

BLESS ME, FATHER. I HAVE SINNED

by Daniel Curzon

CHARACTERS: (4)

SEBASTIAN, 30-40, nice-looking, with Southern accent, as in *Suddenly Last Summer*

PRIEST, over 50, manly

NORMA JEAN, early 30s, blonde, pretty, her head and face mostly covered by a scarf

FEMALE, over fifty, walk-on

SETTING: Suggesting a Catholic church, there is a simple confessional with a curtain that conceals the priest, with a chair for the priest and a kneeler for each penitent on either side of the priest.

TIME: 1957

(A PRIEST in a cassock enters, places a stole around his neck, goes into the 'confessional' and sits down. After a moment, he gets up, checks to see if anyone is there to have a confession heard, sees no one, shakes his head, returns to the confessional, sighs.)

PRIEST (under his breath) Shit!

(SEBASTIAN enters, tentatively, wearing a rumpled white linen suit of the Thirties, his hair slicked back. He kneels on the floor, praying a little. He checks to see if something is in-side his upper jacket pocket by patting it several times.)

(After a moment, the PRIEST emerges from confessional and goes up to the young man.)

PRIEST Are you here for confession?

SEBASTIAN Not really.

PRIEST Well, I'm here for a while, if you want me, my son.

SEBASTIAN Thank you, my father. I'll let you know.

PRIEST There is no pressure, of course.

SEBASTIAN I feel none. I'll let you know if I find any sins.

PRIEST I won't be here forever, either.

SEBASTIAN I merely wanted a moment or two of churchly silence in here.

PRIEST I understand. . . . But I am here if you need me.

SEBASTIAN (pointing to the empty surroundings) Let all the other sinners go before me, Father.

PRIEST (taking in the irony) Are you not a Catholic perhaps?

SEBASTIAN I don't know, Father. Sometimes I am. Sometimes I'm not.

PRIEST Well, it's not that Almighty God needs your confession, I hope you realize!

SEBASTIAN Good! I don't need His almighty forgiveness!

PRIEST I'm sorry I disturbed you. Excuse me.

(The PRIEST goes back into the confessional. SEBASTIAN bows his head and prays for a few more moments. Then he gets up and goes to the kneeler of the confessional. The PRIEST slides open the panel between them.)

SEBASTIAN Bless me, Father. They say I have sinned.

PRIEST So you have decided to confess after all, my child?!

SEBASTIAN Maybe I just felt sorry for you, with so few customers.

PRIEST I see. Maybe you really shouldn't be kneeling here then. Confession is a sacrament.

SEBASTIAN I sure hope so. It might be good for you, Father.

PRIEST For me?

SEBASTIAN A cleansing of the guilt. Expiation. Finding God. You supply the cliché.

PRIEST I think, really, you have come to the wrong place. Perhaps you should –

SEBASTIAN They tell me my personal God is a destructive one. Possibly they are right, do you suppose?

PRIEST I wouldn't know.

SEBASTIAN But I thought the Church knew everything about everything, The One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church. How can something so universal doubt or ever be wrong about anything?

PRIEST Excuse me. (Closes the sliding panel.)

(SEBASTIAN waits.)

PRIEST Are you leaving?

SEBASTIAN No. . . . It will be very interesting, Padre, what I have to say to you. Even surprising.

PRIEST (No response.)

SEBASTIAN Unique.

PRIEST . . . All right then. (Slides open the panel.) What can I do for you, my son? How long has it been?

SEBASTIAN (ominously) Far too long, my father of fathers.

PRIEST You seem to be resisting, I must say!

SEBASTIAN No, Father, it is the Church that is resisting. As usual.

PRIEST I don't care for your attitude.

SEBASTIAN Do I seem arrogant? Insistent on my own way? Wherever could I have learned such traits? Surely not from the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church!?

PRIEST I don't want to hear your confession if you don't want to make one. So goodbye to you.

SEBASTIAN Not true, Padre! You've always wanted us to make our confessions, especially when we didn't want to. And if we didn't, we were going to be cast into a merciless pit of fiery coals, and not just for a week or two, like in some bad Mexican hotel, but for all eternity. So we had no choice but to do what you demanded. Now I think it only fair that you be told a thing or two yourself, Father, particularly if you don't want to hear it. It will be so good for your soul! You can always leave, you know.

PRIEST That's quite true.

SEBASTIAN Yes, you can leave the poor penitent just before he's about to heave his horrible, horrible confession, just before he reaches into his twisted, wracked soul to grasp those filthy, depraved, monstrous sins and feed them to you one by one – leave him just when you could have saved one more lost, lost soul! You wouldn't do that, Father. It would betray your calling.

PRIEST Yes.

SEBASTIAN And you were called, were you not? God Himself appeared to you one day, in your heart, and said, in a whisper or in a shout, I forget, "Feed my lambs! Feed my sheep!" And you replied, "I hear, O Lord. I will abandon the fleshly ways of this world and will walk the purer path of righteousness." Yes, occasionally overhearing the pornographic images of the poor, the excommunicated, or, more likely, the poverty of the pornographic images of the poor, and healing them with that balm, that ointment, dare I say that lubricant, so necessary, so essential to their parched, yearning, beseeching . . . orifices Ora pro nobis!

PRIEST It will be difficult, I can tell. Still, I think I can help you.

SEBASTIAN Try, Father, try!

PRIEST God will welcome you back, my son, no matter what you have done.

SEBASTIAN But there are so many offenses, Father. So many!

PRIEST Really?

SEBASTIAN Seven thousand six hundred and sixty-six, to be exact. Shall I begin with number one?

PRIEST As you like.

SEBASTIAN Actually I do feel some guilt about a few things. My cousin. My sweet lovely Catherine for one.

PRIEST Go on.

SEBASTIAN She was two years younger than I – a lovely girl, a beautiful girl in certain lights, until . . . the operation.

PRIEST An abortion?

SEBASTIAN No, father, an operation on her brain. Just here. (Points to the pre-frontal area)
Can you see me?

PRIEST Dimly.

SEBASTIAN Of course. I'm in a church, am I not?! Churches are dim places.

PRIEST Your sister had this operation on her brain because . . . ?

SEBASTIAN My cousin. Because she was saying things about me. My mother did not like those things. They were crude. No, sir, my mother did not like crudity. I myself don't like it either; however, sometimes you can't avoid it. Yet it wasn't just what Catherine was saying about her dear cousin . . . brother . . . whatever . . . that was the issue. Precious, lovable Catherine was also . . . unpleasant.

PRIEST Unpleasant?

SEBASTIAN People often sentimentalize the mentally ill, Father. Those of us who actually have to deal with them on a daily basis rarely are so sentimental. Catherine had her bad days, her impossible minutes. Not just burning nuns with cigarettes, but suddenly striking out at anyone and hitting them in the eye. Just all of a sudden for no reason that you could figure out our Catherine would strike – at me, at my mother, even at a baby once. She struck a child that someone had brought to St. Mary's, a child that never should have been there. And Catherine also was not . . . fastidious, shall we say, about her . . . necessities, shall we say. But you wouldn't want to hear about her female necessities, would you, Father?

PRIEST Not really, no.

SEBASTIAN Let us just say that my beloved sisterly cousin was a combination of angel and devil, though surely one of the lesser devils, God bless her heart. I miss her, I miss her, Father.

PRIEST You murdered her?

SEBASTIAN Oh, she didn't die, Padre. She's still alive. Only not alive. After the operation she was "better," only there was so little of Catherine left that it is hard to tell if she is alive or dead. She is bearable now. Bearable but terrible. Do I make myself clear?

PRIEST Like a vegetable, you mean?

SEBASTIAN More like a broken flower, a wilted rose, once so lovely, now so . . . unlovely. And I had helped to make my lovely, lovely – she was never really that lovely – Catherine into the dead thing that inhabits her body, that says “Yes” and “No” and sometimes even smiles. But there is no there there, as somebody said about something else. I helped create that lifeless Frankenstein’s monster because my mother solicited my advice about what to do about troubled and troubling Catherine. She was at her wit’s end, my mother, our mother, and said, “Sebastian, there is this operation now, somewhat unknown and somewhat dependent upon the skill of the surgeon, and yet I believe we must do it for our Catherine’s sake, because she is becoming more violent every day, they tell me. She hit a baby in the eye. Deliberately. They don’t want her at St. Mary’s any longer. They want us to remove her. So what do you think, Sebastian? Do you want Catherine to come and live with you? I’ll pay for her. But you know I can’t have her with me or I’ll be dead of anxiety within the year. You, however, could take care of her, Sebastian. She loves you. We could manage with your help. We’ll get you two a place. We needn’t have that lobotomy after all. But it will mean sacrifices for you, my darling boy. Are you prepared to sacrifice for Catherine? . . . Are you?”

PRIEST And?

SEBASTIAN I was not prepared to sacrifice myself for my Catherine, and I said, “Mother, proceed with the operation, and perhaps Sister will be normal. It is so vital to be normal, as we know.” . . . But, like so much in life, Catherine’s operation was a disaster. A quiet disaster. Yes, it was I who signed the document which authorized the pre-frontal violation of my sweet sister-cousin’s brain.

PRIEST It was you who signed the document?

SEBASTIAN Not literally. Mother got a Polack doctor to do that part. However, since I acquiesced to Mother’s pleas, I might as well have driven the scalpel into Catherine’s brain with my own hand . . .

(SEBASTIAN weeps and rises from the kneeler.)

PRIEST Are you all right? Are you leaving?

SEBASTIAN (crying) My knees, Father, are hurting. You would think I’ve had enough practice being on my knees, but apparently I haven’t. The Church demands knees to be kneeling much, much longer than anything else I’ve ever known. (Kneels again) I’m back, Daddio! Restored. How ‘bout you?

PRIEST I’m fine.

SEBASTIAN Your butt is not numb?

PRIEST Please!

SEBASTIAN Just asking, Padre! I don't really, deeply care about the state of your behind. I merely thought it polite to enquire.

PRIEST I'm fine, I tell you!

SEBASTIAN Pace, Padre! So, anyway, you will be happy to see that I do indeed feel some guilt about certain subjects. You in the Guilt Business can feel cheered. If I haven't quite made your day, at least I have validated this whole edifice around us. All this masonry and mortar for poor little ol' Sebastian's soul! It's touching, downright touching.

PRIEST His eye is on the sparrow.

SEBASTIAN Really? His eye may be on the sparrow, but He certainly isn't watching out for the baby sea turtles in the Encantatas! Have you seen them devoured by the savage, carnivorous birds, Father? In this wondrous universe that He Above has created in His image.

PRIEST You can find in Nature any lesson that you want.

SEBASTIAN So true, Father. You surprise me. Is there is some saving of you after all?

PRIEST Let's save one soul at a time, what do you say?

SEBASTIAN Mine first? And then yours? Is there any saving of your soul, of the Church's soul? Are you one and the same? Are you an organ of the Church, Father-Father? An organ of mercy? Or one of wrath?

PRIEST I do my best.

SEBASTIAN What if that's not good enough? Hmm? You'll leave the Church, not as a failed priest, rather as a found priest, who knows when the religious shtick is not working anymore, never really worked, merely clouded the issues, a minor Band-Aid on the soul. What courage, Father, to throw off the shackles that others have put around your emotions, around your genitals, around your very essence. The Church has for so long put chains around experience, calling this a sin and that a virtue, indeed this one a venial and that one a mortal. How nuanced, how calibrated . . . and yet how . . . stupid.

PRIEST Now, now!

SEBASTIAN Am I getting obstreperous, Father? Should you call in the spiritual surgeons and give me a pre-frontal lobotomy to calm me down? (shouting) Come and get me! Save me before I do something really awful! Come on, ye ministers of Heaven!

PRIEST (coming out of the confessional) Please! Please! You're disturbing others!

SEBASTIAN (standing, looking around) I still don't see anyone else. Perhaps you exaggerate your actual numbers, Padre? Could it be possible I don't have to be here today? Other religions have bitten the dust, I believe – the cult of Artemis, Moloch, the Anglican Church. Why not the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church? Dead, dead, dead, its so-called sacerdo- tal solemnities sunk in the slough of time. A curiosity, yet no longer lethal, no longer able to impose its doctrinal grip upon fair youth, upon fair youth without even permission of said fair youth, penetrating those young minds, making them respond with “Yes, Father” and “No, Father,” like automatons who have been programmed from their assembly to follow the code drilled and drilled into their brains. Just here. (Touches his pre-frontal lobe.)

PRIEST You don't seem to give the Church any credit for anything. For many, it is a comfort. We help the distressed.

SEBASTIAN No, you don't! The Church is a bully! Do it – everything, everything – its way or suffer the consequences. Emphasis on suffer! And you've always had the last word. And the first word. And the middle one too!

PRIEST We also soothe and comfort.

SEBASTIAN I forgot! You're right. Beg and scrape and promise never to do it again – that little bathroom mishap, Father, possibly? – and you can be cleansed of your sins. Scoured and spanking new. Off to sin again, no doubt, but for the time being brimming with misplaced optimism about the future! But let us not diverge from our main point, Father. Father what, by the way?

PRIEST Just Father.

SEBASTIAN You're making it too easy for me. (Pats his inside jacket pocket once more) Don't you want to individualize yourself, set yourself apart from your institution? The sin-manufacturing, sin-eating institution that you live in, that you live off? The exploiter of people's basic energies and physical needs that you label wicked sins, when they are anything but wicked sins. Not always pretty, but hardly wicked, hardly in need of something falsely called redemption.

PRIEST My son —

SEBASTIAN I am not your son! Unless that's you over there, Mother! Is it? Maybe it's the dress!

PRIEST I'm not wearing a dress!

SEBASTIAN Oh, it's a cassock. Yes! Not a dress. Not a dress. It just looks like a dress.

PRIEST It does not look like a dress. It's nothing at all like a dress!

SEBASTIAN You don't mean it's in the eye of the beholder, Father . . . Nameless? A Rorschach test – one person sees an ink blot; another sees a man in a dress, but it's all right, Father Nameless, because it is a rather dreary dress that you wear, and thus no one will suspect you of . . . wearing a dress. Or even a gown. (loudly) Avaunt, Satan! Avaunt!

PRIEST You really must settle down, sir.

SEBASTIAN Oh, I'm "sir" now. Good! We're making progress. Not your "son" but "sir."

PRIEST Do you want to tell me your name?

SEBASTIAN No. . . . But it's Sebastian. Sebastian Vulnerable.

PRIEST I'm Father . . . Boyd.

SEBASTIAN Void?

PRIEST Boyd!

SEBASTIAN Same thing.

PRIEST Well, it seems to me if you say a couple of rosaries and make a novena to the Virgin Mary that you should be able to –

SEBASTIAN Forgive me, Father, I'm not finished.

PRIEST You're not?

SEBASTIAN Not by a long shot.

PRIEST Oh.

SEBASTIAN I now confess to a second sin. I tend to have a bitchy streak. It isn't my finest quality. However, it does provide a laugh or two in this Vale of Travail.

PRIEST I do have to prepare for Benediction tonight.

SEBASTIAN No one is coming to that either, Father! Oh, maybe some old ladies who have not committed a sin in fifty years, already so full of holiness they are about to burst. Or maybe the odd nun here or there. “Odd nun” – now isn’t that a redundancy?

PRIEST Surely you aren’t going to bad mouth nuns too?

SEBASTIAN Surely you’re not going to give me that old crap about “be-sainted sisters.” I’ve seen enough nuns up close and personal to disabuse me of that illusion. Most of them are mad with the mad dogmas of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church – that Virgin Birth, that bread into that God, that blood sacrifice upon that cross, and the rest. Mad with celibacy as well, lying alone in their chaste, narrow beds, pursued by demons, but fucked only by the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church!

PRIEST I won’t listen to filthy language, especially not here in God’s presence!

SEBASTIAN I thought God was everywhere. Not just here.

PRIEST He is!

SEBASTIAN Then He must hear a lot of filthy language. Is He inside me right now?

PRIEST Not exactly.

SEBASTIAN God is everywhere, but He’s not inside me? Inside you then?

PRIEST I can give you Thomas Aquinas on that, if you like.

SEBASTIAN I’ve had Thomas Aquinas thank you very much. He prepared me for the perfect life in thirteenth-century Christendom. Unfortunately, I live now. Anyhow, bless them!

PRIEST Who?

SEBASTIAN The poor benighted, be-sainted sisters in their solitary beds afraid to raise even a solitary finger to help themselves by placing it where it –

PRIEST Stop! We will not indulge you any further. (Comes out of confessional.)

SEBASTIAN But, Father Boyd, I thought nothing was off-limits here, in this one honest place where the penitent can finally void his aching, bloated load of cares via the medium of God’s own go-between in this glorious glory hole of salvation!

PRIEST Glory hole? . . . No, don’t tell me. Try though you may, you will not drive me from my own church. That is something that I know for certain!

SEBASTIAN Having doubts, Padre? Can I help you through this time of turmoil?

PRIEST Will you please get the situation correct! This is not my confession!

SEBASTIAN Maybe it had better be. You want a clear conscience — and don't forget the clean underwear — when you go to meet your Maker. As you must one day.

PRIEST We'd better wrap things up here, Sebastian. I will give you a catechism to refresh your mind and soul. (Steps out of the confessional, points.) You'll find one right over there near the front of the church. Thank you for coming. (The priest sees Norma Jean entering.) Right over here, Miss. Confession? (She nods.) You can use this side of the confessional. He points to the other kneeler.)

(SEBASTIAN stays kneeling where he is. The PRIEST re-enters the confessional and slams the panel to SEBASTIAN's side shut.)

PRIEST (to NORMA JEAN) Go ahead, please.

NORMA JEAN Bless me, Father. Is that what you say?

PRIEST Yes. Are you not a Catholic either?! This sacrament was not meant to be used by any passerby. Are you aware of that?

NORMA JEAN Bless me, Father. I am unhappy.

PRIEST I'm sorry to hear that.

NORMA JEAN My name is . . . Norma Jean.

PRIEST It's not necessary to identify yourself.

NORMA JEAN That's what I thought, but I wasn't absolutely sure. I'm pretty, I'm famous, and I'm miserable. Do you think you can help me?

PRIEST I can try. Do you have sins you wish to be absolved of?

NORMA JEAN I guess you could call them sins. I've done some bad things. But people have done bad things to me too! It's not right. Just not right!

PRIEST (opening the panel to SEBASTIAN) Sebastian, are you still there?

SEBASTIAN (going right on) As for my mother, quite a lady. Mrs. Violet Vulnerable! Too much money. Too much time on her hands. And then what time did to her body — the usual ravages, and the stroke, that stroke that debilitated her body even further but left her mind as sharp and evil as it ever was.

PRIEST (to NORMA JEAN) Excuse me, Miss. I'll be right back. (Closes her panel.)

NORMA JEAN Don't be long!

PRIEST You must leave, Sebastian. Now.

SEBASTIAN But no, my sainted mother –may she rest in peace! – was not evil. No one is evil! Deep down inside every single person is in pain, and sometimes they just lash out in their pain. But evil, no, only damaged. My mother, on the other hand, was used to getting her way, whether it was a daiquiri at five P.M. precisely every day, or a son who would be her best friend. Not her beau! That's sick! I was her best friend, her only true friend. Why must people sully that relationship with cheap, psycho-analytic claptrap, claptrap that I predict will not withstand the test of time. Violet and Sebastian, Sebastian and Violet – we were equals, and we were stunning. You should have seen us in our heyday, Mother in her white gowns, me in my white linen suits, both handsome, both regal. . . . God, we filled up a room!

PRIEST I have someone else here now. Excuse me. (Closes the panel to SEBASTIAN.) (Opens the panel to NORMA JEAN.) You were saying, Miss?

NORMA JEAN I want to be spiritual! Can you make me holy?! I'm not just a whore!

PRIEST I'm sure you're not.

NORMA JEAN (testily) I'm not! Why, I've never even had an organism. How can I be a whore if I haven't even had an organism? [*sic*]

PRIEST Miss, perhaps that's a bit more than I –

NORMA JEAN Have you ever had an organism, Father?

PRIEST I believe that's not relevant to . . . to . . .

NORMA JEAN Do you think Jesus can give me an organism, or at least make me forget about it? No one else seems to be able to!

PRIEST Excuse me. (Closes her panel.) (Opens SEBASTIAN's.)

SEBASTIAN They claim my mother emasculated me, but that is quite untrue. She brought me out. I tended to be shy as a boy, believe it or not, and my wickedly sainted mother built me up and praised me until I joined her in that sparkling time. We were a team, a team in our very own sport, and we were wonderful! And I will always love her for that. If it is wrong or sick to love your coach, then perhaps one must examine those who try to make something so good, so decent, one of the few truly

(Cont'd.)

pure things in this dirty world, into something degraded. Quite possibly they are the problem.

PRIEST I'm not listening! (Closes the panel to SEBASTIAN's side.) (Opens the panel to NORMA JEAN.) Do you have specific things you want to tell me, Miss? I don't need the exact details. I just mean —

NORMA JEAN Is sex dirty, Father? So often it seems like it is. Really filthy. Like those fat producers — every one of them gross. Fat, fat, fat! And the B.O.! And they wanted to get on top of me! Yuck! I was lucky when they just pulled it out and wanted me to whistle it. Have you ever had to whistle, Father? Your lips get dry and cracked and —

PRIEST Please, Miss.

NORMA JEAN Why is it a sin if it's so terrible? Maybe it's a sin for them, cuz they seem to like it, but I never liked it. Not once! It's not that I don't get 'romantic' sometimes. Cuz I do. But I can't seem to feel what others are feeling. Like that Joan Crawford — my god, she screams almost as soon as she gets on top of me. And she keeps on screamin' and moanin'. Jesus, I just lie there and she yet seems to turn inside out, and what do I get from it all? Nothing but rashes. Rashes!

(The PRIEST slowly shuts the panel to NORMA JEAN's side.)

PRIEST (opening the other side) Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN For not everyone has to be a drone! A drone with the two or three or four thick-necked kiddies, mean little critters typically. The world has more than enough of those . . . dronettes, with their ordinariness worn like a crown on their square little heads. Even my mother tried to get me to settle down into one of those boring patches that pass for lives among the many, busy gathering all that pollen, never having much honey themselves — I say my mother tried to introduce me to the right sort of young drone ladies. She did not try to clasp me to her ample bosom beyond the age of twenty. In fact, she nattered at me night and day to “give the girls a break, Sebastian! What is wrong with you!? Isn't there even one you like? It only takes one, boy!” But not one tripped my heart, shall we say, or any other bodily part. At first I blamed myself. But then I began to realize that I did not want to dwell in that dreary drone patch. I was not even “physical” yet, and yet I knew that it must be sheer Hell to have to labor in the same vineyard day in and day out, what misery to keep eating plate after plate after plate of the same stale old bread night following night! My God, how do they do it?!

(The PRIEST closes that panel, opens hers.)

NORMA JEAN I can't help it if I'm pretty! The camera loves me. And everybody's making all these demands of me! Stand like this. Stand like that. Turn your head. Shake your boobs. I'm a serious actress, for god's sake! I've studied the goddamned Method! I'm gonna win an Academy Award in a serious dramatic part. You watch me. People said I wouldn't get this far, but I have! I'm a goddamned Somebody! You hear me?!

SEBASTIAN Even when Mother and I met some 'suitables' of the other – the male – gender, it was Mother who tried to make 'arrangements,' shall we say? She was by this time, I believe, reconciled to the fact that her Sebastian was not going to choose a little female drone and do the drone mating dance, as she herself had done it. Yes, Mother 'procured' for me, as mothers usually 'procure' when they can.

NORMA JEAN I can get anybody. Anybody! I've married two of the most famous men in the world, and even they couldn't give me an organism! Am I asking for too much out of life? Beauty, fame, and an organism? Father, do you think I'm asking for too much out of life?

PRIEST I don't know, Miss.

SEBASTIAN But every single one Mother 'procured' was wrong. They were too much like me! Not everybody wants slender, young 'aesthetic' gentlemen of impeccable taste and stunning wit! I know I didn't. Mother obviously liked that type; however, she should have left the shopping to me! Not that I didn't go shopping on my own. Underneath those white linen suits lay more than a pale skin and a faint heart. I had urges. Surges and surges of urges! There was, I confess, though, as I must insist again, confession is so inadequate a concept. Guilt and innocence? Guilt or innocence? How simpleminded really . . .

NORMA JEAN I pray every night. I pray in the daytime. Sometimes I make little bargains with God. "God," I say, "give me peace. Let my body be at peace. Let nobody notice me, not even me!" And God is very silent. Why is God so silent, Father?

SEBASTIAN There were dalliances, oh yes. In Tierra del Fuego, in the South of France, even in Pittsburgh! I think my mother would in fact have been reconciled, when I reached thirty, to accepting, to 'tolerating' a dalliance turned drone, and blinked about the gender – as long as her Sebastian was 'happy,' was nested with one stake through the hearts of two, as if happiness can be attained so summarily, so glibly. There is no happiness, and everybody knows it! . . . Or if there is, it is a tiny point of light between the darkneses, between the anticipation of the happiness and the invariable disappointment after the happiness. I say my mother would have accepted my twin and even bought us a house, calling him "my other son," no doubt, Sebastian's special "buddy" or "chum." Never of course "Sebastian's lover"!

NORMA JEAN I want a good lover! No one else has been able to help me one little bit. I want God to give me a lover who will give me the organism I've sought so long!

PRIEST Oh, for god's sake, it's orgasm!

NORMA JEAN What?

SEBASTIAN Alas, none of those young me ever tripped my heart, either, *Mirabile dictu!* And I wasn't tired enough yet to settle for one of my clone drones and to settle down, to settle in . . . to settle up with life. I wanted more! And I got more. Oh, so much more. Seven thousand six hundred and sixty-six.

PRIEST The number of Satan?

SEBASTIAN (condescendingly) Yes, Priest, exactly the same number as Satan. Satan had my number. And I had his. In fact, Satan himself, Lucifer, that fallen angel, was dalliance number seven thousand six hundred and sixty-six! And he left this mark of Satan upon my flesh! (He tears open his shirt at the top.)

PRIEST . . . I can't see anything.

SEBASTIAN It was a terrible hickey. But it must have gone away. Like most things.

PRIEST Do you think you are toying with me, Sebastian?

SEBASTIAN Do you want to be toyed with? Which toys?

PRIEST I am God's vessel, and God is not mocked.

SEBASTIAN He's often mocked, and should be. He created this universe we have to live in.

PRIEST No pain, no gain.

SEBASTIAN Cocaine, no pain. . . . At least for a while.

PRIEST So your mother ruined your life and –

SEBASTIAN Are you listening at all in there? That's not what I said, not even close. Padre, don't disappoint me now in my hour of need! By reducing my story to a burnt-out Freudian cliché. At least let me have the hope of being one tiny bit original.

PRIEST Don't worry. You're one of a kind, Sebastian.

NORMA JEAN Do you have a special path to God, Father? I've heard that priest are supposed to.

PRIEST I don't think I have that kind of path, Norma Jean.

SEBASTIAN May I call you Billy?

PRIEST You know my name?

SEBASTIAN Of course. I checked the schedule for confessions for days before I finally came here. William Boyd! (singing) "Will you come outside and play, Billy Boyd, Billy Boyd! Should I come inside and play, charming Billy?"

PRIEST That's enough now.

NORMA JEAN Who's singing over there?

SEBASTIAN You don't like my singing?

NORMA JEAN You have a mediocre voice at best.

PRIEST And I don't like your song.

SEBASTIAN I can change my song. I've changed my tune many a time. I can sing high. (changing his voice) I can sing low. (changing with each) Tenor, alto, even basso profundo, if needed in a pinch. Shall I sit upon your lap in there and sing for you?

PRIEST That won't be necessary.

SEBASTIAN I won't tell anybody, Father. You know, the seal of the confessional!

PRIEST I'm not interested. You know what? I think I actually knew your mother.

SEBASTIAN Oh, you did, Daddio! She too sometimes felt an impulse to unburden herself, and so she came to a young priest – in a cassock, not a dress – and knelt where I am kneeling and divulged a sin or two, most likely ones she made up, to keep you interested. My mother was – how shall I put it? – quite the scamp. Was she a scamp with you? Hmm? Too bad you and she couldn't marry each other. You would have been a perfect couple, and I would have had the perfect father, Father.

PRIEST Do you think you can presume on my patience forever, young man?

SEBASTIAN Not so young anymore, Padre, not if you look close. Not if you look at the portrait in my attic. But that's another story.

PRIEST I must be going soon.

NORMA JEAN Me too! I don't think I'm going to find help here after all! Fudge!

SEBASTIAN Not even a hour, to save me? To save me from Satan's jaws at that last minute? Another notch on your chastity belt?

PRIEST I've already endured a lot.

SEBASTIAN What do you suppose Satan's jaws feel like, Father? Are they slippery? Are they full of too many teeth? I hate it when that happens, don't you!? Oh, but you probably wouldn't know about all that. You're going to get your rocks off later, in Heaven. You hope! (Laughs)

PRIEST I trust that my hope is more confident than yours.

SEBASTIAN You sucker. Suck, suck, suck. But as I was saying, I not only loved my mother, I resented her. Which son does not? And then a decade would go by and I would love her again, and forgive her. I can forgive too, *Priest*.

PRIEST We must forgive one another – or die. Too bad that you're not ordained to do the job.

SEBASTIAN You know something, Father Confessor, we can forgive and still die! How could I not forgive and love a mother who thought so highly of my verse. I myself thought it but indifferent, though I did work on my poems, shaping them and re-shaping them. Have you noticed how you can shape a poem in ways that you cannot shape your life?

PRIEST I don't write.

NORMA JEAN I do! I keep a journal. No one thinks I can write, but I can. I can sing too.
(Sings: "Glory, glory, hallelujah!")

SEBASTIAN Well, Sebastian can write as well! Mother thought he wrote just one poem per summer; however, she was wrong. There was one poem per summer that he showed her, one fairly decent poem to show one's mother. What kind of poem would that have been? Although she was the perfect reader – always delighted. She praised her boy's poems, always, always, always. He knew in his heart that she would have praised them if they had been the most god-awful doggerel that a human being had ever writ. You cannot, must not rely on a mother's praise to ensure that literature springs into the world. No, Sebastian wrote numerous other poems, poems not meant for his mother's eyes, probably not meant for most to see: dark poems, frail poems, twisted poems, scathing poems, gentle poems, translucent poems, good poems, and bad poems. I do feel that the good ones

(Cont'd.)

outnumbered the bad. But then you can no more trust a versifier about the value of his verse than his mother. To wit: (reciting) The versifier can be a liar. And that is all well and good, that is, if we need the lies he tells us with his words. But if he lies to himself as well, alas, his verse may well be. Would you care to finish the rhyme, Padre?

PRIEST No.

NORMA JEAN Turds?

SEBASTIAN Thank you.

NORMA JEAN Do you want to hear one of my journal entries? I think I have it committed to memory. It's about an affair I had with a major movie personality.

PRIEST In a moment.

SEBASTIAN I must commend you, Father. You have indeed been patient with me – and her. That, I suspect, is because you think in the end you will have your holy way with me. And her too? You're as patient as a pederast.

PRIEST See here now!

NORMA JEAN What's a pederast?

SEBASTIAN Something I hasten to add I am not, nor have I ever been. Children – (Spits) I have no interest in them in the slightest. Only parents and pedophiles would! Still, I have been accused of such terrible things, Father, that I feel I must defend myself. Let me set the record straight once and for all. It is amazing – simply amazing – how many outsiders have deemed themselves competent and even entitled to analyze my psyche, to judge me and my desires like some travel agent telling people where to go when they haven't ever been there themselves! The nerve! I have been accused of the most dreadful crimes, and I have not been permitted to say a word in my own defense. And defense is the wrong word besides!

PRIEST You can always speak privately to God.

SEBASTIAN Oh, please, Padre! That is such hog twaddle! He never, ever answers. Even she knows that! It's like interacting with a Freudian psychoanalyst! The most boring people under the sun! At least you say something now and then, Padre.

PRIEST Thank you.

NORMA JEAN You seem to be forgetting me. My confession is just as interesting as his!

PRIEST He probably needs more help than you do, Miss.

SEBASTIAN (to PRIEST) Oh, no you don't! I will not be sucked into your priestly, 'understanding' web. You will not be hearing me beating my chest, the tears welling up and flooding this con-fessional. If there are any tears to be shed, they will be somebody else's!

PRIEST You will come around, if not today, then another day.

SEBASTIAN Maybe so, Father. But even the worst sty in an eye wants to live and will in fact fight you for its very life.

PRIEST So you acknowledge some faults then? A sty in your own eye perhaps?

SEBASTIAN Right next to that mote – that beam – in yours, Padre. The mote in the eye of the One, Holy, Catholic, and Apostolic Church of Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!

PRIEST . . . Amen.

NORMA JEAN I'm not Catholic. Praise Jesus!

SEBASTIAN Call me what you will, Confessor, but I do not think it possible in this world – not in any world – for someone else to take away your sins. And I do mean you. That is preposterous and antique in the worst, the most senseless way. What kind of an Almighty God would resort to a middle man? No, this is a human invention, like this box. (Shakes the confessional.)

PRIEST My God lets people heal!

SEBASTIAN It's not working! Re-think it!

PRIEST You must not tell the Lord what to do.

NORMA JEAN He's right about that. God can be very mean.

SEBASTIAN Oh, mustn't I?

PRIEST I believe it is time for you to truly repent and then I can give you absolution. If I do, you can leave here with an uplift you have never felt in your heart before.

SEBASTIAN And then will I turn into a censorious, narrow-minded prig whose notions of what a human being can do are quite silly at their best and quite fascist at their worst? Oh, I have seen the Righteous up close, Father, and they're un-beautiful!

PRIEST They can be kind.

SEBASTIAN If they think they'll save a soul when they're finished with you.

PRIEST That's because they care deeply.

SEBASTIAN Father Boyd, face it. Nobody has a soul! There isn't the slightest proof, to the sane mind, that we have souls! No, our bodies corrode and corrupt and wither and wane, and we are never heard of again, unless we happen to have built a pyramid or written a fine poem preserved by a dotting mother in a fine book with fine print and a fine binding. . . . And even that lasts just so long, and no longer. Praise Jesus!

PRIEST You have the bleak outlook of a condemned man, Sebastian.

SEBASTIAN And you have the facile outlook of someone who makes his living harvesting souls that don't exist.

PRIEST (Pause) You know, son, sometimes I feel like getting up off this seat and coming over there and beating your homo brains out!

NORMA JEAN Is he a fag? Get him! Get the fag!

SEBASTIAN . . . Why do I bring out this unpleasant quality in others? Which brings me to the urchins of the nether countries. They say I used first my mother and then my cousin Catherine to "procure" young-sters for my own nefarious carnal ambitions. Let's examine that, shall we? The urchins that I supposedly 'enticed' with these two female bodies were hardly interested in connecting with this male body. They wanted to jab their juices all over those female bodies, and they would have too, if I had not been there. Poorly done on my part, but I did protect them. Protecting their God-given right to wear a bathing suit, for Lord's sake! I wasn't the biggest or the baddest of the male protectors possible, but I was male enough to deter their sleazy, quite normal intentions. Oh yes, I was male enough for most things. Those 'urchins' were teenage boys, and older. Their bodies were not overfed –and I do regret their situation – but they will breed, won't they, and your Church will keep encouraging them, won't it? Nevertheless, they were healthy enough, horny enough.

NORMA JEAN I think I've been there. South of the border?

SEBASTIAN They would stand up on the high part of the beach and grab themselves. Do I need to tell you where they grabbed themselves, Father? And they hooted and carried on because a woman – any woman, if she was under eighty – was lying on a beach in a bathing suit that revealed the curvaceous outline of her body. I would try to shoo them away. At first it worked. Then they began to get bolder. They knew that I did not have a weapon. Not then. I learned later that you need a

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weapon in this good old world. (Pats his top pocket.) Poems are not enough. And when these gentlemen callers would not stop and kept getting a little closer every time, I called the police and paid the bribe expected, and still the *policia* did nothing to stop the groping, grinning, hooting teenage man-boys, didn't stop them no doubt because in their hearts they agreed with those man-boys that those sun-baked females were putas, whores, lying there in their bathing suits, their necks and arms and legs completely exposed. What else should anyone expect of those man-boys yanking at themselves, kept at bay only by one linen-suited non-alpha male. And so my women and I would always have to leave the public beach. Always. The man-boys always won.

NORMA JEAN Yeah, I have been there. And I'm not going back. They're like monkeys.

SEBASTIAN And they told their brothers and their cousins and their friends, and even their enemies, that there were nearly naked females lying there for their pornographic view, and they must all come and see such sights as Mother Church denied them the right to see. No, not even later in Heaven! So I understand why those man-boys were so needy, so frustrated. I could understand. I had my own frustrations as well. Yes, I began to offer them money to stay away from the beach – pesos, dollars, whatever. I just wanted them to leave us be! But they misunderstood me. They thought I was offering them money for their bodies! Do not be deluded, Father. These man-boys were not embarrassed to be offering themselves for sex. It was hardly their first time! I was hardly the first tourist they had accosted. As if I wanted to pay for sex! I did not, and I would not! Who did they think they were? They should have been paying me for sex!

NORMA JEAN I never, ever took money for sex. I got a couple of parts, early on, but never after my first speaking part. Honest!

SEBASTIAN It would be disingenuous if I didn't add that I had a casual interest in what they had to offer. Who would not at least check out the merchandise in any sidewalk bazaar, if only to be polite?! I have always tried to be a good visitor and sample whatever the particular locale has to offer. But I cannot protest enough that these hormonal hordes were not what I lusted for. They had seen the money in my hand, had smelled it in my trousers, and they were going to re-distribute the wealth, one way or the other. So they wouldn't take no for an answer. They clung to me, literally, when I went out for a stroll alone. Their hands reached out – touching my buttocks, putting my hand on their 'parts,' eager to sell what they clearly considered commodities of enormous international value. . . . And I confess I succumbed to their importunities once or twice. Just twice. I hated, hated having to pay for sex, sex that I didn't even want, except that I was lonely and my body cried out for some kind of contact with something more than my own hand.

NORMA JEAN I tried my own hand. It was a little better, but I still couldn't have an organ – what's that word again?

SEBASTIAN Orgasm!

NORMA JEAN Not like the ones you read about. What is wrong with me?

SEBASTIAN And in my silly heart I convinced myself that I was also helping out impoverished, foreign youth. If you think they were ashamed and shy and I was taking advantage of them, you have the situation backwards, Padre! The two I did it with came at me like animals and wanted to stick their uncircumcised *vergas* in a place I did not want their *vergas* to go! I wanted it to be mutual, as much as it could be in those dire straits. I most certainly did not want these young men to stick their 'obscenities' into my 'obscenity' so that they could think they were 'men' and I was some feminized lesser thing because they had propelled their sticky, Latin juices into another man's rear end. Oh no, they were just as 'homo' – God save the mark! – as I was! And I wouldn't let them 'do it' to me that way. No! No! Screw them and the Faith they rode in on! I'd rather do it with myself than that. Onanism is a dark, stark religion in itself, I suppose, but onanism is better than being violated and insulted and then having to pay for it on top of it! Save me, Father, save me from their sins! Yes, there was exploitation in all this, but it was not I that was the exploiter! Save me from such simple-mindedness! So I threw the money at them. "You're not going there!" I said. And that's when they became angry. The snide, condescending smirks disappeared from their faces when I wouldn't let them have that substitute hole they were so willing to console themselves with. My, wasn't that 'un-hole-y' of me. I even offered them the gift of oral sex. And there is no greater gift on this planet, yet a gift so often denigrated. Oral sex bad mouthed? I do not understand! Someone places willing lips around your needy nugget and manipulates it and tenderly massages it until it swells and swells and reaches its crescendo, a crescendo like no other music even in the grandest operas of Italy! Even when the smells are not the best and the taste is viscous, not vicious, viscous, you accept that cascading crescendo until the other person is satisfied, even lingering, if you're really good, until they utterly subside. No, I say to you that sucking someone off is the kindest act a human being can perform on this planet!

NORMA JEAN Easy for you to say!

SEBASTIAN And were they grateful? Were they grateful that you had pleased them instead of biting off their ugly dicks and spitting them out? Hah! They walked away without a word or even said cruel things. They shot their teeming spigots and left only their teeming bigotry behind. Where were their mothers to teach them gratitude for what they had received?! I have learned since that men like me are kinder than men like them. We hug and kiss and even say "thank you" when we get our members nurtured and attended to. You do not insult your nurse. You

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do not castigate your savior! So, yes, there were times when I applied my oral techniques to these ruffians, times when my words, even my money was of no use in dissuading them from their persistent onslaughts against me and my women. But, oh my, they were gone soon enough once their penises were drained, I'll tell you that. And, yes, I did it more than twice. And then I told them. That's it – no more. You will not come in my mouth anymore. Not one of you. Not one! You're not even grateful, you fucking sons of bitches!

NORMA JEAN I say double Amen to that! But you don't have to swear!

SEBASTIAN And you know what? The men-boys returned! A whole troop of them returned, carrying these sharp, metal objects which they had made out of tin cans and God knows what else. Twenty, thirty of them came in a cold, calculated rampage. With two intentions. Me and Catherine. They were going to take care of me first, and then they were going to rape my Catherine and then, and only then, rip her flesh with those jagged tin cans, violate her body because she dared to wear that revealing bathing suit in public. "Run!" I said to Catherine. "Run back to the hotel!" And she ran ahead, then stumbled, and I took all the pesos and dollars that were in my wallet and flung them at those men, not longer boys in the slightest, and some fell on their knees to grab that money, but the bulk of them did not stop. So I had no choice but to stop and face them, out of money, with no weapon in my linen suit that had become so hot under the blazing white sky and those blazing black eyes! (He removes his jacket, revealing dirt, rips, and blood stains on his shirt) "Run, Catherine!" I called until she got up and ran and ran to the safety of the hotel. And the men who were not boys surrounded me and began their savaging. A blow to my head! The first cut in my right hand! A second cut to my left hand. Another blow to my temple! I staggered, but I would not fall. They called me horrible names in their own language. Some even knew the hateful words in my language, and they hurled those at me as I staggered up that hill, the white, blinding light across my eyes like a hand. A final blow! I went down on one knee. Someone crept up behind me and dragged that ragged metal object across my throat, and I gagged and I screamed. I confess I screamed, and, yes, like a woman. (He weeps.) And I begged them not to do any more, to turn around and descend the hill, to pray to their loving God and save themselves from this savagery while there was still time. . . .

NORMA JEAN Oh, please stop!

SEBASTIAN But they would not stop, would not hear me, as their voices rose as one voice, it seemed, though made of many separate sounds, and they came upon me in a rush and began to cut and cut and cut . . . and cut. (Silence) And then some of them ate the part of me they had first mutilated and then severed from my body. They put me in their mouths like Holy Communion to mock me, as I lay there under the scorching Latin sun, bleeding, bleeding. I was their Unholy Eucharist, and it was

(Cont'd.)

clear, if it hadn't been before, that they considered themselves infinitely superior to the beaten, mutilated faggot that lay at their feet. Their ugly, bare feet.

NORMA JEAN (touched) I'm sorry. . . . I'm sorry.

SEBASTIAN Oh, I did not die. I did not! Eventually they left, taking something of me as a memento, that is, the part they hadn't cut to pieces or pretended to devour. I forget which part that was. Perhaps my heart? Was that the part?

NORMA JEAN The truth is, Father, no one, no one has ever, ever touched my heart, just my body.

SEBASTIAN Somehow I managed to re-group myself and stanch the bloodletting with sand, with fragments of my shirt, and then I slowly crept back beyond their reach, beyond their vicious, sanctimonious hands, and made it to the hotel, where my beloved Catherine was waiting, agonized but safe. And she comforted me and got me to a doctor. She was always good with doctors. . . . I was in Purgatory for a time. I think that was the place. My theology is so bad. But I recovered. I healed. My body was no longer whole, but I healed. And then I vowed that I would have vengeance! . . . *Priest!*

PRIEST Now, now.

NORMA JEAN And I vowed I would come here today and get my body in tune with my soul. Or know the reason why. That's why I selected you, Father.

PRIEST Me?

NORMA JEAN You're a priest, aren't you?

PRIEST I am.

NORMA JEAN One of you is just as good as another. Put your lips over here.

PRIEST My lips?

NORMA JEAN I want you. Are you afraid?

PRIEST This really is getting out . . .

NORMA JEAN Shall I help you?. Watch me. I'm standing up. See my body?

PRIEST (weakly) No.

NORMA JEAN Oh, yes, you do. See how pretty I am? My curves? You want me, don't you?

(Cont'd.)
All of me. Here. Now!

PRIEST (more weakly) No.

NORMA JEAN How long has it been, Padre? Has it ever been? See my body against the panel? It's amazing. Everybody says so. Put out your tongue. Lean over here. Come on. Come on!

PRIEST Oh, oh!

(He scrambles to his knees, tasting her lower body through the panel, the sight obscured but clear enough. There is more commotion of the two, followed soon enough by mutual sounds.)

NORMA JEAN That's right. That's right. Oh, yes! Yes! Yes! Yessss! Give me God!

PRIEST Oh, Jesus Christ! I'm coming!

NORMA JEAN Me too! Me too! At last! Oh, my god, at last! I can see now that sex is not dirty – if it's with a priest!

(They both pant and then climax. A silence follows.)

SEBASTIAN Bless you both. . . . And so I have come here today. But not in hate. (Laughs)
What bullshit! Of course I have come in hate!

PRIEST No!

SEBASTIAN Yes.

PRIEST You wouldn't.

SEBASTIAN But you're such a sinner, my boy.

(SEBASTIAN takes a small pistol out of the pocket of his jacket and shoots the PRIEST through the panel.)

PRIEST (Makes distressed sound)

SEBASTIAN How does that feel now? Better, you sin-free son of a bitch!?

PRIEST Sebastian!

SEBASTIAN Too late, Priest. Die. Do you hear me? Die! . . . That I may live.

(SEBASTIAN gets up from the kneeler and crosses himself. He moves off to the side where he knelt at the beginning and kneels again.)

NORMA JEAN (stumbling out of the confessional) Did you really have to do that? I don't know if I can find another one with a tongue that perfect! And now they'll be looking for people in confessionals!

SEBASTIAN I gave him an orgasm of the soul. It is finished. At last I can say it. Their ways are finished! And mine are about to begin. Would you like to hear one of the poems I couldn't show my mother, Father? (He stands and takes a poem from a pocket.) With my compliments to Mr. Wordsworth. It's called "The Announcement."
(reciting)

He dwelt among the untrodden ways,
The untrodden ways of Love,
A man whom there were none to praise,
But quite a few to shove.

A pansy in a summer sun,
Full hidden from the eye,
Stark as a star, the only one
That fills a desperate sky.

He dwelt unknown and who could know
Sebastian at his core.
But now he's risen from his grave, and oh,
He shall be dead no more!

NORMA JEAN Hey, that's pretty!

(SEBASTIAN rises, starts to leave, then returns and checks to make sure that the PRIEST is dead, slumped in his chair.)

(SEBASTIAN'S MOTHER is sitting where the PRIEST was, slumped.)

NORMA JEAN Look. There's an old lady in there!

SEBASTIAN'S
MOTHER (coming to life) Sebastian, my boy, it's me. Your mother.

SEBASTIAN/NORMA JEAN (together, startled) OH!

(SEBASTIAN and NORMA JEAN jump, and so should the audience.)

BLACKOUT