

R E U S A B L E T R U T H S



I R V I N G F E L D M A N

V. defined seduction as “trying to turn a stranger into an intimate.” Just like V. not to add, “Without making him a friend.”

S.’s first act in making himself a complete snob was to snub that pretentious, infinitely inferior being S.

Her constant companion was the tinnitus of criticism – approval, disparagement – raging in her head. Everything had a voice, and the voices, pushing and pressing, told her who she was while their unfailing pressure kept her in the world.

He brays outlandish, meaningless, irresponsible things, and they feel freed to riot in moral saturnalia; high on the afflatus of empty words, they rejoice in their demagogue-hero whose license has empowered them to take leave of their senses.

Dependency is intimacy, given by taking, taken by giving.

What drew him to psychology was his wish to know what it is like to have a psyche.

I walk down a city street, and things are fine, okay, pretty good, smiling their approval of my presence and passage. I return their salute. A woman walks down the street; the street is vivid, sly, out of kilter, imminent with dangers.

“Good reasons make bad art” – not least because “good reasons” are pleased with themselves, and art is their bothersome intruder.

Ironizing presumes the ironist knows more about his subjects than they know about themselves. It is rude. If he must ironize, let him engage his ironic ignorance of himself, though here, too, let him be kind.

Potter grows more cool while the clay warms in his strong hands.

“I don’t gossip,” he said, “I distribute information on a need-to-tell basis.”

Envy is the empathy of weakness.

Difficult for him to understand that because she hasn’t prepared herself to feel desirable she is nonplussed by his desire, then irritated, then offended, as by something intrusively alien, for surely he mistakes her for someone – anyone – else!

Conscience claims authority over me while being itself, for all I can tell, conscienceless.

Gods, too, have genealogies. And any current authority bears his predecessor’s doomed legitimacy.

Set an obstacle before the devil, and I will root for him, though I be the obstacle.

Number him among the benevolent rapists who screw you over for your own good.

Priding himself on his honesty with others made him more ignorant about himself.

Gofer, errand boy, messenger bearing a sheaf of dispatches or most urgent word whispered in the king's ear: the person transfigured as value.

Among the powerful there circulates a currency of blow jobs.

My self-satisfaction is benign, is generous: it includes you.

They have set their thieves to teach them value.

Suffering doesn't relieve you of responsibility to others to treat their sympathy kindly. Let your sorrows be elegant. Learn to suffer *beautifully*, with dignity and grace.

Having enjoyed the game so little, his only pleasure was gloating at its end, as if his rival had all along been death.

Every bystanding thing abides in patient insignificance; then we act, and it rouses into sudden selfhood, cheers or jeers us on our way. Everywhere we look the world is potent with danger and blessing.

It is happiness to be happy, but joy to make others happy. Winning, too, is good, but we are proud of the triumphs of those we love.

Always appearing on the verge of engaging while in fact excluding his interlocutor – such is the bore's cunning craft.

No nakedness so naked it has nothing to hide.

An idea isn't its conclusion but its argumentation.

Sympathy for the devil. Having no place in the cosmic community of goodness, the outlaw – vivid, naked, immediate – is at every moment exposed to danger and death. And we, though faithfully companioned by our disapproval, we can't help it, we are there with him.

She felt herself abstract, two-dimensional, potential without force, a statement without context, which only an attentive regard could

bring to full life. She tended to her appearance, for fear she fail to appear at all.

Just as sound creates space, listening, too, creates space, even in the absence of sound.

I may see all at once, but *knowing* what I see takes time.

The “Do or die!” “Now or never!” of performance makes any old work immediate and vital – even as, reading it, you whisper its words to yourself.

The avidity of the strangers’ stares was estranging. She was beside herself, this celebrity, fearing they’d singled her out for something terrible. She did a lot of crazy things in token sacrifice to forestall any real sacrifice to come.

Among life’s disappointments: thrilling to experience becomes tedious in the telling.

A work loses intimacy in the clamor of voices acclaiming it.

The tedium of explanations: like flashbacks, they bring you only to where you all along have been.

What loses its value when hoarded and enriches its possessor only as it is expended? Gossip.

Things dispossessed are, like orphans, incomplete until possessed again – and again are someone’s asset.

Don’t waste your gallows humor on the hangman, he’s heard it all.

So few get-rich-quick schemes, so many get-poor-slow ones.

Envy tears the world apart; resentment brings the enviers together.

The sexter sent photos of his nakedness to women who, desiring to know the whole man, wanted only to see him in clothes.

Past childbearing, she was diminished by a mystery.

For the storyteller, the past tense is an ocean of many oceans among which he moves at will, fluidly without interruption. The present tense is a staccato of *nows*, each *now* a *now* unto itself, a cell from which he breaks out – to imprison himself in the next *now*.

It wasn't the praise she thought it, telling him, "You're a great lover," as if he were a professional of love and not, undone by love for her, love's rankest amateur.

Men didn't envy him his whore but his wealth, for whom spending four thousand bucks on her was like getting it free.

We name rock tree hill lake flower mountain river, we name everything – to people the world with creatures and convene its power in ever greater societies, societies always embracing ours.

Democratically, we are asked to "identify" with this character or that. But grant their distance from us, and we do not identify with an Oedipus, a Lear: we *behold* them. They are not to be redeemed by our sympathy, nor are we.

In his desolation of power all that connects the torturer to humankind is scream after scream after scream.

He was selfish and unfair. Well, had he been otherwise she'd have doubted him. She knew he loved her, because that's what love is, selfish and unfair.

"We won't lose this," we say after it's been lost. Blind though we are, our lies are unerring: they find the nail and hit it smack on the head.

Their loser idea of a winner is bigly self-indulgent Trump. Whatever has been denied them, and what in bitterness they deny themselves, his superb self-approval grants. They shall have what he is. And miracle, their hidden wounds are weaponized as open carry. They swagger in his sun. Let everything go to hell and all shall be well!

Nihilists are proud to be nihilists.

Marjorie's was the hand that moved the fingers of Sam that moved the pen that ended his thing with Nancy.

Praise is a poor substitute for understanding.

Sentimentality insists that feeling the feeling suffices; as such, it is the enemy of anything beyond itself, like thought.

The young love "cool." Uncertain how the world they are entering receives them, they disclaim what they assert even as they assert it, coolly having it neither way.

Tossed a few crumbs, he makes of them his Miracle of the Loaf.

So fascinating this froth at your lips you lose all sense of the wave hurling you down, hurling you on.

To see you as finite is to surrender you to mortality is to surrender everyone to mortality is to surrender to mortality.

For all its liveliness, the life he took would not add itself to the life he had. At his first strike, he joined his victim in mortality: divested of innocence, his only armor now this power that each time leaves him more exposed, debt-ridden, mortal.

Fool is licensed to say anything on condition it mean nothing.

Skip out on your debt to X or Y, and you will discover – unburdened, pleased with yourself, skipping, no, staggering along – how at the last you are shackled to death: this creditor of creditors who holds all the tabs, who knows every score. Quick, while the till is open, pay up, pay up, free yourself and live forever!

Patience makes a moment a century, the infinitesimal infinite, the infinite intimate.

Anticipating pain beyond bearing, he screamed, knowing that the next instant it would be too late to scream.

If you had to pass a test to get into hell, the wannabe winners would be lining up for it.

Whatever their elevation or depth, his air of authority renders the pedant's every utterance a platitude.

Small talk's comfort of tiny thoughts pattering about the house.

Lionel was not so cynical he'd make use of a person for whom he had no regard. Still, when he was no longer useful, a certain someone seemed to sink in Lionel's esteem.

The whole is without momentum and confers this mercy on its momentum-driven parts.

In the rapture of their danse macabre, the dancers cry out hosannas in praise of Death for his leadership.

Many a lone wolf is really a lone sheep.

This hyper-ruminant's discourse is a thrice-pulverized palaver's continuous cud of saliva and schwas.

Saith the televangelist, "There's a sucker reborn every minute."

To keep from obsessing over slights, R. adopted the motto "Don't hate. Just kill – and move on!"

A simple crime harms its victim. A hate crime injures the idea of his existence and that of everyone in his hated group.

The will is unable to act on what it perceives to be without will. So the maker instills spirit into wood block and clay lump to animate their impassivity as willfulness. They resist . . . until they let him persuade them to collaborate.

Oh, he was utterly ridiculous, but, because he was incapable of imagining himself so, he was immune to the ridicule we lavished on him – and we, left with our heaps of useless ridicule, saw *we* were ridiculous.

Born in rage, they live in nostalgia for rage, and recur to rage to be reborn in rage.

Moral authority derives ultimately from your willingness to interpose your mortal body.

Hell is peopled by hatreds, each isolated in the prison of its arrested drama. But let a Master free them to a common hatred, and they rejoice. Then hell is a great, collective happy hatred, and not so bad, after all.

When I serve myself, I am sometimes the one served and sometimes the server. I am a solitude doubled . . . until I serve another.

The words of a poem become, in their aggregate, a name: the poem names itself as an individual to be confronted and then, unlike other individuals, performed.

Ninety percent of life is conversation: with others, with others in me.

Two men, two strangers, meeting on neither's turf, size each other up. Two women bare their teeth in smiles.

Fear most the lazy predator, who hunts at home.