

Lemon World
by Irene Loy

CHARACTERS

JACOB, in his 30's, was married to Chloe
PATRICIA, in her 50's, Chloe's oldest sister
JEAN, in her 40's, Chloe's middle sister

*One of those benches on the boardwalk along the Jersey Shore. Seaside Heights, NJ.
Sound of the ocean, lights from the rides.
Jacob, Patricia, and Jean sit finishing up pieces of birthday cake off of small plates.*

JACOB

So happy I was invited.
Gave me a reason to get out of the city.
House looks good.
You've kept it up real well.
For being gone.
It's big, and with all that sand blowing in, I don't know how you do it.
Must be a woman's touch. I guess.
The house—Chloe helped keep it up.
You're real good to keep it up, even now. Even after—

JEAN

Shhhhhhhh—

PATRICIA

(holding up a mostly-finished bottle of champagne) You want some more, Jacob?

JACOB

Nah.

PATRICIA

You're sure?

JACOB

...Okay.

She pours him another glass of champagne into a little plastic cup.

JEAN

You had better slow down!

JACOB

What?

JEAN
You can't handle your liquor.

JACOB
Can too.

PATRICIA
You're the one who drinks too much, Jean.

JEAN
Oh, Chloe had her fair share of alcohol—and other things.

Pause.

PATRICIA
You shouldn't say things like that.

JEAN
What? I was making a joke—

PATRICIA
Not on her birthday.

JEAN
She would have laughed.

PATRICIA
You don't know that. And besides, we're celebrating her—

JEAN
Not reminding ourselves what a lush she was.

PATRICIA
Jean!

JEAN
Just trying to lighten the mood.

Pause.

PATRICIA
Can you believe it's been a whole year?

JACOB
She would've been 39.

PATRICIA
You say that like it's old.

JACOB
Well older than me.

PATRICIA
You'll get there.

JACOB
She really loved this view.

PATRICIA
Yep.

JEAN
She used to talk about that old unicorn movie when she looked out at the waves. What was it?

JACOB
The Last Unicorn.

JEAN
Yeah.

JACOB
To Chloe!

PATRICIA
To Chloe!

JEAN
...To Chloe.

*They drink.
Jean takes red lipstick out of her beach bag and starts to put in on.
Jacob watches her, then breaks his gaze.*

JACOB
Do you care if I stay here tonight?

PATRICIA
Certainly not. You know you're welcome here anytime.

JACOB
I just, I may be just a little bit sloshed, and anyway I don't feel like driving back to the city tonight.

PATRICIA

Stay as long as you like.

JACOB

Sometimes I get real tired of driving around. Drive to work, drive home, drive to the beach, drive home, driving in circles all the time, gets boring. And even now I have an Audi I should like driving but I don't. Just feels like a routine. Now this one time. One time I had a, a real lemon, an old '97 Ford Aspire, shaped like an egg and built to run on fumes. And I drove that thing all over. Could not have been more fun. Felt like an adventure, 'cause each time I drove it, I didn't know if it'd give, or if I'd make it home or what. So when it finally died, I had it demolished. Didn't want to be reminded, how much fun we'd had.

JEAN

You're always thinking too much.

PATRICIA

Well, he's always in school.

JACOB

I am getting a PhD. Teaching—

JEAN

Before that. You were in the army.

JACOB

My ways of avoiding the real world.

JEAN

Now you're a hipster professor.

JACOB

Touché.

JEAN

Look at this collared shirt—at the beach!
Don't you ever let loose?

JACOB

Occasionally.

JEAN

Then?

JACOB

Then I come here.

Pause.

JACOB

We should put on our bathing suits and go swimming.

PATRICIA

It's too cold!

JEAN

I've got mine on.

*Jean stands and takes off her clothes, revealing her bathing suit underneath.
Jacob looks at her body.*

PATRICIA

Op! You've got icing on your collar.

JACOB

What?

PATRICIA

Hold still!

*Patricia spits on her hand and wipes at the icing on Jacob's collar.
He allows this.*

JEAN

Chloe always loved the Tilt a Whirl.

JACOB

Like the waves!

JEAN

She'd get in, pull the bar down, and hold her breath while it moved up and down.

JACOB

Except—

JEAN

She'd usually last the whole ride. Only that one time did it not stop soon enough, she tried leaning over the side, but puke went everywhere, in this rainbow spray, high and arched and disgusting. ...That night, it was Cuevo and pills.

PATRICIA

Just awful.

JACOB

She always let loose when she was home.

JEAN

Ha!

PATRICIA

See, I don't remember those things about her. What comes to mind for me is the sweet, young, innocent girl who followed us around college and high school, when she was just a child. She had pigtails and wore pastel dresses, asked a ton of questions starting with 'why'. She wanted so badly to grow up, to change, but I loved her just as she was.

Jean pulls heels out of her beach bag, trades her flip flops for heels.

She saunters around in her heels.

Jacob's eyes follow her.

PATRICIA

Oh, your hair is all mussed.

Patricia starts to fix his hair.

Jacob lets her do it.

JEAN

You baby him!

PATRICIA

I do not!

JEAN

Just like you babied Chloe.

PATRICIA

Nonsense.

I supported her.

JACOB

You did baby her—a little.

That one time you bought her a pink dress for our anniversary? I felt uncomfortable.

PATRICIA

Why on earth?

It was so she had something nice to wear when you went out!

JEAN

Or when Chloe knocked into that mailbox one night driving drunk, and you covered for her! You argued with the police over whether it was a crime, you fought with the DMV so she could keep her license.

PATRICIA
She needed me!

JEAN
Exactly! You made sure of that. You enabled every bad choice she ever made.

Pause.

JACOB
Anyway, the house looks good.
It's as well-kept up as ours was.

JEAN
And now?

JACOB
Our—my—house is a mess.
Can't find anything.

JEAN
So, that's what a woman's touch is good for?

JACOB
It sure helps.

Pause.
Jean approaches Jacob.

JEAN
And what about—

She touches his neck, dips a finger in under his collar.
He moves away.

JACOB
I'm not, you're really—

Jean drops it, moves away too.

JEAN
You do baby him though.
And he lets you!

PATRICIA
And what do you do to him?

JEAN
Absolutely nothing.

Patricia gives Jean a skeptical look.

I seduce him—that's what you want me to say. But I do nothing of the sort. I try to seduce him. Those are two entirely different things—trying to seduce someone, and actually doing it. Enticing them beyond the edges of reason. No. Prance as I might—he's still devoted to the one who DOMESTICATED him.

JACOB
Hey!

JEAN
Past death do you part!

PATRICIA
That's enough.

JEAN
But then, I'm a living, breathing, WILD being, and I still can't outshine her.

PATRICIA
Show some respect—

JEAN
No matter. He wouldn't know what to do with me anyhow. Would you?

JACOB
I'm leaving.

JEAN
What? When we're having such fun?

JACOB
You don't know when to stop—

JEAN
I'm only getting started. You're a coward—

JACOB
Jean

JEAN
Who's too afraid to do anything about this—

JACOB
I'm warning you

JEAN
FIRE between us.

Pause.

JACOB
I think I will go ahead and drive home.

JEAN
Of course.

Beat.

Go on, now.

He gathers his shoes, etc.

JACOB
Patricia, thanks for hosting me.

He turns to go.

JEAN
I let her die, you know.

JACOB
What was that?

JEAN
I didn't kill her, but I let her die.

Pause.

She'd gone on another bender—

PATRICIA
She was tired, exhausted really—

JEAN
Stop making excuses for her!

PATRICIA
She always had so much to deal with, it was too much for her—

JEAN

She was probably wasted when she took those pills.

PATRICIA

No. She was home visiting. She was a good girl—

JEAN

I came in and saw her passed out, empty bottle of vodka on the floor, empty bottle of Oxy on the bed. ...I knew what to do, how to intervene. I'd been trained.

Instead, I made myself a drink and watched her go.

I let her die, because I wanted you.

Long pause.

JACOB

You evil/

JEAN

/What are you gonna do about it?

He stampedes over to Jean, gets right in her face.

That's better.

JACOB

You'll be sorry.

JEAN

Will I?

JACOB

You and your sister live in a lemon world!

It's junk, and you keep driving it around!

JEAN

What about you? You haven't stopped living in your lemon world since the day she died!

Jacob closes the space between him and Jean, fast.

He kisses her hard on the mouth.

He bites her lip.

JEAN

Ow!

JACOB

Meet me back at the house.

JEAN
What for?

JACOB
Its demolition.

Jacob exits.

PATRICIA
You wouldn't.

JEAN
Watch me.

*Jean slings her beach bag over her shoulder, goes to exit.
Patricia stands in her way, tries to stop her.*

PATRICIA
You've always focused on yourself!

JEAN
And you never have!

Beat.

Just—let me have this. I mean, Pat, she's gone.

PATRICIA
She wouldn't have died if you had—

JEAN
She was always on her way out.
She didn't know how to grow up.

PATRICIA
...You know... In you, he may have met his equal.

*Jean hugs Patricia.
She lets her by. Jean exits.
Patricia stays, gathers the rest of the cups, plates, etc. She finds one more swallow of
champagne in one of the cups. She raises the cup.*

PATRICIA
To Chloe!

Lights out.