could tell by how she walked, she was blind.

Halfway up the path from the house stood an old man, with a white beard.

And what seemed to my uncle to be a large, black snake curled at his feet.

MAGGIE

A snake? You're kidding, I hope. I hate snakes. Except in dreams, of course.

SARGE

It startled my uncle, too. But the old man didn't seemed to mind much, and ... //

MAGGIE

And the old man was blind, too. Right?

SARGE

No, Maggie, he wasn't.
He waved for my uncle to come down,
which my uncle did, and followed him to the house.
The snake trailing behind, like a dutiful pet.
Keep in mind that my uncle was plenty tired at this point.
And certainly unnerved. Having just killed a prince. And seeing the snake.
On the other hand, he was intrigued by the blind and beautiful girl.
Which is what made my uncle ask the man, in German, who he was.
The old man answered him, in German, "Elijah."
A strange name for someone in Switzerland, my uncle thought.
"And this is my daughter, Maggie," the old man said, as they got to the house.

MAGGIE

Maggie?!

SARGE

No. Not "Maggie." I just forgot, and made that part up.
But "Maggie's" good enough.

MAGGIE

Okay. Just wondered.

SARGE

The girl came over to them, and reached out to touch my uncle's face.
"Is it you?" she whispered. "Are you the one?"
"What?" my uncle answered.
"Do you know where you are?" she asked.
"Not really," he told her. "I'm a stranger; and all this here seems like a dream."
"Do you love me?" she asked.
"What??" my uncle replied.
"I love you," she said.

MAGGIE

I'm beginning to like this story.
But Uncle Carl, you better beware.
If *I* tell a man I love him at first sight, and he says the same thing back,
we're both lying, and we know it.
Love like that is in the eyes of deceivers.

PRINCESS

You can lie like that?

MAGGIE

Oh, most certainly.
And I'm probably lying right now.

SARGE

"How could I possibly love you?" my uncle asked. "I've just met you."
"You will," she said. "Do I not have the most beautiful face you have ever seen?"

MAGGIE

I *do* like this story.

SARGE

Her hands were a thin, delicate white. Her hair, jet black.
And her face was, indeed, the most beautiful face my uncle had ever seen.
He never forgot it.
The old man spoke: "Consider her condition, which you must have noticed.
Do not your sight and her blindness make you a perfect couple?
Your good looks, and hers? What beautiful children you will have!"
My uncle was flabbergasted.
The thought passed through his mind that the two of them might be ax
murderers.

PRINCESS

Or chain saw butchers.

SARGE

And what was an old man like that doing with a young daughter like her, anyway?
She reached out again to touch him, but my uncle pulled back.
"What's wrong?" she asked. "You're safe here."
My father's an alchemist. Our house has walls of gold.
His wells hold healing water. He can look into the future.
And he sees us, together. With our babies."
As my uncle turned to leave, the snake slithered over his feet, and up the tree.
The old man asked him again to stay.
"But I don't love your daughter," Uncle Carl told him.
"By *her love* you shall know her," he replied.
But my uncle was determined to get away.

PRINCESS

Who wouldn't be?

MAGGIE

Faint heart, they say

SARGE

It was night by then and the moon had just come out.
Not for Maggie, of course, who felt her way over to the tree, and started climbing.

MAGGIE

With a snake up there? I don't think so.

SARGE

Yep. Same tree. With the same black snake in its branches.
The old man told my uncle to go over to the tree and give her a hand.
And he obliged. But by the time he got there, she was already up.
And she handed him something down.
By the light of the moon he could vaguely see that it was round,
about the size of a loaf of bread, white like a pearl.
But when he had it in his hands, he saw it was a skull, with a nail in it.
My uncle gasped in horror; dropped the disgusting thing to the ground; and ran.
He could hear them calling after him.
But he kept running, all the way, till he came to the nearest village.

PREACHER

Fleeing down the labyrinthine ways of his own mind....
[beat] Your uncle was lucky to get away. With *his head* still intact.

SARGE

Fortunately, there was an inn in the village, and a room for the night.
For five nights, actually. Where my uncle had the same dream, every night.
When she came to him ... //

MAGGIE

Who? Maggie?

SARGE

Yes, Maggie. In his dreams. And
Wait. Just a minute. I remember now. Her name wasn't Maggie. It was Salome.

MAGGIE

Crap! That changes the whole story.

PRINCESS

Salome? And the skull? Did she gave it to him on a platter?

SARGE

I have no idea. What make you ask that?

PRINCESS

Never mind. Go on.

SARGE

On the fifth night, in his dream, she danced for him, and stripped naked. It drove him out of his mind; and he had to go back.

PRINCESS

He went back? To the old man? And the blind girl? And the skull?

MAGGIE

And the snake?

SARGE

Scared shitless, but he went back anyway.

PRINCESS

Why? Why would he do such a damn fool thing?

SARGE

He kept hearing the old man saying, "By her love you shall know her."
And he was falling in love with her, just like the old man had said.
By the time he got back it was nearly dark.
He found the two of them, sitting peacefully in front. Waiting for him.
The only change was that the tree had been cut down.
On its stump was a brass bowl, with a golden flame burning in it.
Near the stump the black snake was curled up. Watching the fire.
"You figured it out," the old man said, as Uncle Carl approached.
"Figured what out?" Uncle Carl asked.
"Who Salome is. And why she loves you. And why you love her."
"I haven't figured a thing out," my uncle sputtered.
"My thoughts haven't given me a moment's rest."
"If you think thoughts are who you are, you confuse yourself with a tree."

MAGGIE

What did the old man mean by that?

PREACHER

I suppose it means that we assume our thoughts are us. When they're as independent of us as trees we walk past in the woods.

SARGE

Elijah then finished my uncle off:

“You came back because of Salome, because she is your sister.”

For an instant a wreath of fire surrounded the tree stump.

My uncle felt a paralyzing fear gripping him. “My *sister*?” he asked.

PREACHER throws up his hands.

PREACHER

What the Hell?! How could *that* be? What’s happening?

SARGE

The old man was my uncle’s father.

“I recognized you the moment I saw you,” he said, “and Salome did, too.”

PREACHER

Your uncle, of course, knew that *that* couldn’t be true.

He knew who his real father was. It’s all absurd!

SARGE

Actually, he didn’t.

My grandmother had come to America, pregnant with my uncle.

She always told everybody her husband had been killed. Shot.

Along a steep, winding road in Switzerland.

MAGGIE

I’m liking this story again.

SARGE

It was later my father was born. In Minneapolis.

MAGGIE

So your uncle believed the crazy old man?

SARGE

Not at first. But details started coming out, and things started fitting together.

MAGGIE

What a totally weird way to meet your father you thought was dead.

SARGE

Salome was gazing in my uncle’s direction.

There was a gentle expression on her face. Quite different from the last time.

“Why am I here?” my uncle asked.

MAGGIE

I bet I know.

SARGE

“You’re here because you want her,” Elijah told him. “You need her.”

MAGGIE

See!

SARGE

Salome slowly went up to my uncle, and put her arms around his neck. He hadn’t felt her warmth like that before. “Do you believe now I’m your sister? And that I love you?” It crossed his mind, he no longer cared. Ask Oedipus. “Now *forget* for tonight I’m your sister.” The golden flame shot up, maybe fifteen feet into the sky. The serpent’s eyes glittered with its reflection. Swaying back and forth. My uncle passed out. Probably hypnotized. All he could remember was bare skin, dark hair, breasts, and wetness. He awoke in the middle of the night, stark naked. As was Salome, lying in his arms. White roses scattered about them. They were in a large bed in a small bedroom with bare white walls and a skylight. And he left. In the moonlight.

MAGGIE

What’s the point of it? Finding the love of your life, and then running off?

SARGE

It happened to my uncle. During the First World War. That’s the point. When he got home he never got married. Stayed off, by himself. An introvert. Wouldn’t talk much to anybody. Did his job, and stayed to himself. Toward the end he began to trust me. I guess because I turned out to be a bit of a black sheep in the family myself. He told me the greatest thing he regretted in life was never going back. Never having the courage. Never forgetting she was his sister, and the yearning he always felt for her.

PREACHER

[to MAGGIE] Take my word for it, yearning like that can become a way of life.

MAGGIE

Sweetheart, we can relate to that.

PRINCESS

Maybe he should have told his mama. About her.

SARGE

He was too embarrassed.

PREACHER

How we hide ourselves inside our secrets.

MAGGIE

Duh.

PREACHER

Because of what a man wants a woman for. And what a woman wants a man for.

MAGGIE

Women know what it means to have a body.
They understand its strengths and weaknesses.
A woman's body was made to share, with a woman livin' inside.
Men don't think the same way. They think their bodies are theirs alone.

SARGE

It ain't easy. Everything gets so upside down. It did for my uncle.

PREACHER

Sex ain't easy. I agree. Nor is love.

MAGGIE

If love truly exists at all, it's conditional, on good sex.

PREACHER

I don't agree.

MAGGIE

Would you ever have sex with your sister, Preacher?
Have you? Have you ever thought about it? Have you ever had sex?

PRINCESS

Your mind's corrupt, Maggie. Leave the man alone, will ya?

SARGE

When my uncle died they found a hand-written note on the floor next to his bed.
It said, "The greatest joy in my life was misery. The greatest misery in my life was weakness. The greatest weakness in my life was my only joy."

MAGGIE

What a way to go! Almost poetic justice.

SARGE

I figure he died happier than if he'd spent his life fornicatin' with his sister.

MAGGIE

Oh I don't know about that. Not if his sister was like me, and beautiful as you say.

PREACHER

Did he tell you anything more? Like ... I don't know.

Like, wasn't he curious? Did Salome have a baby? And did she go on loving him?

Does love like that even last?

SARGE

How should I know? He went about his life. He did his job.

And he never got in people's way. That's what being American's all about.

Freedom to live your life your own way.

PREACHER

You're right. Your uncle had every right to live his life like a coward.

SARGE

A coward? you Asshole! A coward like who? Like you?

PREACHER

You're right there too, Sarge. I *am* a coward.

I had my life in my hands, and let it slip right through my fingers.

Love, knowledge, and all.

So I feel like I can understand some of what your uncle went through.

The doubts, the emptiness, the longing to go back, the despair....

We all struggle against despair, don't we? And lose to it in the end.

It's what lets us say goodbye.

SARGE

[*beat*] There was something else my uncle told me.

That staying away is a journey in itself.

It wasn't Elijah, he said. Or his sister. Or the sex. Or the snake.

Or the skull with a nail in it. It was killing the Prince.

He said the moment he did that the gates of heaven slammed shut in his face....

And one more thing: "If you want to see the light, pay the electric bill."

BREAK



THIRD

MAGGIE

Pastor? Do you believe in love lasting? I can't tell if you do, or you don't.

PREACHER

Maybe once, Maggie. Maybe once.... It didn't for me.

MAGGIE

What *is it*, then, you believe in now?

PRINCESS

Yes. What *do you* believe in, Professor?

PREACHER

Lots of things. Not many things.

PRINCESS

Give us one. You're a preacher. Tell us one thing you believe in about Jesus.

PREACHER

One?

PRINCESS

Try, if you can.

MAGGIE

But keep it simple. Okay?

PREACHER

Most people think God brought Jesus. But it's the other way round.

PRINCESS

That makes no sense. God's the Father. Jesus is the Son. Sons don't bring fathers.

PREACHER

God's a spirit. *Not* flesh, blood, and bones. Spirits can't create one atom of flesh.

MAGGIE

What the F are you talking about?

PREACHER

God doesn't have the balls to father a child. Is *that* simple enough, Maggie?

**MAGGIE playfully throws a Lincoln log
at PREACHER.**

MAGGIE

Then where did Jesus come from then? Tell us that.

PREACHER

He was conceived by the usual suspects. A man and a woman, having sex.

PRINCESS

That's not what we were taught. Mary was a virgin when Jesus was born.

PREACHER

Does that make sense to you, Princess?

Or just feel right, because it's always been that way?

Things don't always have to stay the way we were taught.

Jesus was thirty when he had an epiphany, left his mother's home in Galilee,
and walked the countryside, preaching of a *new God*. A more loving God.

PRINCESS

And then Jesus became God, right?

PREACHER

Let me quote you, the best I can, what Albert Schweitzer says about that:

“The Jesus of Nazareth who came forward as the Messiah, who preached the kingdom of God, who founded the kingdom of heaven upon earth and died to give his work its final consecration, never existed. He is a figure, clothed by modern theology in historical garb.”

MAGGIE

You have it memorized?

PREACHER

I'm as odd a duck as you can find, Maggie. This side of Schweitzer.

PRINCESS

You're a heathen. That's what you are. And you can't be serious about Schweitzer.

PREACHER

I'm absolutely confident he said that. He wrote it, in fact, in a book.

MAGGIE

That's the way I like 'em. You don't get much action without havin' confidence.

SARGE

I remember hearing about Schweitzer back when I was in school.
He's the doctor who left Germany to go to Africa. He must have been Jewish.

PREACHER

Albert Schweitzer was more Christian than I am.
He, and his father, *and* his grandfather all were Christian ministers.
And Schweitzer preached more sermons than I ever did.

PRINCESS

I don't care. Heathens shouldn't be allowed to preach about Jesus.

SARGE

Why did Schweitzer run away? if it wasn't to escape?

PREACHER

He ran as you say, because of a dream in which Jesus kept asking him a question.

SARGE

Which was ...?

PREACHER

What are you doing with your life? if not atoning for what was done to Africa?

MAGGIE

Africa? I don't get it. What business was Africa to Schweitzer? *Or* to Jesus?

PRINCESS

I know what you mean Preacher. I get it. I seen pictures what whites did.
Unspeakable crimes they got away with.

SARGE

No worse than the Africans themselves. What they did to each other.

PREACHER

Schweitzer's debt was owed for *what whites did*, to blacks in Africa.

PRINCESS

I won't be takin' any too kindly if you're disrespectin' black people, Preacher.

PREACHER

I put Albert Schweitzer in a class of greatest human beings ever.
With Dr. Martin Luther King and Abraham Lincoln.
And I'm hardly about to be disrespecting any of them. Or the color of their skin.

PRINCESS

Amen to that.

PREACHER

So, what I said is true. God didn't bring Jesus. Jesus brought God.
How many of you would know a penny's worth about God if it weren't for Jesus?

PRINCESS

You sayin' *Jesus* is the first most important thing in the world.

PREACHER

I'm saying: The *second* most important thing on Earth is the human mind.
A thing of miracles, that got us to fly, and walk on the moon, and cure epidemics.

SARGE

What's the *most important* thing then?
The President?

MAGGIE

Sex, of course. Everybody and Sigmund Freud knows that.

PRINCESS

God.

PREACHER

Time. Time's the most important. Whether we have patience for it or not.
We live in the present. God connects us with the rest of time.

PRINCESS

[*beat*] You don't believe in Jesus, do you?

PREACHER

What do you want most in this world, Princess?

PRINCESS

Black lives to matter, and there never be another man killed like George Floyd.

PREACHER

I agree. 100%. But tell me. Is it more important I worship the same God as you?
Or stand tall with you against racism and for police reform?

PRINCESS

To stand tall with us, of course.

PREACHER

Now I ask you: Who's going to get the job done? Jesus? Us? or God?

PRINCESS

God helps those who help themselves, I spose.

PREACHER

Patently. And how do you think that happens?

PRINCESS

[*beat*] God changes people's minds?

PREACHER

Yes! And that's because of what God is.

SARGE

What is God to you, anyway, Preacher? A myth? Do you even believe in God?

PREACHER

I don't need to *believe*. I know. God is inevitable.
And God taught me there's only one measure of a person's faith: Determination.

PRINCESS

How? How did God teach you that?

PREACHER

When I was young, and strong, and good looking to some ... //

MAGGIE

Still are ... //

PREACHER

I had a large church, a faithful congregation, and I fell in love. With Anna Maria.
Who was life to me. When she left, I went on empty.

PRINCESS

Why did she leave you?

PREACHER

She felt Christ! Sad to say, she felt trapped. Becoming a preacher's wife.

MAGGIE

I get that. What happened then?

PREACHER

Simple.... I killed myself.... No. Of course not. Though I felt like it.
I prayed to God, and God made me an offer:
If I would promise my soul, and if I would let God be born in me,
I would be told everything, including why Jesus came, and why Anna Maria left.

PRINCESS

What does that mean? God be born in you?

PREACHER

God already exists where God exists, in us. In our minds. As thought and spiritual energy. What God wanted was a more commanding role in my mind.

SARGE

What are you talking about: God exists in people's minds?
God is everything. God created everything.

PREACHER

Not exactly. Dark matter, through the Big Bang, created all the material things.

SARGE

Don't go scientific on me. Who do you think made the *[air quotes]* "Big Bang."

PREACHER

The Big Bang was an unusual, but inevitable, consolidation of dark matter, so dense it blew up, and formed all the stars, planets, light, and energy.

SARGE

So?

PREACHER

Only a fraction of dark matter got used up in the Big Bang.
The rest is still around. And it wasn't God who created it. It re-forms itself.
After this, and our universe goes dark, another Big Bang will come along.
Every hundred billion years, or so. It's perpetual.

SARGE

And where did dark matter come from in the first place? Huh?

PREACHER

It's always been here, and always will be. Everything that's anything is created out of something that's always existed. If you want to call dark matter God, go ahead. But actually it's only dark matter, and not much else.

SARGE

You're an idiot. God created everything and runs everything.

PREACHER

Let me ask you. Who's going to guard the Earth against rogue asteroids?
Who's going to stop nuclear war?
Who's going to protect the Earth from global warming?

MAGGIE

God?

PREACHER

You sure of that, Maggie?
Did God protect the Earth when an asteroid wiped out the dinosaurs?

SARGE

He could have, if He wanted to.

PREACHER

Things like that aren't in God's control. Like earthquakes and hurricanes aren't.
Or children, dying from car accidents, or stray bullets, or the coronavirus....
It's *us*. The kingdom of God is within *us*. Eight billion pieces of us, collectively.
And when we're extinct from the Earth, God will be, too.

SARGE

Your God's a pussy.
How could I have been around so long and not know this about you?

PREACHER

My God's the only God that really matters, because my God's the only God that
can change us. Because my God is a God who has a skin in the game.

PRINCESS

An' you told your people that?

PREACHER

Yes. And lost them all.

PRINCESS

What would you expect?

PREACHER

It's the price I had to pay for the dreams I had. God warned me it would be
chaotic, because chaos always accompanies God's birth.

PRINCESS

Tell me about the dreams.

PREACHER

You don't really want to hear.

MAGGIE

I do. Try me.

PREACHER

Stop me, when you've heard enough....

The first dream was like flying through pure space and light.

My God! the colors! I felt elated beyond anything I'd ever known.

And filled with what I imagined was the all and everything of knowledge.

I learned that God is as much about poverty and people struggling,
as about E equals $m c$ squared, or the mysteries of love's privilege.

But a week later I began falling. Through Hellish stench.

Into a valley where snakes hang from trees like moss.

I started walking, along a rocky path, and in a few steps, behind a bush,

I saw the body of a small girl covered in blood. One shoe on; one shoe off.

Her head, crushed. Pieces of whitish bone and brain matted in her hair.

Next to her stood the veiled figure of a woman, who said to me,

"Do you have anything to confess?"

"I can't bear to look at her."

"Remove her liver," the woman demanded. "Do as I say."

"*I will not*," I defiantly tell her.

"You coward! Take out her liver!"

"Why? What would make me do such a vile thing?"

"*I* want you to. And you shall do it, for my sake. For I am the soul of this child."

And I did. I reached in, and cut it free with my knife.

"Now eat it!"

MAGGIE

Oh my God!

PREACHER

"This is an abomination," I shouted.

"Who do you think I am?"

"You're one who gave birth to God. And you're the one to pay the price."

So I knelt down, tears burning my eyes, cut off a piece, and put it in my mouth.

The rusty sweet taste of blood flooded my senses, and I blanked out.

When I awoke I was covered in sweat.

SARGE

You're sick, Man. You need professional help. What's the point livin' like you do?

PREACHER

I do what's required of me, because I want my life to amount to something.

SARGE

You're an atheist.

MAGGIE

You're not one of us, are you?

PREACHER

No.

PRINCESS

Why are you like that, Preacher? Because of God livin' inside you?

PREACHER

God living in you is like reading a book about your hometown, and you're in it. And the author quietly begins working you into the story, *and* your feelings. And before you know it, it's about you. And you have a chance to live life over. Until it gets more like talking with your grandmother about your dad in a coma. And then one night you feel as though the story has come to an end. And the emptiness, the sadness, I can't begin to tell you.

MAGGIE

I've had men kick my door down when I dumped them.

PRINCESS

Pastor, I'm so sorry for you.

SARGE

Don't be. He brought it on himself. He chose to be a preacher. He chose an unworldly life. He asked for the sadness.

PREACHER

Sarge is right. Don't cry for me. It used to be so important to know where God came from. It's not. I struggled for a while. Sold home alarm systems. Then went back to school and became a professor of chemical engineering. I'd learned: Life's not about what God is or likes to read. It's about what God does. And Anna Maria, thankfully, got away from this loser, and wound up in Africa with a doctor without borders.

PRINCESS

What you've gone through....
Did your dreams tell you anything about what Jesus went through?

PREACHER

Oceans worse, but much the same.
God suffers. Egos suffer. People everywhere suffer. I suffered. Jesus suffered.
He was not much older than a boy when disillusionment set in.
His calculations of when the Earth would end proved all wrong.
He witnessed people no longer trusting him.
Even his own family.
His most cherished friend in the world, John the Baptist, got beheaded.
And finally, full force, he experienced God's pain.

PRINCESS

[*pause*] O my God! Are you telling me?
Jesus didn't die for our sins?
He died young for God's despair.

PREACHER

Jesus knew God's despair better than anyone.
Christianity's biggest mistake, in my opinion, is to worship the cross over healing.
Which is why the world's greatest men have been our greatest healers:
Albert Schweitzer. Martin Luther King. Abraham Lincoln.

PRINCESS

It did something to you, didn't it?
You're not white anymore, are you, Preacher?
Inside, in your heart, you're not white anymore.

PREACHER

Stars of night and midnight moon,
I'm as black as Doctor King. And as white.



FOURTH

MAGGIE

Preacher, I can't understand your every word.
Or maybe your virtues.
But it's not about *what* you say, is it? It's about *how* you say it. And the passion.
You have a church organ voice. Beautiful. Like you are.

PRINCESS

What are you on about, Maggie?

MAGGIE

Just look at the poor man! I think I'm falling in love with him.

PRINCESS

You have no idea what love is.

MAGGIE

I know better than you.

PRINCESS

You don't know crap. I've heard you talk.

MAGGIE

What do *you* think makes love last, India?
You probably think it's monogamy. But monogamy doesn't do it.
I'll tell you what makes love last. Passion; sex; discovery; and security.
And our preacher friend here is as deep an ocean.
There's no end to discovery in him. *And empty.*
It would take the rest of my life to fill him up.
That's what makes love last, I tell you.

PRINCESS

Were you ever married, Maggie? Can you tell me *that*?

MAGGIE

Maybe I was. Maybe I wasn't. But I was engaged, once.

SARGE

You were *engaged*?

MAGGIE

To a Muslim. Named Mohammed. But he got scared off.

SARGE

Not enough confidence for you, eh?

MAGGIE

All right, if you need to know. It was when I was eighteen.
I was working for a tobacco company. In their office.
Had my own apartment. Car. Everything I needed then. And happy.
He was a hospital intern, doing some medical research stuff at the company.
About smoking. That's how we met. He asked me out a few times.
Then he asked me to marry him. I wasn't so sure. We hadn't even made it yet.
I liked the way he looked all right, and the way he looked at me.
But living over there? How they treat their women?
Word got out.
One night we were at his apartment, and there was a knock at the door.
When he opened the door seven droogs forced their way in. Wearing masks.
"We're Greek gods. Come from Olympus," one laughed.
"Get out of here," Mo told them.
And they told him they'd torch the place, him and me in it, if he got in their way.
They had a silver lantern. He just sat on the floor beside it. And watched.
There was gospel music, I remember, playing loud.
I closed my eyes and pretended I was somewhere else.
I always close my eyes on ugly sex. I'm haunted by ugly sex. Hunted by it.
They said they were there to warm the winter of my virginity. Shakespearian.
Seven of them, packed in, one dwarf after another. Some bigger. Some smaller.
One of the pricks had only one leg, I remember. Eyes closed.
Clumsy fools. Pulling and tearing at everything.
I never knew who they were. The police didn't either. Afterwards.
Said it must have been a gang from the North. But they weren't Yankee accents.
Xenophobic accents. It didn't pay to date a Muslim back then.
But should I die a fool for it? Beaten to death, a rag doll, for it? No way.
I made it home. Not sure how. And I never saw Mo's face again.

SARGE

Holy shit! Maggie. I never suspected.

MAGGIE

What I remember most about that night was imagining crows, flying around.
Crows are spirit-catchers. They protect me. Like they do foxes. Like nothing else.
Spirits fly to them, the way men's eyes fly to a naked woman.
And crows are about as predictable as men, too. That's how I like them.
The same way I like men. Predictable. No man's ever going to satisfy all of me.
It's the sex I like unpredictable.

SARGE

And you never got married.

MAGGIE

Oh, I got married all right. To a real fool.
So smart he was the stupidest man I ever slept with.

PREACHER

Not a preacher, I hope.

MAGGIE

A psychiatrist, with money and an attitude.

PREACHER

You married your therapist?

MAGGIE

Precisely. A man who found beauty and sex invisible.
A man obsessed by what psychoanalysis can do for rape victims.
A real man longs for a woman. That's what makes her beautiful.
How sweet it is finding men who long for you.
It's as much in the desire as it is in the orgasms.

PRINCESS

A man marryin' you is just askin' for trouble.

MAGGIE

Damn straight. We weren't married two months before I was doing it with a guy
from the office. At lunchtime. A friend of his had a room over a bowling alley.
We timed our orgasms with the strikes. He never knew.

PRINCESS

You're sick.

MAGGIE

You ain't heard nothin' yet.
After we moved North, there was a carpenter. Damned good looking.
With all the right tools. Nobody could do it like him.

PRINCESS

Do you have any morals at all?

MAGGIE

My vagina belongs to no one but me. And to as many men as I share it with.

PRINCESS

Bastards. Every one of them.

MAGGIE

What's wrong, craving new things, now and then?
Looking for the strange that no *one man* can possibly satisfy the need for.
There was a guy living on our street. Married. Several guys. Actually. All married.
Back then.
They say relationships take work.
It's not relationships. Relationships work themselves out.
Monogamy is what takes work. Because it's not natural.
Anyway, the married guy and I started getting together on Tuesday evenings.
When I played bridge.

PREACHER

You play bridge?

MAGGIE

Don't look so amazed. I've got my master points.
But on Tuesdays bridge was just a beard. We'd go to a nice hotel.
Have a couple of drinks. And you know what our brains out. Until

SARGE

Until what? Your husband found out?

MAGGIE

Until an idea came to me: I told him one of our neighbors had made a pass at me.
"Oh?" he asked.
"Yeah," I said. "And I'm thinking about it."
"You better not go someplace else with someone else."
"Oh, I wasn't thinking of *that*," I said. "I was thinking of having him join us."

SARGE

You didn't?

MAGGIE

It took a little persuasion. But he was pretty much addicted to me.
So we tried it.
And it was fun.
A woman's got two of most of the important things, you know.

PRINCESS

You went to bed with *two* men at the same time?

MAGGIE

I haven't finished.
After a while, we asked a third neighbor to join us. Just on special occasions.
Those were the ultimate workouts.
They'd have me they way they wanted. I'd have them the way I wanted.
And then they washed me.
There wasn't a place on my body I wasn't touched.
And exhausted.

PRINCESS

Dear God! Please tell me there's nothing more.

MAGGIE

You must be kidding.
After what was done to me when I was eighteen and a virgin? I *owed* the world.
And I was hardly emasculating anyone. They had their fun.

PREACHER

What about your husband?

MAGGIE

He was the dullest sex partner imaginable. What did he care?
A pompous, self-righteous, prick, who turned sex into therapy.
Why do couples copulate? he'd ask.
Because sex is more important than doing nothing. Like I'm *nothing*.
I could hardly wait for the day to crush his balls under my feet.
Spending his time, endlessly, judging others.
And what did *he* know? Faking it.
Acting like psychoanalysis erases the ugliest scars dangling like moss from trees.
He never knew a thing. Never suspected a thing.
There's no punishment good enough for a husband that stupid.

SARGE

Beautiful women are made to make men suffer. Especially husbands.

MAGGIE

Husbands!
Where it really gets interesting is with Catholic priests.
They have a lot they can learn from a good Catholic girl like me.

PRINCESS

I can't believe this.

MAGGIE

At the bridge club one of my partners was a handsome young priest.
A good player.
We played on Thursdays and won a few master points together.
One night we went out for a drink afterwards, and I suggested something more.
I could see he had an eye for me, but was too shy to know what to do.
So I asked him if I could get us a room.
To go over the bridge hands, I said. My treat.
Actually, I took it as a charitable deduction.
Soon enough we were regulars there on Thursday evenings.
Believe me, priests aren't all what you'd think.
But all pretty much horny, in my experience.
He had a friend. A fellow priest. Who needed some sex education, too, he said.
So we invited him along.
O! those were the days. Halcyon Days. Some weeks, five men in a week.
Six, if you count my husband, which I don't.
But before you ask, I'll tell you: I was smart enough to keep him satisfied, too.
Faking orgasms when I had to.

SARGE

How long did you keep it up?

MAGGIE

A couple of years. Until I became a Life Master.
The problem started at a party at his psych partner's house.
You know how partners can be.
And he came on to me.
And, to make a long story short ... //

SARGE

You didn't?..
I take that back. You did.

MAGGIE

That was the beginning of the mess.
He had a patient, who found out, and talked his way into my pants, too.
A real con man. A *real psycho*. As it turned out.
He bought me an expensive, gold ring.
With "Love never ends" engraved on it.
He thought I'd run away with him. To Switzerland.
Which, needless to say, was out of the question.
So he killed himself.

PRINCESS

Somehow I was hopin' this would end before it ended.

MAGGIE

Oh, it ended all right.
The psycho had pictures of most everything,
And had them mailed to my husband, after his death.
Nude. And his partner nude, too.
Which ended their partnership and our marriage in one fell swoop.
Whoop de doo.

PREACHER

You're a modern-day Madame Bovary.

MAGGIE

I'm a female Don Juan, and proud of it,
who knows the more you score the better you feel.
Action's the real thing for me.
Which slowed down a bit after I got divorced.
There's more challenge for a man in seducing a married woman.
More urgency in cheating that's missing when you're both single.
Screwing him while you're screwing her.
But my single years have been okay, too.
Sometimes at the guy's place. Sometimes at mine.
Sometimes through the night. Sometimes he leaves.
I had a couple of ball players once. But they got traded.
And a senator.
I guess I've done most everything I've wanted to in my time.
But I'll tell you:
I'll never forget the best sex I ever had.
There was this teenage boy. A killer in shorts.
And when he took his shirt off, a body to die for.
He used to cut my lawn and sweat in the sun.
Knowing I was watching him.
Because he was a watcher, too. I'd seen him.
Peeping in at night, with those heart-stabbing blue eyes of his.

SARGE

I've heard this story.

PREACHER

I haven't.

MAGGIE

I owed the lad.
So, in front of silver lamplight and plenty of mirrors,
I washed myself naked, everywhere, just where he could watch every bit.
Then I sneaked outside to surprise him.
We made love for hours. I could hardly contain him.
No one ever, ever... So many times in one night. Or so enthusiastic.
He appreciated my body in a way no one else ever has.
The last time was in a sleeping bag.
Noah, Balboa! I burst. Water everywhere!
I could barely touch the boy goodnight.
He was so beautiful my hands shook.

PRINCESS

You're the most rancid, unfaithful woman I ever met.

MAGGIE

All the infidelities, and all the divorces they caused,
avenge nothing for what that gang did to me.

PREACHER

I've never known a woman who hated men more than you.

MAGGIE

I don't hate men. I've gotten way over that.
I love them. And I use them.
And they don't forget me.

SARGE

Is there anything you *haven't* done?

MAGGIE

I don't sleep with women.
Now there *was* a guy I'd spend the night with occasionally.
After he'd fall asleep I'd sneak out of bed and put his clothes on.
He was about my size. And I'd walk for blocks, in the dark, feeling myself in them.
Next to my skin. Like being naked in the sand.
But, really, nothing with women.
I guess I don't care much for makin' friends with women, either.
I'm a better lover than a friend.

PRINCESS

I can understand that.

MAGGIE

I guess you have to start with yourself.
Start by making friends with yourself.
What do you think? Does sex make friends? Does God?
I had a woman call me a slut in church once. *In church.*
Said I ought to get some morals. Christian morals. Like she had.
She said she'd rather pull weeds than have sex with her husband.
I told her, "Screw you. Screw your garden. Screw your husband."
Which I decided to do.
And taught him a few things they don't teach in church.
But what creates friendships? And keeps them?
I'm not sure.
What about us?
Are we friends after tonight?

PRINCESS

Us?... We're all we got now, aren't we? Warts and all.

PREACHER

There's so much we never knew before tonight.
About each other. Eye-opening.
To each his own, I suppose. I've consistently refused to judge others.
Even though sexual dalliance has always bothered me a lot.
Just, Maggie? Isn't there something else in you?

MAGGIE

[*beat*] The thing I'd love to most, would be to love myself again.
Like I did before the gang rape. And feel safe in God again.

PREACHER

Maybe we all do.

MAGGIE

I don't understand people believing in God without passion.
Without the blood and bread and arms.
I've always pictured Jesus with his arms around me....
There was a saint once, in an old VW bus, who took me to the Wayfarers Chapel
in California; and then Massacre Ridge in Nevada.
We spent the darkest night on Earth together; and he never touched me.

PREACHER

Love demands that we find our own way to it. And to its eternal moment.

MAGGIE

At first what I thought you needed, Preacher, were priests,
to help you spread the word.
But you don't need priests.
You need a priestess who takes her hormones.

PREACHER

You're a magnet for chaos, Maggie.

MAGGIE

I've had one soul inside me. Sex. You're birthing a second one now.
You've laced my body's needs with your spiritual ideals.
You've changed me. It's *your* footprints moving inside me I feel.
For so long I've used sex to fill the holes in my life.
Something's different now. It's not sex. Something different to believe in.
You're quite the lover, aren't you, hidden here on campus.

**MAGGIE stands, and holds a hand out to
PREACHER. After a moment's
consideration, he takes her hand, and
they exit together.**

PRINCESS

Well?

SARGE

Do we finish it? Or tomorrow night?

PRINCESS

What do *you* want to do?

SARGE

I want to apologize. For being such a closet bigot. About Black Lives Matter.

PRINCESS

Do you want to talk about it? To come on up for a while, and talk about it?

SARGE

Yes, I do. Very much.

They stand and exit together.

END