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**Editor and Publisher:** Elana Dykewomon

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**Editorial readers and advisors:** Ariban, Baba Copper, Barbara Ruth, Betty Dudley, Cath Thompson, Donna Dunklin, Gloria Anzaldúa, Heidi Henken, Jasmine Marah, Jess Wells, Lisa Carlin, Lisa Gerick, Val Stoehr, Winn Gilmore

**Consultants:** Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, Adrienne Rich, Gloria Anzaldúa, Dolphin Zeldia Waletzky, Susan Jill Kahn

**Contributing Editors:** Gloria Anzaldúa, Irena Klepfisz

**Typists and proofreaders:** Betty Dudley, Cath Thompson, D.Z. Waletzky, Kit Quan, Lisa Gerick, Leslie Baker, Leslie Hassberg, Susan Goldberg, Val Stoehr

**Cover:** Jasmine Marah   **Graphic Consultant:** Max Dashu

**Office help, correspondence, ads and accounting:** Jennifer Krebs, Laura Israel, Nina Wouk, Sheila Brush

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**Distribution, mailing, office construction:** Amy Klitsner, Anita Schriver, Caryatis Cardea, Debbie Fier, Dolphin Zeldia Waletzky, Donna Dunklin, Elizabeth Fides, Jasmine Marah, Louise Rafkin, Ramona Galindez, Tavia Tipton. **Rewiring:** Laura Orabona, Judy Nishimoto, Brigid O'Doud

**Reader for the Womyn's Braille Press:** Judy Freespirit

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and Catherine Nicholson (1976-81)  
Michelle Cliff and Adrienne Rich (1981-83)  
Michaele Uccella (1983-84)  
Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz (1983-87)

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# A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination in the Arts and Politics

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## A Dyke Geography

I have been given *Sinister Wisdom*. To tend, hold, share, nurture, shape, extend, encourage, challenge and be challenged by, give, pass on when the time comes.

To tend: as lesbians have tended hearths for centuries. Keeping sparks alive, hidden in the ash, when the smoke of open fires is dangerous. Adding fuel to blazes that light rooms and lives, while making sure the blaze doesn't burn the house down. Knowing when it's time to burn the house down...

To hold: as a lesbian holds a baby, touching her new spirit by mind and heart, checking for strength, clarity, vitality. As a lesbian holds a crystal, looking into its depths for reflection. As a lesbian holds a rock, or a rifle. As a lesbian holds a pen. Willing to open her mind to examination.

### WHAT'S AN EDITOR?

When Melanie and Irena offered *Sinister Wisdom* to me I looked at myself in the mirror: I can write, typeset, print, I've designed books, done distribution for years, am good with details, am in an urban area where there are both material and emotional/energy resources; I've worked in the Lesbian and Women's movements for 18 years, and I love womyn. I love the sense of vision throbbing in us, possibility, the motion forward, the great adventure it is to be on the boundary. I asked many different kinds of lesbians if they would help. Many said yes (and many are). So I agreed to accept this gift and this responsibility.

As I take up the editing and publishing, I see that although I have power in shaping *Sinister Wisdom*, I shape first from what comes in the mail. *Sinister Wisdom* is a place. A country. To which lesbians add their own villages, their own geography, issue by issue. Year by year.

As editor I don't want to be "ruler of the land": I want the process to be open and participatory. I want to see that *Sinister Wisdom* gets non-profit status (finally). I worry about singular editorship—about the nature of hierarchy and the ownership of process. I am very willing to share this work with other lesbians as they present themselves willing. I resist meetings, though they are happening. Like many lesbians who were active in the 70's, I have reservations about "collectives"—their unwieldy nature, the comfort of traditional women's anonymity masquerading as anti-hierarchal process. But we still have a lot to gain from exploring collective and cooperative forms of organization.

I also know the efficiency of primary organizers. And I believe that leadership—strength of idea, purpose, willingness to work—should be



encouraged among womyn. I talk about this tension between hierarchy and collectivity—no one has any easy answers. That the editorship of *Sinister Wisdom* changes as it does is part of the solution. That we keep asking questions is another.

#### WHO I AM AND WHO'S HELPING

*Sinister Wisdom* has, in its 11 years, been edited primarily by couples. Catherine and Harriet, Michelle and Adrienne, Melanie and Michael, and then Melanie with Irena Klepfisz (who was officially a contributing editor, but worked with Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz as “khaverte,” “comrade,” in Yiddish: their word for a wonderful partnership of ideas and heart that has informed *Sinister Wisdom* in the last four years).<sup>1</sup>

I am neither coupled nor uncoupled. I live in a complex web of lesbian relationships from which I draw the energy for this job. I am getting input, advice, dissent, energy, thoughtful comment from: the lesbians who've volunteered (a varying group of 20), the Jewish Lesbian Writers Group, my separatist study group, Gloria Anzaldúa (who continues as contributing editor), several of the former editors, my friends & interested womyn across the country, and my intimates Dolphin Zelda Waletzky and Susan Jill Kahn. This is a multi-racial, multi-class, multi-ethnic, multi-ability group between the ages of 25 - 65. I hope that we can find new ways to understand “editor” as I work with lesbians interested in *Sinister Wisdom* and they work with me.

I welcome your participation. Join us in this written country. I am glad to acknowledge the outreach that previous editors have done. *Sinister Wisdom* has a broad base of contributors — Native American, Chicana, Black, Asian, Jewish, Arab, Ethnic, White, working-class, poor, middle-class, disabled, able-bodied, fat, thin, old, young, survivors and fighters. I want *Sinister Wisdom* to continue as place where many lesbians can make their own homes.

I myself am a Jew, fat, middle-class, sometimes-disabled, a survivor of mental hospitals, 38 by the time you read this. I have been a lesbian and a writer all my life. I was drawn, in high school and college, to socialism, anarchism, anti-war and anti-racist work. I went to my first “Homophile Association” and Women’s Liberation meetings in 1969. First I was a queer, then I was gay, now I’m a lesbian and a dyke. I have called myself an anarchist, a revolutionary, a feminist, a socialist feminist; I still call myself a lesbian separatist. And I still think of myself as a revolutionary.

#### REVOLUTION?

Often it seems like a fog of boredom, cynicism, of oh-we’ve-been-through-that-already, has spread through our various communities. The “hot heads” of the 70’s have become cool. Passionate political engagement is viewed with suspicion—perhaps it’s a substitute for intimacy, or a lack of personal boundaries. After all, many lesbians can get good jobs



and in most big cities you can find lesbian doctors, plumbers, computer experts, restaurants, magazines, bars, 12-step groups. The police aren't raiding our bedrooms, even though they could if they wanted to. Nobody seems to keep us from living our lives.

But that's not enough. We don't have a womyn's economy. We don't have lesbian centers. We have no shelters or on-going homes for lesbians in need at any age. We haven't figured out how to share our resources with womyn in crisis, let alone as full communities (although if we could do it as full communities we might not have to worry about the crisis. Because we always worry about the crisis first, we rarely change the root). We don't use the word "patriarchy" anymore—it sounds too antagonistic, too dated. But we haven't even begun to scratch at the patriarchal nationalist military machine/mentality. We haven't encouraged all womyn to withdraw their energy and support from men's causes. We barely know what womyn's causes are. We have so much more to learn about each other, about our cultures-of-origin, our different perspectives on ethics and justice. We are extremely susceptible to fashion and the quick-fix. As womyn in the United States, we have little international perspective. I haven't met a womyn yet who has unworked the prick inside her head. The fact is, there is very little lesbian space in the world, outside of our homes.

Michal Brody writes in *Are We There Yet? (a continuing history of Lavender Woman, a Chicago Lesbian Newspaper 1971-1976)*: "There seems to be a current attitude that we share some of the credit for creating those bygone progressive times, but today, with the right wing in power, we are now mere victims of history. It probably doesn't work both ways...There are ways to effect change at any historical moment, if one desires to work for change."<sup>2</sup>

This is hard work. I read and reread the first statements of all the editors before me. In April of this year Catherine Nicholson, Harriet (Des Moines) Ellenberger, Adrienne Rich, Gloria Anzaldúa and I did a benefit celebration at the San Francisco Women's Building for *Sinister Wisdom's* move West. When it was my turn to get up on stage I became infused by the sensation of being part of a long spiral, an infinite loop of lesbians, working together: in spite of everything: because we are all that we have: and just that much is amazing. With that energy in me, I gave one of the best readings I ever did. The point of which is: my own excellence needs lesbian energy to exist. We need each other in order to exist. And the more we exist, the more we change the world.

#### ALRIGHT, SEPARATISM AND —

Alright. Separatism. It's true. I'm a separatist. That means first, everything I do, I try to do for/with lesbians.

Obviously I live here. I often work at straight jobs, I rent from a landlord. I am reluctant to write about separatism now for a variety of



reasons.<sup>3</sup> It's a much longer subject. I don't want to start from a defensive position. And it often triggers a lot of negative response. If you feel yourself so triggered, I can only ask that you continue to read (and contribute to) *SW* with an open mind. As I write "Notes for a Magazine" from my perspective, each woman we publish writes from hers. I don't intend for *Sinister Wisdom* to be focused on debate about separatism. I do intend for *Sinister Wisdom* to be a place where any lesbian may be included. Just as we will not publish racist, classist, ageist, ableist or sizeist statements, we will not print anything that's oppressive or demeaning to lesbians. *SW* has a long history of radical and separatist lesbian energy, and I intend to affirm that history and encourage that energy in the present.

I have such desire to bring together, to root out the best, to enthuse us for the long haul; to get lesbians to trust each other again for real reasons (not just "sisterhood" in name)—to keep us arguing without hating each other. I believe that disagreements strengthen us, help us move, keep us honest. I long for honesty and depth between womyn.

And womyn who are not lesbians? *Sinister Wisdom* has, since its first issue, published non- or not-yet lesbian work. Harriet (Desmoines) Ellenberger wrote in *SW* #1: "The content of *Sinister Wisdom* grows out of a lesbian consciousness. Lesbian consciousness marks a style of the body: a leaning toward women; it marks a style of the mind: the female mind swung like a winnowing fan, shifting the chaff of terror for the broken remnants of grain... But lesbian consciousness is also a process that begins long before a woman comes out and is never completed, only strengthened and enriched... Each woman represented in the magazine is moving outside patriarchal culture. All are boundary dwellers; it shows in their visual language and in their words."

I believe all the work in this issue is by lesbians. That may not always be the case. As with any group, it's crucial that members be able to identify each other in order for that group to retain and develop its identity. Therefore, any work published by non-lesbians should be identified as such. All work that's published in *Sinister Wisdom* will come from some aspect of the lesbian imagination. And why not?

## DON'T YOU WANT TO BE PART OF THE WIND?

Let's restimulate a passion for revolution. We are powerful, we can affect each other and the larger events around us. We all know how painful it can be to love other womyn—the disappointments, the confusion, the defensiveness, the ones who turn away and the ones who won't come forward with us when we're ready to change. But it remains true that loving lesbians is fun. That change, no matter how upsetting, is exciting. That experiencing a generosity of spirit is creative. That creativity is joyful. That building things together is sweet and satisfying. That we need that satisfaction in our lives. That sense of purpose,



coupled with flexibility and imagination.

And it's still scary. Why? Because. It's public. It's powerful. It's a claim to territory. This is lesbian territory and we still have a right to it. Is lesbian life a series of gang wars? Or a circle, handing what we have from one to another, and it comes down to who can do the work and who has the heart for it. The stomach and the heart. Who wants to do the work together.

To tend, hold, share, nurture, shape, extend, encourage, challenge and be challenged by, give, pass on when the time comes.

So it's scary to be given this: wanting to do a good job, to stir-up lesbians, to keep vitality and intelligence throbbing, and/ it's scary because every time I write about politics I touch nerves.

But I am not out to un-nerve anyone. Only want to send the excitement of question, of recognition, of challenge up your spine. There's a storm coming in off the pacific coast—it could change the shape of the land forever. Don't you want to be part of the wind that drives that storm?

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<sup>1</sup>We have very few words to describe those relationships which offer us sustaining, creative energy. In this issue, Gloria Anzaldúa suggests the word "carnala" for a closer-than-compañera bond. We keep needing new words, and new ways to imagine our intimacy and our work.

<sup>2</sup>Michal Brody, *Are We There Yet? A Continuing History of Lavender Woman, A Chicago Lesbian Newspaper, 1971-1976*, pp. 187-88, Aunt Lute Book Company, SF, CA 94141.

<sup>3</sup>In the absence of a body of separatist theory, many of us hope that Sarah Hoagland and Julia Penelope's anthology of separatist writings, *For Lesbians Only*, will get published within the year.

## Notes on the Themes \_\_\_\_\_

**#33: Wisdom.** In choosing "wisdom herself" as a theme I had hoped to collect what we've learned doing political/cultural work in the lesbian and women's communities—how what we bring to our idealism shapes the work we do; how what happens in the process shapes us. I was looking for discussions on compromise, disillusionment, renewal, second wind. What we've learned along the way by establishing our peculiar, tentative intimacies. Portraits of the sense of humor we'll need in order to keep our rebellions flourishing. How we can keep what we've learned from getting lost, buried, burned. How we pass it on.

Some of the work, to my mind, touches those questions directly—among them Gloria Anzaldua's *"En Rapport, In Opposition: Cobrando Cuentas A Las Nuestras,"* Michal Brody's *"Transit Waltz,"* Leslita William's poem *"Non-violence,"* Adrienne Rich's *"Negotiations,"* Chrystos' *"I Am Not Your Princess,"* Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz's *"War Stories."* Wisdom, of course, is a broad theme: whatever we have to say to each other contains the stuff of which wisdom is made. I am pleased to print every piece in this issue.

And I learn my first lesson as editor: You don't always get exactly what you want. But wonderful work comes in the mail, the issue has a deadline, you work with what you have. Putting together a magazine becomes a pleasure & trial of necessity. And all the questions remain open.

**#34: Lesbian Visions and Science Fiction.** It may be too late to say this, but I thought: the wildest imaginings of past present and future that contain a world as we'd want it; want to live in it; from forms of government to forms of sex. When we name what we want, we create the road towards it.

As this issue gets into your hands, the deadline for the next one has arrived. But if you happen to have such pieces of writing hidden in a folder somewhere, put them in the mail today anyway.

**#35: On Passing.** We usually attempt to pass as more acceptable to our oppressors: for whiter, richer, straight, christian, more educated, more able-bodied, thinner, younger, male. We occasionally try to pass for those we oppress—witness downward mobility and converting to Judaism. Sometimes we try to pass for classless, raceless, ageless, by calling ourselves bohemians, artists, or spiritually awakened womyn following a path through reincarnation.

We often blame each other for being granted privileges we may never have wanted. If our oppressors define who "can pass" and who cannot, what makes us think *we* have the power to control our images? How do



we actively claim our public identities? How do we feel when we actively try to pass? How do those not passing feel about those who are? What about when we pass almost unconsciously, out of habit or unexpressed fear? What experiences do lesbians "who can pass" (for men; or for straight/ for white/ for—) have in common? What does it mean when a lesbian says she "can't pass"?

When we are "other" there is always pressure—trying to pass is a net of motions many lesbians weave (or are woven into) to obscure themselves every day for at least fifty reasons. Let's talk about it. (Deadline: February 15)

**#36. Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating Emotional Well-Being.** When I wrote the list of things I am in my "Notes for a Magazine," by far the hardest to say was that I had been locked up. I am always surprised by the number of lesbian I meet who have been locked up, or who are/ have been deeply afraid of being locked up. Yet lesbian communities appear to tolerate a narrow range of "appropriate social behavior."

In this issue I want to see two things happen.

The first is a forum for womyn who have suffered psychiatric assault, in mental institutions and within the wider framework of psychiatric therapy (straight or "feminist").

The second is a discussion about how we create the quality of emotional life in our communities. How do we get to feel we can make full, connected, purposeful lives? Where do the norms for behavior come from? When do we, as individuals and/or groups, set standards for what's "sane" and what's "crazy"? What does the word "crazy" mean (and why do you still use it)? How do we get help when we're in crisis, troubled or stuck? How do we offer help? What do we do when a lesbian's behavior becomes a danger to herself and/or those around her? Who decides? Do we hand over our ability to define our own mental well-being to professionals? What are the ways for lesbians to become therapists and maintain a sense of "right-action" and social responsibility? What's at stake between those who hate therapy and those who swear by it? What effect does all this have on our conception of community, our ability to trust, love, imagine, work with each other? What's going on here anyway? (Deadline: June 15)

See the inside back cover for submission guidelines.

Adrienne Rich

## Negotiations

Someday if someday comes we will agree  
that trust is not about safety  
that keeping faith is not about deciding  
to clip our fingernails exactly  
to the same length or wearing  
a uniform that boasts our unanimity

Someday if someday comes we'll know  
the difference between liberal laissez-faire  
pluralism and the way you cut your hair  
and the way I clench my hand  
against my cheekbone  
both being possible gestures of defiance

Someday if there's a someday we will  
bring food, you'll say I can't eat what you've brought  
I'll say Have some in the name of our  
trying to be friends, you'll say What about you?  
We'll taste strange meat and we'll admit  
we've tasted stranger

Someday if someday ever comes we'll go  
back and reread those poems and manifestos  
that so enraged us, in each other's hand  
I'll say, But damn, you wrote it so  
I couldn't write it off You'll say  
I read you always, even when I hated you



Gloria Anzaldúa

*En Rapport, In Opposition:  
Cobrando Cuentas A Las Nuestras*

WATCH FOR FALLING ROCKS

The first time I drove from El Paso to San Diego, I saw a sign that read "Watch for Falling Rocks." And though I watched and waited for rocks to roll down the steep cliff walls and attack my car and me, I never saw any falling rocks. Today, one of the things I'm most afraid of are the rocks we throw at each other. And the resultant guilt we carry like a corpse strapped to our backs for having thrown rocks. We colored women have memories like elephants. The slightest hurt is recorded deep within. We do not forget the injury done to us and we do not forget the injury we have done another. Unfortunately we do not have hides like elephants. Our vulnerability is measured by our capacity for openness, intimacy. And we all know that our own kind is driven through shame or self-hatred to poke at all our open wounds. And we know they know exactly where the hidden wounds are.

I keep track of all distinctions. Between past and present. Pain and pleasure. Living and surviving. Resistance and capitulation. Will and circumstances. Between life and death. Yes. I am scrupulously accurate. I have become a keeper of accounts.

-Irena Klepfisz<sup>1</sup>

One of the changes that I've seen since *This Bridge Called My Back* was published<sup>2</sup> is that we no longer allow white women to efface us or suppress us. Now we do it to each other. We have taken over the missionary's "let's civilize the savage role," fixating on the "wrongness" and moral or political inferiority of some of our sisters, insisting on a profound difference between oneself and the *Other*. We have been indoctrinated into adopting the old imperialist ways of conquering and dominating, adopting a way of confrontation based on differences while standing on the ground of ethnic superiority.

In the "dominant" phase of colonialism, European colonizers exercise direct control of the colonized, destroy the native legal and cultural systems, and negate non-European civilizations in order to ruthlessly exploit the resources of the subjugated with the excuse of attempting to "civilize" them. Before the end of this phase, the natives internalize Western culture. By the time we reach the "neocolonialist" phase, we've accepted the white colonizers' system of values, attitudes, morality, and modes of production. <sup>3</sup> It is not by chance that in Texas the more rural towns' Chicano neighborhoods are called *colonias* rather than *barrios*.



There have always been those of us who have "cooperated" with the colonizers. It's not that we have been "won" over by the dominant culture, but that it has exploited preexisting power relations of subordination and subjugation within our native societies.<sup>4</sup> The Great White Ripoff—and they are still cashing in. Like our exploiters who fixate on the inferiority of the natives, we fixate on the fucked-upness of our sisters. Like them we try to impose our version of "the ways things should be;" we try to impose one's self on the *Other* by making her the recipient of one's negative elements, usually the same ones that the Anglo projected on us. Like them, we project our self-hatred on her; we stereotype her; we make her generic.

### JUST HOW ETHNIC ARE YOU?

One of the reasons for this hostility among us is the forced cultural penetration, the rape of the colored by the white, with the colonizers depositing their perspective, their language, their values in our bodies. External oppression is paralleled with our internalization of that oppression. And our acting out from that oppression. They have us doing to those within our own ranks what they have done and continue to do to us—*Othering* people. That is, isolating them, pushing them out of the herd, ostracizing them. The internalization of negative images of ourselves, our self-hatred, poor self-esteem, makes our own people the *Other*. We shun the white-looking Indian, the "high yellow" Black women, the Asian with the white lover, the Native woman who brings her white girlfriend to the Pow Wow, the Chicana who doesn't speak Spanish, the academic, the uneducated. Her difference makes her a person we can't trust. *Para que sea "legal,"* she must pass the ethnic legitimacy test we have devised. And it is exactly our internalized whiteness that desperately wants boundary lines (this part of me is Mexican, this Indian) marked out. Woe to any sister or any part of us that steps out of our assigned places, woe to anyone who doesn't measure up to our standards of ethnicity. *Si no colifica,* if she fails to pass the test, *le aventamos mierda en la cara, le aventamos piedras, la aventamos.* We throw shit in her face, we throw rocks, we kick her out. *Como gallos de pelea nos atacamos unas a las otras—mexicanas de nacimiento contra the born-again mexicanas.* Like fighting cocks, razor blades strapped to our finger, we slash out at each other. We have turned our anger against ourselves. And our anger is immense. *Es un acido que correo.*

### INTERNAL AFFAIRS O LAS QUE NIEGAN A SU GENTE

*Tu traicion yo la llevo aquí muy dentro,  
la llevo dentro de mi alma  
dentro de mi corazón.*

*Tu traicion.*

—Cornelio Reyna<sup>5</sup>



I get so tired of constantly struggling with my sisters. The more we have in common, including love, the greater the heartache between us, the more we hurt each other. It's excruciatingly painful, this constant snarling at our own shadows. Anything can set the conflict in motion: the lover getting more recognition by the community, the friend getting a job with higher status, a break-up. As one of my friends said, "We can't fucking get along."

So we find ourselves *entreguerras*,<sup>6</sup> a kind of civil war among intimates, an in-class, in-race, in-house fighting, a war with strategies, tactics that are our coping mechanism, that once were our survival skills and which we now use upon one another<sup>7</sup> producing intimate terrorism—a modern form of *las guerras floridas*, the war of the flowers that the Aztecs practiced in order to gain captives for the sacrifices. Only now we are each other's victims, we offer the *Other* to our politically correct altar.

*El deniego*. The hate we once cast at our oppressors we now fling at women of our own races. Reactionary—we have gone to the other extreme—denial of our own. We struggle for power, compete, vye for control. Like kin, we are there for each other, but like kin we come to blows. And the differences between us and this new *Other* are not racial but ideological, not metaphysical but psychological. *Nos negamos a si mismas y el deniego nos causa daño*.

#### BREAKING OUT OF THE FRAME

I'm standing at the sea end of the truncated Berkeley pier. A boat had plowed into the black posts, gouging out a few hundred feet of structure, cutting the pier in two. I stare at the sea, surging silver-plated between me and the lopped-off corrugated arm, the wind whipping my hair. I look down, my head and shoulders, a shadow on the sea. Yemayá pours strings of light over my dull jade, flickering body, bubbles pop out of my ears. I feel the tension easing and, for the first time in months, the litany of work yet to do, of deadlines, that sings incessantly in my head, blows away with the wind.

Oh, Yemayá, I shall speak the words  
you lap against the pier.

But as I turn away I see in the distance, a ship's fin fast approaching. I see fish heads lying listless in the sun, smell the stench of pollution in the waters.

From where I stand, *queridas carnalas*—in a feminist position—I see, through critical lens with variable focus, that we must not drain our energy breaking down the male/white frame (the whole of Western culture) but turn to our own kind and change our terms of reference. As long as we see the world and our experiences through white eyes—in a dominant/subordinate way—we're trapped in the tar and pitch of the old manipulative and strive-for-power ways.



Even those of us who don't want to buy in get sucked into the vortex of the dominant culture's fixed oppositions, the duality of superiority and inferiority, of subject and object. Some of us, to get out of the internalized neocolonial phase, make for the fringes, the Borderlands. And though we have not broken out of the white frame, we at least see it for what it is. Questioning the values of the dominant culture which impose fundamental difference on those on the "wrong" side of the good/bad dichotomy is the first step. Responding to the *Other* not as irrevocably different is the second step. By highlighting similarities, downplaying divergences, that is, by *rapprochement* between self and Other it is possible to build a syncretic relationship. At the basis of such a relationship lies an understanding of the effects of colonization and its resultant pathologies.

We have our work cut out for us. Nothing is more difficult than identifying emotionally with a cultural alterity, with the Other. *Alter*: to make different; to castrate. *Altercate*: to dispute angrily. *Alter ego*: another self or another aspect of oneself. *Alter idem*: another of the same kind. Nothing is harder than identifying with an interracial identity, with a mestizo identity. One has to leave the permanent boundaries of a fixed self, literally "leave" oneself and see oneself through the eyes of the *Other*. Cultural identity is "Nothing more nor less than the mean between selfhood and otherness..."<sup>8</sup> Nothing scares the Chicana more than a Latina who lumps her with the *norteamericanas*. It is easier to retreat to the safety of the difference behind racial, cultural and class borders. Because our awareness of the *Other* as object often swamps our awareness of ourselves as subject, it is hard to maintain a fine balance between cultural ethnicity and the continuing survival of that culture, between traditional culture and an evolving hybrid culture. How much must remain the same, how much must change.

For most of us our ethnicity is still the issue. Ours continues to be a struggle of identity—not against a white background so much as against a colored background. *Ya no estamos afuera o atras del marco de la pintura*—we no longer stand outside nor behind the frame of the painting. We are both the foreground, the background and the figures predominating. Whites are not the central figure, they are not even in the frame, though the frame of reference is still white, male, and heterosexual. But the white is still there, invisible, under our skin—we have subsumed the white.

## EL DESENGAÑO

And yes I have some criticism, some self-criticism. And no I will not make everything nice. There is shit among us we need to sift through. Who knows, there may be some fertilizer in it. I've seen collaborative efforts between us end in verbal abuse, cruelty and trauma. I've seen collectives fall apart, dumping their ideals by the wayside and treating each other worse than they'd treat a rabid dog. My momma said, "Never



tell other people our business, never divulge family secrets." Chicano dirt you do not air out in front of white folks, nor lesbian dirty laundry in front of heterosexuals. The things cultural stay with la Raza. Colored feminists must present a united front in front of whites and other groups. But the fact is we are not united. (I've come to suspect that unity is another Anglo invention like their one sole god and the myth of the monopole.<sup>9</sup>) We are not going to cut through *la mierda* by sweeping the dirt under the rug.

We have a responsibility to each other, certain commitments. The leap into self-affirmation goes hand in hand with being critical of self. Many of us walk around with reactionary, self-righteous attitudes. We preach certain political behaviors and theories and we do fine with writing about them. Though we want others to live their lives by them, we do not live them. When we are called on it, we go into a self-defensive mode and denial just like whites did when we started asking them to be accountable for their race and class biases in 1980-81.

## LAS OPUESTAS

In us, intra- and cross cultural hostilities surface in not so subtle put-downs. *Las no comprometidas, las que negan a sus gente. Furemos las caras y negamos toda responsabilidad.* Where some of us racially mixed people are stuck in now is denial and its damaging effects. Denial of the white aspects that we've been forced to acquire, denial of our sisters who for one reason or another cannot "pass" as 100% ethnic—as if such a thing exists. Racial purity, like language purity, is a fallacy. Denying the reality of who we are destroys the basis from which to talk honestly and deeply about the issues between us. We cannot make any real connections because we are not touching each other. So we sit facing each other and before the words escape our mouths the real issues are blanked out in our consciousness, erased before they register because it hurts too much to talk about them, because it makes us vulnerable to the hurt the *carnala* may dish out, because we've been wounded too deeply and too often in the past. So we sit, a paper face before another paper face—two people who suddenly cease to be real. *La no compasiva con las complaciente, lo comunica doatorado en sus gargantas.*

We, the new Inquisitors, swept along with the "swing to the right" of the growing religious and political intolerance, crusade against racial heretics, mow down with the sickle of righteous anger our dissenting sisters. The issue (in all aspects of life) has always been when to resist changes and when to be open to them. Right now, this rigidity will break us.

## RECOBRANDO

*Una luz fría y cenicienta bañada en el plata palido del amanecer entra a mi escritorio* and I think about the critical stages we feminists of color are

going through, chiefly that of learning to live with each other *ascarnalas, parientes, amantes, as kin, as friends, as lovers*. Looking back on the road that we've walked on during the last decade, I see many emotional, psychological, spiritual, political gains—primarily developing an understanding and acceptance of the spirituality of our root ethnic cultures. This has given us the ground from which to see that our spiritual lives are not split from our daily acts. *En recobrando* our affinity with nature and her forces (deities), we have “recovered” our ancient identity, digging it out like dark clay, pressing it to our current identity, molding past and present, inner and outer. Our clay streaked faces acquiring again images of our ethnic self and self-respect taken from us by the *colonizadores*. And if we've suffered losses, if often in the process we have momentarily “misplaced” our *carnal*hood, our sisterhood, there beside us always are the women, *las mujeres*. And that is enough to keep us going.

By grounding in the earth of our native spiritual identity, we can build up our personal and tribal identity. We can reach out for the clarity we need. Burning sage and lighting Guadalupe candles by themselves won't cut it, but it can be a basis from which we act.

And yes, we are elephants with long memories, but scrutinizing the past with binocular vision and training it on the juncture of past with present, and identifying the options on hand and mapping out future roads will ensure us survival.

So if we won't forget past grievances, let us forgive. Carrying the ghosts of past grievances *no vale la pena*. It is not worth the grief. It keeps us from ourselves and each other; it keeps us from new relationships. We need to cultivate other ways of coping. I'd like to think that the in-fighting that we presently find ourselves doing is only a stage in the continuum of our growth, an offshoot of the conflict that the process of biculturation spawns, a phase of the internal colonization process, one that will soon cease to hold sway over our lives. I'd like to see it as a skin we will shed as we are born into the 21st century.

And now in these times of the turning of the century, of the harmonic convergence, of the end of *El Quinto Sol* (as the ancient Aztecs named our present age), it is time we began to get out of the state of opposition and into rapprochement, time to get our heads, words, ways out of white territory. It is time that we broke out of the invisible white frame and stood on the ground of our own ethnic being.



<sup>1</sup>Irena Klepfisz, *Keeper of Accounts* (Montpelier, Vermont; Sinister Wisdom Books, 1982), 85.

<sup>2</sup> According to Chela Sandoval, the publication of *Bridge* marked the end of the second wave of the women's movement in its previous form. *U.S. Third World Feminist Criticism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness*, a dissertation in process.

<sup>3</sup>Abdul R. JanMohamed, "The Economy of Manichean Allegory: The Function of Racial Difference in Colonialist Literature," *"Race," Writing, and Difference*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (Chicago, Illinois; University of Chicago Press, 1985, 80-81.

<sup>4</sup> JanMohamed, 81.

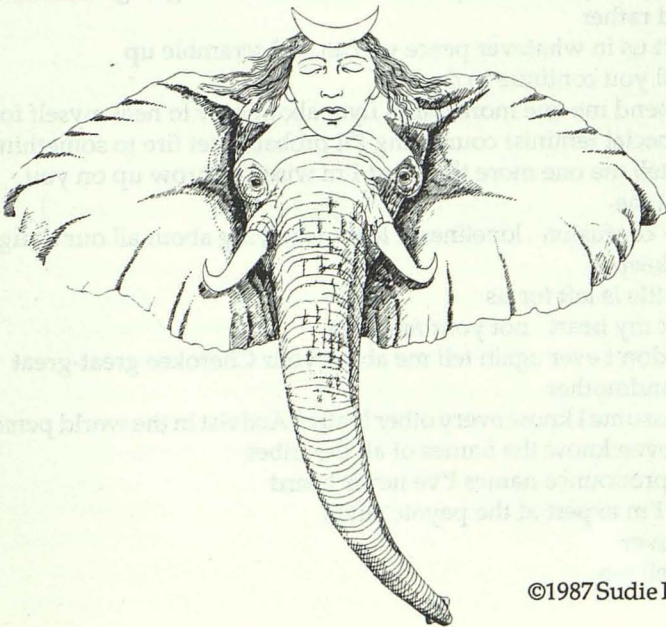
<sup>5</sup>A Chicano from Texas who sings and plays *bajo-sexta* in his *música nortehña/conjunto*. "Tu Traicion" is from the album *15 Exitasos*, Reyna Records, 1981.

<sup>6</sup> *Entreguerras, entremundos/Inner Wars Among the Worlds* is the title of my next book.

<sup>7</sup> Sarah Hoagland, "Lesbian Ethics: Intimacy & Self-Understanding," *Bay Area Women's News*, May/June, 1987, Vol. 1 No. 2, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> Nadine Gordimer, quoted in JanMohamed's essay p.88.

<sup>9</sup> Physicists are searching for a single law of physics under which all other laws will fall.



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Chrystos

## I Am Not Your Princess

especially for Dee Johnson

Sandpaper between two cultures which tear one another apart I'm not  
a means by which you can reach spiritual understanding or even  
learn to do beadwork  
I'm only willing to tell you how to make fry bread  
1 cup flour, spoon of salt, spoon of baking powder  
Stir Add milk or water or beer until it holds together  
Slap each piece into rounds Let rest  
Fry in hot grease until golden  
This is Indian food only if you know that Indian is a government word  
which has nothing to do with our names for ourselves  
I won't chant for you  
I admit no spirituality to you  
I will not sweat with you or ease your guilt with fine turtle tales  
I will not wear dancing clothes to read poetry or explain hardly  
anything at all  
I don't think your attempts to understand us are going to work so  
I'd rather  
you left us in whatever peace we can still scramble up  
after all you continue to do  
If you send me one more damn flyer about how to heal myself for \$300  
with special feminist counseling I'll probably set fire to something  
If you tell me one more time that I'm wise I'll throw up on you  
Look at me  
See my confusion loneliness fear worrying about all our struggles  
to keep  
what little is left for us  
Look at my heart not your fantasies  
Please don't ever again tell me about your Cherokee great-great  
grandmother  
Don't assume I know every other Native Activist in the world personally  
That I even know the names of all the tribes  
or can pronounce names I've never heard  
or that I'm expert at the peyote stitch  
If you ever  
again tell me



how strong I am  
I'll lay down on the ground & moan so you'll see  
at last my human weakness like your own  
I'm not strong I'm scraped  
I'm blessed with life while so many I've known are dead  
I have work to do dishes to wash a house to clean There is no magic  
See my simple cracked hands which have washed the same things  
you wash  
See my eyes dark with fear in a house by myself late at night  
See that to pity me or to adore me are the same  
1 cup flour, spoon of salt, spoon of baking powder & liquid to hold  
remember this is only my recipe There are many others  
Let me rest  
here  
at least

## War Stories, 197-:

### 1. THE DAY WE DIDN'T DECLARE WAR

We just weren't ready to kill, and anything else seemed too dangerous. I remember the sickish feeling that descended on me, like fog rolling in, filling the room which happened to be my living room where thirteen women sat around on what was available, mostly the bed and the floor. I listened to each of them talk and I heard my own self, but the words floated off into the fog, and I thought, *we're not ready, we're not going to pull this off.*

And I felt sick because I knew, if we weren't ready, who was?

We were at a pitch in those days, and no wonder. We had only recently concluded that what had been going on for centuries was a war against women, and rape was one of the major battle strategies. That rapists did not perceive themselves as acting in concert, that each saw himself (or in groups, saw themselves) as acting independently and probably felt bold, original and daring was irrelevant, and we saw how movies and tv and respectable highbrow fiction helped men feel bold, original and daring in what has got to be the archetypally cowardly act, second only to fucking their baby daughters, which many of them manage to see as bold and daring also.

So we saw rape as a strategy and we assessed the effectiveness. Many of us had been raped, some on the street, more by dates or husbands or some man whose car or back room you wandered into, because you needed a ride or directions or just wanted a cup of coffee. But, in a way, that was the least of it. We were all afraid. Fear governed all our lives, limiting where we lived, what jobs we'd take, what hours we'd work, how late at night we'd go for a walk or come home from a friend's, whether we'd take a shower when no one else was around. That's if we were lucky, because the ones who weren't lucky had to do dangerous things right through the fear. It was endless, when we started enumerating the ways this war affected our lives. We concluded rape was working: for them.

Because clearly it affected their lives, men's lives, too. Constantly learning that we had to be afraid and they didn't; that we got raped all the time and nothing could stop it; that we needed them to protect us; that rapists rarely got caught, except for Black men raping white women in the South, only you knew who got caught was probably Black men who made trouble for white men, or just Black men period. So it meant one more thing to fight instead of something to make you feel safer.



And there was a third thing we talked about: women fighting back. Inez Garcia, Joanne Little, Yvonne Wanrow were our heroes, and we knew it was not incidental that they were women of color. We knew that each woman, by killing her attacker, had strengthened every woman's ability to resist violence. Some of us began collecting newspaper articles, the kind where you have to read between the lines . . . Remember the Skillet Murder, the wife who creamed her husband, and the daughter maybe saw, and the wife's co-workers, employees of the husband, maybe helped, maybe tried to cover it up: that's the sort of thing we'd talk about, what did the daughter, the other women have to do with it? What would make a woman that angry? (For, if you recall, she slammed him with not only the skillet but several other articles of kitchen equipment.)

And there were stories coming from other cities, less subject to interpretation. We gathered names and wrote poems and made art about them; we performed rituals honoring them, Jennifer Patri, Francine Hughes (years before Farrah Fawcett, and I have to say, in the tv program she comes off as a pathetic victim pushed to a horrible deed; my Francine Hughes is a tough cookie and I'm glad she is because that's why she's alive); and lots of names that never got famous, Wanda Carr, Marlene Roan Eagle, Miriam Grieg, Evelyn Ware, Gloria Maldonado . . .

There was a group of us, not exactly all friends but part of the same general community. We learned the statistics of our small relatively safe city, and it's not that we were shocked or appalled. I'll speak for myself: It was as if a curtain of thick gauze had suddenly lifted and I saw very clearly in a brilliant, hard and accurate light.

And to tell the truth, it's still accurate. But I don't know what to do about it, and this is the story of how I realized none of us knew. Because we were decent people, because we were afraid, because we could not trust one another enough to declare war back.

But it starts before that, in the early fall. I was working on the crisis line and so was my best friend Alice. It was my shift and I got a call from a woman, Karen, whose boyfriend had been beating her. Regularly. And she was eight months pregnant, and concerned. She didn't want to leave her apartment and go to a shelter, which was what we had to offer women in trouble. She wouldn't go. That was that.

It was Alice's idea, we called a couple of friends and suddenly The Godmothers was born. Why should Karen have to leave her own home? We would go in and stay with her in two's, make sure she was safe. Karen was delighted. We felt tough, useful, bold and daring. So there's a way we were undoing their violence against all of us by showing up at Karen's with our sleeping bags, night sticks, and new lock for the front door.

Because we weren't stupid. We had rules and believed in modest weapons. We knew that any place where a man used a gun or knife, we



shouldn't be and neither should the woman, no matter how much she hated to leave home. And we insisted she get a restraining order against him, so he'd be violating the law just by showing up, and we could call the cops. But if what he usually did was get drunk and bullishly angry and punch her around — which was what most of them did — we figured he would not be prepared for the woman he called "his" to have sober and determined help.

You see, we had discovered they were cowards. We pasted up a notice on the front door, saying, "This house is under the protection of a restraining order and THE GODMOTHERS," and it worked exactly like it was supposed to. We never had a confrontation, and we collected a lot of stories about angry frustrated and scared batterers deprived, in their view, of their rights.

So we had some success. There were five of us at first, and our numbers grew. Lots of women, it seemed, were angry and wanting to be more direct in expressing this anger than anything anybody else had come up with allowed. Of course, we made some women nervous, with our nigh tsticks, name (Godmothers) and attitudes. They would say the real answer was not violence but education. We'd point out that being prepared to ward off violence was the opposite of violence, and besides we were educating like mad. Look at the lesson we were offering these women's children, and their neighbors and neighbors' children: women stick up for women and keep men in line. We were cheeky and proud.

The only problem with the Godmothers was the time it took to be one, the womanpower needed to protect every single woman who called. Even posting two at a time in eight-hour shifts (three women for weekend nights at closing time, when men stumble out of bars drunk, furious and restless), a Friday-afternoon-to-Sunday-midnight weekend called for eleven women willing and able to leave their own homes, families and lives to sit around a stranger's apartment. Some improbable friendships were formed this way. Karen, for example, became a fiercely committed Godmother, staffing the phone while she nursed her tiny lump of a new baby. But women were getting burned out fast.

Then around November, the crisis line started getting calls about the park. At the north end of the city was a small private college, surrounded by a fairly posh neighborhood shading off to the east into a working class neighborhood, both bordered by the (quite beautiful, we discovered) Clinton State Park, used as parks are in cities, for, among other things, jogging and for a shortcut from the buses that ran directly downtown back into either neighborhood.

First Beth, on the crisis line, got a call from a woman who'd been raped in Clinton State Park by two men. One had a knife. She described them as twentyish, white, one blond, the other dark with long hair.

*"Have you reported to the police?"* Beth asked, as we always asked.



"No."

"Do you want to? I'll go with you," she offered, as we always did.

But the woman didn't want to report. She was fifteen and had lied to her parents about where she'd been supposedly studying at her friend's house in the neighborhood instead of downtown at the movies, cutting back home across the park. She couldn't tell her parents, but she wanted someone to know.

Beth talked to the woman for almost an hour, comforting her, informing her of the various services available. Then she filled out the phone report, as usual.

That same week, Marta got a call from a woman who'd been raped in the park by two men, who she described with some precision: in their twenties, one blond with short hair, the other dark with long dark hair and half-moon scar on his left hand. The blond one, at least, carried a knife.

Nobody had put any of this together yet, so Marta went through the usual procedure. This woman was older, in her thirties. She'd been jogging. She would not report to the police: *"I'm not stupid,"* she told Marta, *"I'm divorced, I work as a cocktail waitress and I know exactly how the police are going to treat me."* As Marta said afterwards, *"I would have liked to tell her it wasn't true, but I knew it was still goddam true."*

I got the third call, two days after Marta. This woman actually came in to the office to talk. She was a college student, studying for finals, she was very upset and I referred her for free counselling. She didn't want the hassle of the police, and though I tried to explain to her about identifying an m.o. and checking out photographs, she was adamant. *"Besides,"* she said, *"their faces are a total blur, and I hope they stay that way."* She was able to give a general description.

By the time we had our next staff meeting and were going through the phone reports, there were five calls from five different women who had been raped in the same park by, barring extraordinary coincidence, the same two men.

So we called the police. We knew that without women willing to file reports—or, as the police so sensitively phrased it, without victims—there would be no arrests. But we wanted the park posted, so women in the area would know this was not a safe place, and we wanted a police patrol.

When I look back on it now, it's kind of touching. On the one hand, we had identified a war being waged by men against women, and, on the other, we were outraged when the police responded as every scrap of analysis we could muster should have instructed us they would. For centuries, women who say they've been raped have been accused of lying. The women who'd phoned the crisis line were accused now by the police.

*Why were they lying?* Because if they were telling the truth, they'd report to the police. When we pointed out that by FBI estimates— not exactly a radical source — something like nine out of ten women who are raped *don't* report to the police, they pooh-poohed it. If the women didn't report to the police, they weren't raped. They were lying.

*"Or maybe,"* the captain of our city's finest explained blandly, as I sat on the other side of his desk during another useless meeting, *"some of those women who answer the phone are—not lying exactly, but exaggerating a little, you know, to puff up the crisis line."* He suggested all of us who "claimed" to have taken these calls come in for a polygraphy, a lie detector test. Failing that, he was sorry, but the police had no basis on which to act.

All this talking took several days, during which three more women who called the crisis line to say they'd been raped described the same two men in the same park.

We did the normal responsible crisis line type things. We called a press conference and put the police department in a wonderfully awkward position. We printed our own posters, warning women, requesting information. We held neighborhood forums to educate the communities, and literally dozens of women, from the college and from the neighborhoods, called the crisis line to get involved. The Godmothers organized a huge patrol of women to march through the park on a Saturday night (six of these rapes had taken place on the weekend) with chants and flashlights, to shame the police as well as to make the park safe that night, and give women a taste of power. From the cynical police point of view, Clinton State Park was a hot ticket. From ours, women were responding to a dangerous situation with an authentic desire to bond and protect each other.

And while this organizing activity was going on, three more women called the crisis line, describing the same two men in the same park.

That was the background for the meeting in my living room, a secret meeting drawing on some of the Godmothers, but this group was called the no-name group. We were the hard core, though our discipline at meetings left something to be desired, everyone talking at once.

*"Can't we just patrol, I mean not sixty of us at a time but, say, six?"*

*"Do you have time for that? What are the goddam cops for?"*

*"Not us, that's for sure."*

*"I have to get up early for work."*

*"Let's just kill the fuckers."*

*"We're not going to catch anyone—they'll just stay out of sight."*

*"They'll go to another park."*

*"Yeah, so we can start patrolling there. Terrific."*

*"Sure, let's devote our lives to park patrol."*

*"At last, another opportunity for women to volunteer."*



In one corner they were cracking up, fantasizing about uniforms and a marching song, when someone said, "What do we do if we see them?"

Total silence.

Then another flurry of talk.

"What do you mean? We'll make a citizen's arrest."

"How do we know it's the right two guys?"

"That description is pretty fucking exact."

"Yeah, but it's not a photograph."

"Who cares?"

"That's not the problem. I want to know how we bring them in. They carry knives."

"Yeah, do we hold a knife to their throats?"

"You have to come in real close with a knife."

"Maybe we should use guns."

"Knives are safer."

"Where've you been, on Mars?"

"Who has a gun?"

"We could just knock them out. With night sticks."

"Do you know how hard you have to hit someone to knock him out? I mean, without breaking his head?"

"How do we arrest them? We don't have one witness."

"All those women who called."

"They won't testify —that's why the cops won't deal with it, Dumbo."

More silence, except for the woman being called Dumbo protesting,

"Hey!" and the speaker, who was her lover, mumbling, "Sorry."

"We could use a decoy."

"Yeah, then we'd have a witness."

"I'll be a decoy," Jean piped up, and three women answered at once.

"The cops aren't going to take your word."

"It's too dangerous. They carry knives."

"What if they had you and we couldn't protect you?"

There was a long silence this time.

"So what are we saying, these two fuckers can go on raping to their hearts' content and we can't do anything?"

"We could beat the shit out of them."

"We could tie them up and dump them naked in front of the police station, like in Sister Gin."

"Not the police station. We don't want to get seen."

"Look, are they going to stand there while we tie them up?"

"What if they attack us? They carry knives."

It's quiet again, breathlessly, airlessly quiet. There's no oxygen in the room. We're all seeing it at the same time, the ultimate terror, one of us getting separated from the others, the knife against her throat. What do we do: argue? pray? give a karate yell?

Alice said it. *"We can't do anything unless we're ready to kill them, if necessary."*

That's when I looked around the room and saw the fog rolling in, and it was fear blanketing us, but each one separately, pulled back from the others, each mind making its own horrible movies, and I knew we didn't trust each other enough. Or else we just didn't have the training that makes you—makes men—able to take this sort of thing lightly; look what they do to each other in war, for christ's sake, for no reason except someone tells them to.

No one could tell us to. No one could say it was okay. I looked at Beverly; she had worked at the DMV for ten years, she was 28 now, paying the mortgage on her little house. Andy made her living stealing, but she loved music, volleyball, me that year, and life. Even Jean who so readily volunteered to be the decoy, wonderful brave Jean had a daughter and a lover. Could we pull it off, make a plan and carry it out? Could we keep our mouths shut? Would someone drink too much, have bad dreams six months down the road?

Brenda finally broke the silence. *"Yeah,"* she said, very softly, like a breath. *"It could get there really fast."* All our heads were nodding and the words after that were just words.

I can't even remember how the meeting ended or what we decided. There were more press conferences, the neighborhoods gathered hundreds of signatures on petitions, the police charged us with rabble rousing and the rabble was certainly roused, there was a demonstration in front of police headquarters, United Way refused funding to the crisis center, the mayor had to make a statement, and somewhere in there the calls stopped coming and, we assumed, the two men we didn't kill stopped raping women in that park and went somewhere else.

But I remember that moment, poised at the edge of something so dangerous, cruel, just, impatient and necessary, poised right where our theory and understanding had taken us, and not able to leap. I have long since stopped seeing this in moral terms: was this the right decision or the wrong one, could the large but amorphous women's movement have supported an underground and were we weak and shabby not to be the first? History has its own logic: It's what happened, it's who and where we were.

And, you know, I've heard, through the years, stories of a rapist/killer in Seattle who the lesbian community went after and it's true he disappeared from the news. I heard the same thing about L.A. Apocryphal? Who knows?



But I know this. Every time I hear about a woman who kills the man who attacks or abuses her, and sometimes she lands in prison, or, in one case, a woman who killed another woman's rapist—she's doing time in Framingham right now—my heart leaps for her courage and for the simple fact that he can't do it again and every goddam man has to hear that and every woman has to know a woman did that. I tell myself few of us choose to be heroes, and hope, if I should be chosen by danger anyone with a scrap of sense and self-love would run miles to avoid, that I'll do my part as well as Inez Garcia, Wanda Carr or Gloria Maldonado did hers. But sometimes I grieve a little, for us in the no-name group, that we couldn't give that to ourselves and each other, and I feel a little ashamed, like maybe my freedom, such as it is, is getting staked on someone else's bold, daring, perhaps imprisoned back.

## 2. THE DAY WE DID

But maybe it didn't happen that way at all. Maybe it happened this way. Maybe a couple of us had studied self-defense intensively, and three of us had guns; Gail had done target practice once a week for years. The women with guns, who knew all about the wisdom of you don't draw a gun unless you're prepared to kill, said straight out: *"We can't go into this unless we look very clearly at what might happen."* It was getting pretty hot in that room.

*"The law won't touch them. We don't even have a choice, we have to use a decoy."*

*"What for?"*

*"So there's something to charge them with."*

*"That risks someone's life. What is this, be fair to rapists week?"*

*"So what are you saying?"*

*"They carry knives. They're killers."*

*"They haven't killed anyone."*

*"Why are you defending them? Maybe they have."*

*"Great. Now we're dealing with hypothetical crimes."*

*"Hey — what do you think they do with those knives if a woman resists?"*

The room got very quiet.

Finally someone said, *"You think we should kill them in cold blood?"*

*"Cold blood, hot blood, what are you talking about?"*

*"They're enemies. Treat them like enemies."*

*"That's how men talk."*

*"Who else ever gets to talk?"*

So we went around some, women saying things like "it's wrong" or "then we'll be as bad as they are." But when the logic was pressed, it crumbled. Wrong, bad in whose terms? The clincher was when someone pointed out how great we'd feel if two bodies matching those descriptions were

to turn up in Clinton State Park. And we assumed we weren't the only ones who felt this way, though women didn't often come right out with it.

So the rest of this story is about tactics and you fear you're caught in the wrong genre. Let me assure you, the genre hasn't changed. Just the framework. We were no longer insisting on being innocent, on proving to the world, the media, other women, men, whoever would listen: *see how bad they treat us, see, see?*

First, we talked about confidentiality and self-protection. While we agreed it would make a terrific self-defense case—either simple or complex, as in arguing that every woman was, in a sense, one's self—we were not anxious to be martyrs and especially not to do time or be confronted with a resurrected death penalty. That meant we had to keep our mouths shut and not get caught. But we wanted everyone to know women had done it, that was part of the point, in advertising lingo, to create a new image. We needed to claim the act. We decided on an anonymous flyer cleverly worded to credit and protect us at the same time.

What we agreed was this: those of us who had been very visible around the rapes, public speaking, meetings with the cops, etc., would have airtight alibis. This meant Alice, Louise and me. All three of us balked at this; we didn't want to be left out, and besides, there was something about equal risk and responsibility that made us feel safer, more joined. I said I felt guilty escaping the dangerous part, but Brenda pointed out we'd be on the line soon enough, the first three suspects the police would bring in for questioning. We got a little giddy fantasizing how they would justify suspecting us since according to them the rapes hadn't happened and the descriptions of the rapists had been, therefore, fabricated.

We talked too about other women who'd been outspoken, women at the crisis line, a couple of women in the neighborhoods who'd risen wonderfully into leadership, women who might also be suspected but who would not have the prescience to arrange alibis. We agreed that if innocent people were charged, seriously charged, we'd have to respond. *What if men were charged?* We agreed women had to get the credit. We'd bombard them with press releases. *Down to taking the rap ourselves?* Somehow we avoided this one, comforting ourselves with an obvious truth: The cops were getting nowhere with tight descriptions and m.o.'s. Where were they going to get with us?

*"That's because they don't believe in rape. None of the women has officially reported."*

*"Yeah, well these turkeys aren't going to report either."*

This got quite a laugh. We began to feel better.

We spent hours that night spilling into that room all our scary images of revolutionary violence, mostly derived from books and movies like *The*



*Informer, Man's Fate, The Possessed*: idealistic usually-young usually-men drawn to a cause end up betrayed or corrupted, ruined, *as bad as the oppressors*. Was this automatic? We decided it probably wasn't. Anyway the danger to us right now was not corruption but doing nothing.

So we planned, very carefully. Jean would be the draw. She was willing, had superb outdoor skills and was used to being outside at night, and she knew how to shoot, though she was rusty and didn't own a gun. She and Gail immediately, that night, from the meeting, took off in Gail's car to pick up her .38, stop by Sam's for a silencer we thought would fit (it did), drive two hours to her cousin's camp in the eastern part of the state so Jean could practice shooting. Someone would call in sick for both of them at work, the post office and the alternative junior high. The other two women with guns would drive out the next day, to practice. Also the next day, Alice and I would go to the park to study the layout, locate places for cover, choreograph our moves. Thursday night Brenda, Louise and Andy would walk every inch of the park, just to see. Friday would be the first try. By the time the meeting broke up, we were feeling much more in control, no longer so afraid.

Alice stayed for a bit, after everyone left, Andy with the others. "I feel weird," she said, stretching her arms over her head and moving her torso back and forth, "not to be part of it, the whole thing."

"Yeah, me too. It would be really stupid though." I had opened the window and was smoking, imagining us with the police.

"You think we can pull it off?" she said. "I mean the park?"

"It depends — on whether we can find the fuckers, you know, the layout of the park, can we make it safe for Jean, practical stuff. . .," like any other plan, I thought.

The phone rang and we both jumped slightly. It was Andy, calling to see if she could come back and stay the night. Alice picked up to leave. "That's okay," she said, "I just like her to know I have rights." We hugged and were standing at the door gabbing when Andy showed up. Alice left, and Andy and I undressed quickly and fell into bed. I had to be at work early. We made love much slower and softer than usual, as if we were one another's mothers, tending the body of the delicate newborn needing protection and finding it in a woman's arms.

\*\*\*\*\*

You want details. You want to know exactly what happened in that park. Fat chance. Here is the article from the *Silver City Herald*, December \_\_, 197\_\_.

#### TWO MEN FOUND DEAD IN PARK

The bodies of two men were found today in Clinton State Park, according to police reports. The men, iden-

tified as Roger Allston, age 22, and James Johnson, age 24, had been shot with a .38 caliber revolver.

Morris Abramson, a resident of the neighborhood that borders the park, is reported to have found the bodies when his dog ran into the bushes and he followed. Mr. Abramson also confirmed a rumor which the police have refused to comment on at this time, that a poster was pinned to the jacket of each man, stating that the dead men had attacked a woman with a knife, and that they matched the description of two rapists operating in the Clinton State Park. The poster, Mr. Abramson said, stated that women had killed these men to prevent further attacks against women, and accused the police of refusing to act.

Clinton State Park has been the subject of controversy between the Silver City Police and the Silver City Crisis Line, the Crisis Line claiming they have received reports of rapes by the same two men from 11 women in a period of three weeks. The description of the two men, circulated beginning October 25, matches the description of Allston and Johnson.

\*\*\*\*\*

Now you'll say, "*You're just as bad as they are.*" Like the only other woman in the audience when I saw *Platoon*: The day after battle, thousands dead, the innocent young hero, barely surviving, spots the wicked sergeant, the one who massacred Vietnamese villagers and murdered the decent sergeant in cold blood. Cold blood makes everything worse, and it was bad enough. The hero aims his gun at the fucker, who clearly did not deserve to live and would do damage to his last breath, and I'm sobbing *shoot, shoot*, but silently, since I'm alone at the movies. He shoots, and from one row behind me in the dark theater comes the other woman's sad, shocked voice: "*Now he's just as bad as the others.*" As if, in the face of evil, the issue were not "*how to stop it*" but "*how to stay pure*"—a little finicky for my taste.

So let's get some facts on the table, as they say, like toast and eggs over easy, the yolks filmed over but sitting up yellow and plump.

The rapes stopped.

The rapes stopped.

The rapes stopped.

Consider for a moment Silver City: the newspapers, the talk shows, the conversation at work and at the laundromat.

Consider all the people—women, men, girls, boys—hearing something new for a change.



Consider those neighborhoods around Clinton State Park, the women who loved to walk there and had been afraid. The men who had jerked off thinking about the women's fear.

Consider the women who'd been raped, by these men and by others, realizing they were not part of an endless chain of seemingly natural disasters.

Consider the women in the no-name group, the boldness of the decision, the dignity and strength of the act, the power of taking women's safety into our own hands once we'd realized keeping our hands clean was not our primary goal.

I know you don't want to hear this. You'd rather it was the other way, sad but disillusioned: Power corrupts. Action is guilt. Victims are innocent. The oppressed, aware but helpless in their oppression, afraid of becoming as bad as the oppressor, refuse to fight for power.

I know you don't like this story. But it could be true.

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Note: *Sister Gin* is a wonderful novel, by lesbian writer and publisher June Arnold, in which several women, mostly in their seventies, tie up, strip naked and deposit in the center of town several rapists.

Leslita Williams

## Non-violence

I'm the girl who believes I believe well  
I believe in violence in every cell  
every sense of body in bones  
and blood and back and brain  
I'm the girl who put the paper target  
complete with 6 neat .38 caliber holes  
through the small red heart  
of the line drawn picture of a man  
on my door I taped that target on my front door  
one year It made me smile when I came home  
late nights alone afraid  
I know about violence  
and I'm the girl who knows the name of every tree  
on the mountain  
and the place where lightning took out the top  
of the old pine the place where the August  
wind storm broke apart an oak  
I know about violence  
I'm the girl who knows the feel  
of a nickel blue blade cold  
against the skin of rib  
the girl who cries when she stands on the beach  
and the clouds roll and the sky turns pink  
I'm the girl who knows the feel of scars healing  
on a 12 year old back  
and the feel of hoping only that they heal  
before the next set of leather belt strikes  
I'm the girl who lived one summer grown up wild  
on berries and roots wild plum & apple  
green leaves and fox grapes and asparagus  
I'm the crazy girl who can run in the woods  
I'm the girl who survives  
I'm the girl who knows the colour of purple green bruises  
from hand and fist on arm and jaw the feel  
of tracing those old lines about love  
and learning and for your own good  
I'm the girl who can build things out of wood



I'm the girl who has looked into the bloody face  
 of a boy dying from a shotgun blast hunting accident  
 and the face of a girl a friend hit killed left  
 by a man in a white cadillac  
 and the young face of a father killed slowly  
 but just as dead from radioactive particles  
 I'm the girl who talks to her dog and her furniture  
 and her food  
 I'm the girl who owns a gun and knows how to use it  
 and I'm the girl who doesn't  
 I'm the girl who knows the catch of breath  
 when someone might when someone holds one  
 loaded and aimed close  
 I'm the girl who tamed wild horses  
 by talking talking softly talking  
 moving slowly talking soothing  
 I'm the girl who practices the zen tea ceremony  
 by herself at home before bed  
 I'm the girl who drank Guinness extra stout  
 with 20 year old Irish girls girls  
 who smuggled guns across the border  
 smuggled bombs across the border  
 girls who liked bluegrass music and sang  
 sweet sweet harmonies  
 I'm the girl who wakes up laughing  
 I'm the girl who gets the burning tower  
 I'm the girl who stopped a rape in progress  
 by wielding a broom and screaming  
 by hitting the man in the head  
 with the broom with the wood handle of the broom  
 and screaming screaming screaming  
 I'm the girl who was not brave but afraid  
 I'm the girl who talks nice talks polite  
 like my mama wanted whenever I see fit  
 I'm still the girl who survives  
 and I'm the girl who knows violence  
 who believes in violence  
 I'm the girl who's been left slowly and all of a sudden  
 left for an art school left for a Perfect Master  
 left for a man left for a plan for a Good Job  
 & a house in the suburbs left for a younger woman  
 left for a line of cocaine

I'm the girl who knows about pain  
I'm the girl who's stayed through car wrecks  
    angry threats screaming fits  
    the girl who's held on long past common sense  
and I'm the girl who still blushes when someone I love  
    flirts well across the table  
I'm the girl who talks out loud  
I'm the girl who makes mistakes mistakes  
and I'm the girl who makes changes  
I'm the girl who believes in violence  
I'm the girl who owns a broom and knows  
    how to use it  
I believe in violence I believe well  
    in every cell every sense of body  
and believing is what frees me frees me  
    from falling into using it  
I'm the girl who can choose





*And Brazil Danced With Africa* Max Dashu 1972

Barbara Ruth

## When Marie Laveau Danced in Congo Square

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
All New Orleans came to see her.  
Black and white, men and women,  
Her lovers and friends,  
Those who feared and despised her —  
All New Orleans came on Sunday evenings  
To watch Marie dance in Congo Square.

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The drummers drummed easy, subdued,  
Lightly touching the skins,  
A gentle calinda,  
The drums of the Rada  
They smiled and bowed to Marie,  
Understanding that here, in the midst of the city,  
There would be no Petro drums,  
No possessions,  
No prophecies,  
No love-making,  
No loas, spirits of the dead would appear,  
This was the Sunday performance,  
This was Marie, drumming up business.

In Marie's blood flowed the fire of the nations,  
Spain, France,  
Ibo, Yoruba,  
Choctaw,  
The blood of the Mothers,  
The blood of the loas,  
Generations of women  
Burned in Marie  
While she danced.

The swirl of the peacock covered her back  
On a magic shawl she wore  
A gift from the Emperor of China.  
Her hair was so long and thick  
That at first  
You could not  
See the snake



Heavy on her shoulders.  
At first you thought it another necklace  
Or a golden chain for her waist  
Or a breast ornament  
Like those worn by the ancient  
Women of Crete.  
But as the jewels moved,  
Gleamed opalescent, pulsed to the drumming,  
You saw that they lived,  
That Damballah, the Snake God  
Rode Marie.

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The people saw her eyes  
And at first were afraid.  
No eyes of a human could be that black.  
They feared her eyes as they feared the snake.  
But the people knew that both had the Power.  
Both the eyes and the snake could heal.

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
Milk flowed from the thousand breasts of Black Isis,  
The golden thighs of Parvati beckoned  
And the Blessed Virgin conceived once more.

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
Freda-Erzulie, Goddess of Feminine Beauty  
Looked down from heaven and envied Marie.  
When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
Baron Samedi, Lord of the Graveyard  
Took no lives that day.

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The sick were healed, the broken made whole  
And the people knew her Power.

Despite the cross she wore round her neck  
The priests smelled a witch  
Retired to their churches  
Praying to God the Father  
To strike the blasphemer down.  
But what power had a priest against her?  
What did he know  
Of herbs and oils  
Of fixes and spells?  
What could he know  
Of the tides of blood

Of trouble and love  
Loas and Power  
What could a priest know of these?  
When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The white people said  
"This is black magic  
Before our eyes."  
But the slaves and the Free  
People of Color  
They knew that these were only the previews  
For the real dances at Bayou St. John,  
Solstices at Lake Pontchartrain,  
Where no tourists came to gawk.  
The Black people knew  
And a few white women, first one or two  
Then twelve,  
Thirteen with Marie  
A baker's dozen  
A witches' coven  
Lagniappe.  
When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
La baliannel, loa of love  
Said, "This is my child."  
Brigitte, loa of seduction, disagreed.  
"No, this one is mine."  
But not even a loa could own Marie.  
Many rode her  
None could possess her.  
When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The slaves thought of Santo Domingo  
The drums seemed to whisper the names:  
Dessalines, Sandoval,  
Toussant.  
The snake seemed to hiss  
Rise Up.  
When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
She moved back and forth, propelled by the drums  
And the people came to the side lines  
To whisper to her,  
As the snake, the eyes and the peacock  
Flashed by,  
They said:



High Priestess,  
Voodoo Mama,  
Voodooienne,  
Mambo

How much for a black cat bone?  
I'm going gambling on Saturday night.  
I need all the luck I can get.

Marie, Marie, I need you to uncross me.  
Better sell me one of those coiled snake candles  
And a vial of protection oil.

Somebody gave me the Evil Eye,  
No offense, Marie, I don't mean you,  
(There ain't no protection against *your* eyes)  
No, one of the immigrants, Italian, I think,  
Is cursing me with the evil eye.  
Your got some quicksilver?  
Maybe a cat's eye charm?

Marie, I want my husband back,  
Give me an onyx,  
Give me war water and tell me a spell  
To break up him and his woman.

I got a court case coming up.  
Better give me some saffron  
And a guinea pepper.  
And Marie, burn a candle on the judge.

Marie, you know my baby's coming soon,  
Give me herbs and a piece of chalcedony  
Burn a candle and pray over my womb,  
Make it an easy delivery.  
If it's a girl, I'll name her for you.

Marie, please help me, I'm scared.  
I looked in the mirror and saw  
The Baron, wearing that old black top hat  
And smoking on his cigar.  
I knowed he was coming for me.  
Marie, I don't want to die, can't you  
Make that old Baron take somebody else?  
Talk to him, Marie,  
All the Saints and the loas listen to you,  
Even the Guédés, the gods of death,  
Even the Baron himself.

Marie, I got a toothache oil of cloves won't cure,  
Give me a crystal to put on my cheek.

Marie, do you know Mexican witchcraft?  
Jésus stole my shoes and I'm scared.

Marie, I been having terrible dreams  
I need a garnet for my pillow.

Marie, my milk won't come in.  
Give me a piece of serpentine  
To wear twixt my breasts,  
Don't let my baby go hungry.

Marie, make a doll for me,  
Bless my mojo bag,  
Sell me some gris gris,  
Say a prayer for me,  
Marie, make my wishes come true.

Then the drumming stopped and the people were still.  
There was just Marie  
Lifting her arms to heaven, and calling, as though to her lover  
Shango, Oya, Ogun, Elegua, Oshun, Yemaya, Obatala,  
Oh, Seven African Powers,  
Hear my prayer  
Give my people the strength  
To endure  
Give them the vision  
To live

High John the Conqueror,  
Lift their pain  
Like you lifted the slaves from the fields  
Stop their fears  
Like you stopped the slaveowners' whips  
From the backs of our brothers and sisters.

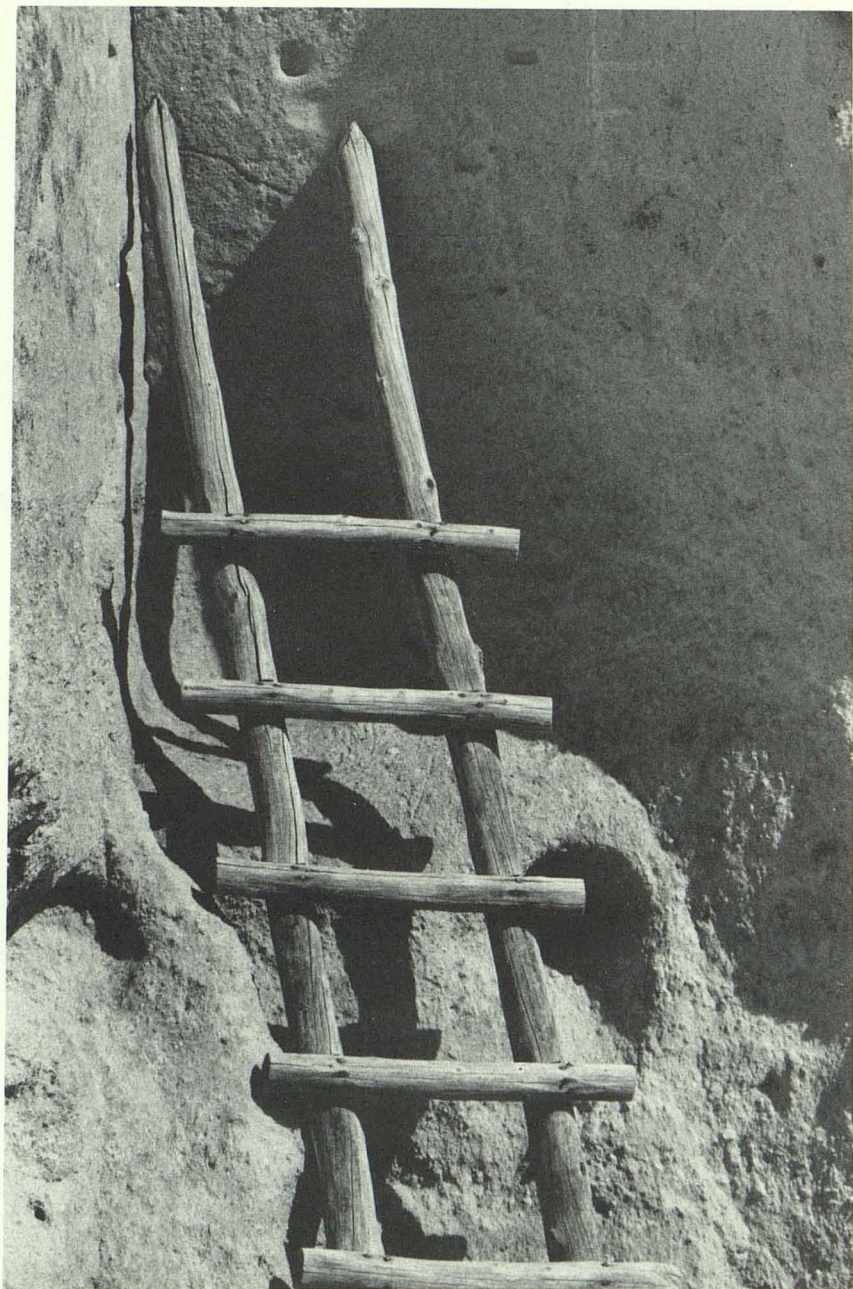
Saint Expédit,  
Do it now!

When Marie Laveau danced in Congo Square  
The Saints and the loas made love  
And Voodoo caught the soul of New Orleans.



## Arousing the Poem

Relax.  
Say the words slowly.  
Let the syllables dance  
in your mouth  
like nipples  
erect  
with passion  
erect  
with power  
to evoke rhythm,  
to incite the flow  
of other moist syllables  
that melt into words  
that melt into phrases  
that position and cluster  
on the cool white sheet.



*ladder, Puye Ruins, Pajarito Plateau, NM*  
Grace Harwood



## We Learn

At school we learn

*the word 'dog' cannot bite*

we learn

*words are the map not the territory*

Terror nonetheless in certain words

"tumor" "malignancy"

along the contours of your breast a laying on of hands

all our disbelieving prayers speaking in a new tongue

"contained" "no metastases"

belief

Belief

beyond words, certainty:

you will not die this year.

chemotherapy would be

a crime against our bodies.

Floods follow this terrain earth slides away

uncharted

"prophecy" too large a sound

dictionaries show no entry

under "I have

a knowing"

Instead

I use the word "love"

to set a cord of survival

swaying between us

(at school we are taught

*the word "love" cannot embrace*

but they have not heard

our hearts pronounce it)

Barbara Rosenblum/Sandra Butler

## The Will

(Barbara)

I've just finished reading the final version of my will. It's 11:30 p.m.; Sandy is sleeping in the other room and the house is still. I glance across the room and see my dog sleeping in Sandy's father's old brown leather reading chair.

My will. A codified, legal document. The crystallization, the representation of my wishes. I never thought I'd have any money to divide. I never believed in accumulation and savings, just a pension for my old age. Now I have money. Medical malpractice money. Blood money.

(Sandy)

*Neither of us ever had any money. Both of us worked for wages. Barbara was raised in a marginally working class family and had been expected to enter the postal service. Safe, secure work, her father told her. Benefits, pension, security. But she became an academic; I worked as a secretary while raising my children. Now that they are grown, I am a counselor and workshop leader. For the seven years we have lived together, we always contributed equally into our household account. We meticulously added expenses at the end of each month, gathering receipts from the brown manila envelope stuck behind the kitchen door. We would sit together at the kitchen table with a pocket calculator, add the bills (which seldom exceeded \$600.00) and divide them equally, with the exception of a separate accounting of long distance telephone calls. Then we would exchange checks and drink tea.*

(Barbara)

The Kaiser doctors told me that the lump I showed them was not suspicious. Even as it grew, and I returned for a second evaluation, the doctors assured me that nothing was wrong. But I was alarmed and insisted upon a mammogram. Negative. No problem. And even when my right breast was twice the size of the other, the third doctor I saw, a surgeon, told me to stop drinking caffeine. No single individual doctor in the Kaiser HMO system caught it. And because of their collective incompetence, I am going to die within the year, at the age of 44 or 45, depending on how I can stretch the time from this moment.

And because of their incompetence, and because I was furious enough to fight, I got a malpractice settlement for \$296,000. All in one check.



(Sandy)

*It was a series of appalling mistakes. The breast cancer has already invaded her lymphatic system. Barbara was consistently misdiagnosed and given inadequate treatment. I watch her undergo painful treatments, adjust to new limitations and face her own death. I am stunned by the magnitude of my rage, my approaching loss, and feel powerless as Barbara struggles for her life. And now, we face the outlandish reality of more money than either of us has ever imagined.*

(Barbara)

I hate this money, this goddamn blood money that comes from years taken from me. As if it could ever make up for the negligence and unfairness of it all. I hate the disease. I hate how my life has turned into a series of appointments in doctors' offices, scans, blood tests, chemotherapy and its side effects. Am I supposed to say, "\$2000" every time they stick a needle in me? Is every experience of throwing up worth \$100? This money was supposed to make up for my shortened life and the extraordinary emotional pain that comes with the consciousness of that fact. This money was supposed to compensate me for the physical pain I had to endure, the hospitalizations, the morphine shots. This money is supposed to compensate me for the loss of a normal life. Ever since the day of my diagnosis, I've had to reshuffle the ordinary balance of attention between self and other. Ever since that day, I've had to become more self absorbed, more inward. I have learned to constantly take inventory. I lost my sense of proportion, my sense of a normal life. Am I supposed to have a meter ticking away each time something terrible happens to me, financially evaluate it and see if it all adds up to \$296,000?

(Sandy)

*She cries each time they draw blood. Little childlike whimpering sounds that she tries to mask with apologetic jokes. I cry at sad and sentimental television programs. We are both edging toward our own feelings with the same halting steps. Unable to deal directly with the overwhelming reality of this disease, we find smaller, tolerable ways to experience our grief.*

(Barbara)

During the next few months I tried to wrest pleasure from this grotesque circumstance. We traveled, bought leather furniture, custom-made tables, botanical and architectural engravings, designed a rug while in New Zealand and had it shipped. Unable to fabricate the desire for any more objects, it finally became clear to me that we could never spend all this money. I had to face the fact that money would remain after I died. I would need a will.

(Sandy)

*One night at dinner time, Barbara told me she was preparing to draw up a will and wanted to discuss her feelings and the provisions with me. Unable to respond, I busied myself with getting dinner on the table, my mind racing as I tried to sort out all the feelings her matter-of-fact sentence stirred in me. It was real now. She needed to prepare for her death. She would die. I would be alone. We wouldn't grow old together. Short, staccato-like thoughts that slid away only to be quickly replaced by another. Unable to hold on to any one feeling, my mind was filled with kaleidoscopic images and I sat down heavily on the kitchen chair and began to cry. I tried several times to postpone the discussion, saying that I wanted a bit of time to sort out my own responses and the need for us to talk about this. Gently and firmly, Barbara kept returning to our need to face the financial aspect of her illness and approach it in the same way we approached everything else. Clearly, truthfully and lovingly.*

*We began to talk haltingly about what she wanted to go into her will, how we would proceed to find a lawyer that would be responsive to the fact that we are a lesbian couple, and how we would go through this process as we had all the others; preparing paperwork for insurance coverage, notifying colleagues of changed plans, interviewing surgeons. We had done all this together, Barbara reminded me, we could do this as well. Still unable to formulate a reply, having forgotten to eat dinner, I began to clear the table and do the dishes.*

*Almost at once, I began to think about this money, dream about it, calculate it and the divisions Barbara had initially proposed. I began to recognize the unstated expectations I had unconsciously formed about this money. For Barbara it represented time she would no longer have, while for me, it was an unexpectedly complex series of assumptions I had never articulated to myself or to her. I had unconsciously taken for granted that Barbara having money would mean that I, too, would have money. The fact that I had continued to work, travel, give workshops and see clients was an expression of my own work identity, my own autonomy, my own need to keep a part of my life for myself. My work was personally gratifying in addition to assuring me that there was more to my sense of myself than the couple identity of Sandy and Barbara. But since Barbara had received her settlement of \$296,000, my work never again had the same financial urgency. And now, I was facing the fact that Barbara having money meant no more and no less than that. It was hers, to do with as she saw fit. She might spend it all on travel, or artwork, or her family or political organizations. It was all her decision and nothing at all to do with me. I felt defenseless, jealous, and surprisingly angry.*

(Barbara)

*I approached the will like I approach everything else in my life: slowly, steadily, and methodically. I always collect lots of data and*



ask people questions. In effect, I do a little survey. I establish the boundaries of the range of possibilities and then I locate a place on that continuum that's comfortable for me. I always take a rational, problem-solving approach to things. This is no different. It didn't seem to be about emotions, feelings, relationships, or obligations. For me, it was about doing it "right" and that meant fairly and justly.

I drew a line down the center of a yellow pad and put the words "money" and "symbolic" at the head of each column. Under "symbolic," I wrote friends' names and decided which objects I wanted each one of them to have. Under "money," my task was to figure out the percentages that would go to the important people in my life.

*(Sandy)*

*What are the percentages of loving? How can I translate respect, value, support, ideology, years spent, shared history into ratios? But that is, of course, what needs to be done—for her will translates the language of the heart to that of a bloodless legalistic document. During all these weeks, I have not made my feelings about this process of allocation explicit. I could not tolerate my own yearnings, my own needs to be chosen as the most important person in her life. Some part of my feeling of loss had to do with understanding that preparing a will would be quite a different matter if I had remained in my traditional heterosexual marriage of the 50's. There would be fewer choices, more certainty and unquestioned priorities. But we had both chosen lives that would not tolerate such assumptions. I knew she had a family: a recently married younger sister whom she raised and whom she still protects fiercely and loyally; an infant nephew; aged and frail parents; close friends. I knew all this but had not allowed myself the dangerous experience of thinking about what it might mean.*

*"A will is not a negotiable document. These are my wishes," she muttered when I read the first draft of her wishes and began to question some of its provisions. I began to recognize that I would not be "taken care of" in the distribution of her assets. I would not be left "well taken care of." Her parents, sister, political commitments were going to siphon off what could potentially come to me. I had come to think of this as my blood money. My trade-off for the loss of my beloved partner. If I wasn't going to have Barbara, I wanted all the money that had come to represent her life.*

*(Barbara)*

I don't want to leave anyone anything. The only reason I'm doing it is because I have a sense of obligation to my family and to Sandy. I hate this money. I hate every dollar. I have the image that all the dollars are stuffed inside my stomach cavity and I am pregnant with money. I can feel their hands dipping inside my stomach cavity and taking out handfuls of bloodsoaked dollars.



I am ashamed of these feelings, of not wanting to leave any money to my important people. I don't want anyone to have a good time with my money. I'd sooner give it away to groups and organizations whose work I support, that do good things in the world. This blood money is in need of redemption, and good works is the only way I can imagine redeeming it.

(Sandy)

*I listen to her plans for giving this money away and recognize for the first time how much I resent having to share this blood money with anyone else. How much I resist any feelings of generosity when this process is predicated on my losing her. How much my heart closes around not "having," not "getting," not being cared for. I was faced with the task of confronting aspects of myself that were carefully masked, guarded, or denied. I had to encounter the infantile, jealous, terrified, competitive, scared Sandy. While I understood that I was not going to allow myself to act upon these feelings or this new knowledge of myself, I knew that I needed to face them squarely. I struggled with my proprietary attachment for Barbara, allowing little room for her love and need of others. I faced my bitterness when I recognized my patterns of self-denying generosity that left me with few financial resources as I approached 50. I longed for but feared financial dependence. I tried to balance my need to be "special" with the sense of belonging and welcome her family has offered me. I try to constantly remind myself of the meanings of this life that are being reduced to codicils and clauses.*

*Barbara became my teacher. I could not allow myself to be less than she was insisting upon for herself. Wanting to keep my autonomy, my independence, and at the same time allow myself to be financially supported was a dichotomy that was both mutually antithetical and one I heartily disapproved of in myself. Having generosity of spirit and sharing my ideas, accomplishments and money with others was one of my best qualities and one which Barbara both admired and emulated. I was, however, faced with the irony that there also existed deeply inside me a set of feelings that were completely at odds with my carefully constructed and thought out feminist politics, but nonetheless deeply rooted in my psyche. I reminded myself of all my conversations with Barbara in our early courting days where we passionately agreed that our partnership (and indeed all good partnerships) should be formed by two independent women who join to build a life together on a foundation of competence and economic self-sufficiency generated by work based on care and passion. We were women, we assured each other, who would make autonomous decisions about how, where, and when to spend our money. Yet I found myself wanting to hear Barbara ask, "What would you like to do with your time?" How would you like to spend the time we have remaining to us? How can I make your dreams possible?" I wanted her to keep me at home. To allow me to care for her—to play with her—to travel with her and not worry or even think*



*about making a living. Now that there was enough money, why should I have to work? How can I continue to feel like the most important person to her if that fact is not reflected in her financial decisions?*

*But what if it had been me who had cancer? How would I have divided my money among Barbara and my children? My political commitments? Wouldn't I have found myself struggling similarly with ratios, percentages, choices? Wouldn't I have to evaluate individual life against political need? Collective use against private gain?*

*The other irony is that even if she had not won the malpractice suit, even if we had no money except our weekly salaries, I would still have made the same choices and live exactly as I do now. I chose to cancel my training workshops across the country to be at home with her. I chose to reduce my income by 2/3 in order to free up the time that would allow me to be at home with her. I made that decision quickly and clearly and felt no conflict or sense of sacrifice. But I am still left with confusion about the meaning this money has for me. Do I need proof that she appreciates my choices? That I mean the most to her? Still, even while berating myself for these responses, I have felt jealous, angry, and hurt that she appears to care more about other people than she does about me. The feeling embarrasses me but is surprising in its intensity. I castigate myself for constructing an equation that makes money equivalent with caring. I feel ashamed of myself and unable to staunch the feelings that flood me. I hold the intrusive thoughts in abeyance, but they intrude. Again and again.*

(Barbara)

Under the column headed "money," I begin with my history. I have always given 10% of my income for organizations that reflect my social values. So—the first step was clear. In my will, I had to continue the tradition of giving to others. Not everything would go to my sister or Sandy or my parents. But, I still had to figure out the other 90%. It is a problem of translation, I tell myself, a problem of numerical representation: how to express in legal language what I experience as a deeply interconnected, dense, cross-referenced narrative which holds together a number of values and principles.

I began by examining how I had lived. I reviewed my history to uncover the consistent and deep values which had informed my decisions. I reminded myself that I always talked about books, art, music and movies. I remembered that the most satisfying conversations combined emotional intensity, cultural themes and intellectual analysis. I had always had lots of records and books but never too many clothes. It became clear to me that the primary values by which I had lived my life centered on intellectual and psychological development. I became a teacher, a profession that embodied these values. Now these same values are reflected in the trust fund which provides for an education for my sister's children.

My mother has a second-grade education and has suffered from illiteracy all her life. She was unable to hold a job because she couldn't read or write or add numbers fast enough. But when she reads slowly, she understands complex ideas. My father, now half blind but still hunched over the New York Times every day with his magnifying glasses, left me a legacy of precision—in language, measurement and thought. It was my father who measured my handwriting with his drafting instruments to make sure the letters were equally sized and properly formed. My parents gave me their deep love (and awe of) education and learning.

Towards them, I have a sense of obligation. I want to make sure that they are as comfortable as possible in their old age. And, for them, I created another trust fund, so they could live out their lives with as much intellectual stimulation and physical comfort as money can buy.

Once I had articulated my basic values, I could consider how much money each person needed. I could hear my father's voice, repeating Marx, "From each according to ability, to each according to need." But when I thought about who among my beneficiaries really needs money, the answer was no one. Yet in another sense, everyone needs surplus cash. Who among my beneficiaries can't use a few extra bucks, to have a vacation, buy a better stereo, save for a child's future, have an education. Make a dream come true.

*(Sandy)*

*"What will you do after I'm dead?" she asks me tentatively.*

*"I don't know, why are you asking me?" I reply, shocked and frightened by the question.*

*She becomes angry and explodes, "Because I'll be damned if you're gonna spend this money with someone else. Or buy a house. I don't want you and my sister to have luxuries as a result of my death. I'd rather give it all away!"*

*I pause, wondering what I plan to do with this money, this blood money, however much it turns out to be. How can I spend it in a way that will honor its origin? We sit together late at night, huddled together on the grey sofa and alternately talk and cry about my life after her death. About our painful acknowledgment that there will be an "after" for me. She tells me of her desire to provide that which I never had: a rigorous education. As a single mother and even after my daughters were grown, I continued to live in the service of others, never creating the time or resources just for myself - to think, to write, to move from emotional work to the more clear-edged world of the intellect. She encourages me to remember that old longing, those old dreams.*

*I feel lightheaded as we talk. It feels somehow like a piece of theater. Here we are, two healthy looking, sturdy, middle-aged women playing roles.*



One is pretending to be a dying woman and the other, her loving partner. I tell her, "This just doesn't seem real to me. You just don't seem sick." But then I begin to sob because her sickness is all too real. It is under the surface, not visible but centrally determining. It cannot be seen or felt or stopped, but it is the center now from which all our decisions are made.

"Yes," I tell her much later, tears spent, "you're right. I think I would like to go back to school." I lay with my head in her lap as she strokes my hair. We had talked for so many hours during these years about my hunger to learn, about my desire for a more traditional education, about my ache for her to guide me through the books, the discussion, the intellectual subtleties she so relishes. "I think I would like to use whatever money is left to me to study, to write, to learn. It would be both a reflection of my desire as well as a way to honor your life. Also, it'll help me get through the next period of time, however long it takes for me to learn to be alone again."

Her face softens and she takes me into her arms. "Yes. Yes, that's perfect. It is everything that matters to me. Everything I care about. To spend this money on your education sounds right to me. To make your dream come true." Understanding we have come to an ending, we stop and look carefully at each other's faces. Gently, we smile with pride in our accomplishment. Hand in hand we tenderly lie down in bed, wrap ourselves around each other and go to sleep.

(Barbara)

A few months later, we sit at night on the grey leather sofa. The cancer has spread to my liver. Now these theoretical issues, these arbitrary percentages, will soon go into effect. Now I'm frightened. Did I do it right?

(Sandy)

Now that I am facing the final year of Barbara's life, I have come to understand some of the larger meanings embedded in the process of creating this will. I have been forced to turn and face parts of myself that lived silent, invisible, powerfully determining precisely because they were unacknowledged. I have begun to learn how the public values I had espoused often masked the private feelings I had denied. I have begun to allow the blending of the public and the private self both in this process with Barbara as well as in my relationships to work, to my family, and within our community.

I have seen Barbara send and receive stirring personal letters to friends and colleagues across the country, articulating the nature and meaning of their relationships. I have participated with the women who formed our healing circle that first met two years ago to hear Barbara's diagnosis. They did then, and continue to provide love, support, anger, and a telephone tree. We have together created the anniversary celebration on February 22nd. One, and now two years after her diagnosis, a gathering

*where we honor living consciously with champagne, laughter and tenderness.*

*My life with Barbara represents the most open, trusting and emotional relationship I have ever had. She has taught me many things and is leaving me a legacy that will provide me a stable and lasting foundation for the rest of my life. I have been blessed with 100% of her time, devotion, courage, sense of humor and passion. I have been with her for eight full and rich years and flourished in her love. I have stretched and seen her do the same, both of us moving in directions and on paths we never would have been brave enough to choose alone. We have both learned about what it means to love fully, unquestioningly and unstintingly, for there is finally no other way to love.*

*And when she leaves, it is not a percentage of herself she leaves, but all the tastes, smells, melodies, and sensations of our loving.*

(Barbara)

There it is, all proper and legal. There are many things wrong with it already. If I did it again, I'd give away much more money to groups whose work I support. I'd change things around a little bit, endlessly refining it. But on the whole, these are my values. To be of service; to work to liberate others from ignorance, poverty, and despair; to help others discover their own possibilities. And these basic values, the ones that have shaped my life, are now legally codified, these passions of a well-examined, well-lived, well-spent, and well-loved life.





*window, Museum of New Mexico, Santa Fe*  
Grace Harwood

Lynn Crawford

## Letter to a Friend

Hello Angie,

My "cat kin" and I, we're out under the grape arbor, and the bees drink and laze between the vines. It's the first football Saturday in Ann Arbor. The thick hum of cicadas is punctured by cheers from the stadium. I feel sad, for this summer grown weary of itself, and for my garden, whose beds I must soon turn over to sleep. Everywhere the leaves parch a little. I will be glad when the heat subsides, the colors sharpen, my concentration quickens. The energy to write is ripening like a little plum tucked under my heart.

Also rising are those voices inside of me that would argue, insinuate and deprecate to the point of choking off my willingness to write. I am not so perfectionistic about other aspects of my life; why this one? If only I could slice off a sentence the way I slice a tomato. Not caring about a little unevenness and totally absorbed in the way the patterned suspension of seeds slides off the knife.

Last night, as I crouched in the tub, looking between my thighs at the gently swirling water, I suddenly heard myself singing, in a soft girlish voice, "I just can't make it better/Anymore/All alone. . ."

I heard it like you suddenly hear your pulse in your ears after running, after long effort, and it was oddly comforting. The song was singing itself from my unconscious and it was rocking me, freeing me. Suddenly, this voice, and me listening, trying to recognize, identify, and pinpoint a time or place.

It wasn't a little girl I found, it was an older girl. An eighteen-year-old who would have called herself a woman and who would not recognize herself as a girl but I can see that girl now who was me. I have just been told that my mother has had a cerebral hemorrhage and I am leaning against the wall in an Intensive Care waiting room. My consciousness is slipping. Somewhere inside of me a coat drops from its hanger and nurses with white uniforms swim the closet-like darkness saying "here you are, there you are" as they slide a chair behind me. I stare at the floor-tiles, their gum-ball blueness and hide between my knees the redness of my cheeks. My mother lays flat in the next room with her eyes staring flat like stones and drying out and I am embarrassed, an eighteen-year-old woman, *embarrassed*, that these other women will see my need for this woman, my first woman, my mother who is dying and I am embarrassed.

What is wrong with this picture?

Inside I feel the emptiness of the house in which she cooked, cleaned, talked to birds and dogs and entertained no friends. In a closet there is



a pad of yellowed drawing paper and each piece is blank. Once there were contours of women's bodies sketched in charcoal but the years wiped them into a grey blur of cigarette smoke and the cold light of television. There are stacks of books that talked to her but did not tell her story so after awhile she lost interest in that too. I see the loss of what she might have been as I see the loss of what she was. My mother, with her lipstick too red, waiting too intently to hear about my day.

As I straightened up in the chair I stared into the black stripe on a nurse's hat. I swore silently to myself. I must make it better, with my life and my words. I will be responsible. I will make the world know the loss and meaning of her life. I will unravel a saga and it will be beautiful as I knew her to be beautiful.

That was my vow, March 19, 1973, the day my mother died.

More than ten years have passed now. I have worked many jobs, lived in several houses, loved some men and more women. Sometimes I have written. More often I have worked for money. Usually I find myself returning to this first theme, source, home, mother. Often I have quit, immobilized. I have not felt equal to the task.

Last night, as the water drained away beneath me and I sang my little song, suddenly I could see that I simply cannot and will not keep that vow. I will never write a Great American Novel or Stunning Universal Poem that will redeem the wastefulness of a culture that assumed the world was more safe and natural with my mother's and your mother's artistry/love/engineering/intuition/craft/anger/mathematics and organizing confined to bungalows/cupboards/"hobbies"/the projects/company coal houses/Kresge's or Kelly Services. I cannot and will not go back and reconstruct her conversations with sparrows, children and loneliness and offer them up as expressions of a woman with a full and free life. Instead they will be left as they were. Conversations of a woman in isolation.

"I just can't make it better/Anymore/All alone"—and I won't. The anger, the sadness, the sense of wasted life cannot and will not be written off. Instead, it will be used, as part of the need for life lived differently.

No one voice, no one story, no one writer can redeem, rectify, justify or revise. To think so is to tempt constriction or cultivate haughtiness. To think so blurs the details of another's life and story.

We need all the voices, of all the mothers and all the daughters, in all their particularities.

Specifically, Angie, sometimes I need you, to listen as I squeak my toes on the bottom of my tub, singing; to tell me your stories and revisions; to sing a little song in your bath.

In these lives lived differently, we need each other.

Openly.

Jan Hardy

## Memorial Day, three years after

some trees hold to their leaves all winter  
no matter how skeletal the stems,  
how brittle the brown flags waving in the wind,  
the trees chatter, branch after branch  
whispering denial, they hush themselves to sleep  
and sometimes i hold to a lover long after  
no matter how fragile the bond,  
how feeble the hand she lifts, waving, we're casual,  
we chatter, and time after time  
whispering denial, i hush myself to sleep  
and into dreams where i can't let go  
and this time it's all right, it's understood,  
forgiven, my hands  
around her neck, i was drowning  
in myself and only she  
could save me, *just tell me*  
*what you want* i screamed, i knew  
she was leaving me  
next day, my fingerprints  
violet-blue on her neck  
like bite marks,  
friends teased and she took it  
like a lover, i followed her lead, but  
shame-faced, not my usual  
lusty  
self  
i knew she was leaving me  
now i live here alone, is it penance  
or simply learning, watching  
the trees as they shrug to the sky  
each spring, their hands open,  
helpless; then fall  
after fall they shed, shuddering, bare  
branches like arms without hands, my hands  
around her neck, fingers pried



away clenching into fists as i sobbed, disgust  
knotting my body into dead wood, i would never

hurt her except i was drowning  
in myself, i held on,  
a death-  
grip

open the hand, touch  
the self first  
learn to live alone  
there are leaves on the ground  
there are more, growing

touch  
the self  
first

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Jan Hardy

## independence day

i read by the window  
leaving the light off  
the page mottled with changing patterns  
of sun and leaves  
when it grows darker  
the leaf shadows blur  
and i wish you bright sun for your holiday  
on the page, two women are falling in love  
i curl up in my chair  
the binding of the book rests lightly  
in the v between my thighs  
your scent  
and the gentle ease of our bodies  
comes back my smile  
against the wiry tangle of your hair  
the woman in the story is saying  
*i've never had so much  
time to read before*  
she and her lover opening  
boxes of books they've ordered  
i remember how carefully i used to arrange  
for times by myself to read, to write  
now they drop at my feet like ripe apples  
i wish you bright sun for your holiday  
i begin to hate the magic you fed me  
that made me lose hunger for my own  
sweet orchard



## Tied

One day the rope pulls taut,  
stars close in around our bed  
whitening the sheets  
as love spills down our legs.  
Our fingers wrap together  
ring against ring,  
the rope among our legs  
and around our waists  
cut twice and tied.

When stars rotate out  
to the sky, one of us  
reaches a hand to them,  
stretching the rope  
till it scrapes the skin  
of the other and burns.

Margaret Tongue

## Fathers/Daughters

Our fathers grow old at last,  
Our fathers who raped us,  
They grow old. They send us letters.  
They speak to us as if nothing had  
Happened or else as if we had really  
Been lovers, as if they had never  
Wounded us, some to the death,  
As if time had made us companionable  
To them — wives, or their own mothers.

Dear Annie, Dear Clare, Dear Elizabeth,  
They write, may I please have a note  
So long since I've heard let me know  
how you are and how is my grandson  
doing in school? I am still here  
Nothing unusual to tell you just  
the same routine day after day a word  
from you would sure make me feel good  
Please write. Honey, I miss you a lot.

Such letters traced out in a tremulous  
Hand, such letters are beyond us.  
How were they written, and how can  
They come to us now and what are we  
To do with them? Is some answer  
Possible? We can crush them, rend  
Them in pieces, burn them, we can  
Try to forget, but always, admit it  
Or not, we end by weeping. Always.

In spite, or because of it all, we care.  
We know the brutality of loneliness  
When we hear it, the daily, difficult valor  
Of old men; their frayed shirts; talcum  
And bay leaves, their delicate odors.  
Tenderness in us is more than a word.  
But the word that would hear? Is it  
In us? Can we speak it? The word they  
Cannot hear, is it a word we can spare?



Oh the fathers, the fathers,  
Aching as always after the beauty  
Of children, of girls, of their daughters,  
Wanting to own it, to make it theirs,  
These husbands and heroes, providers,  
These scholars and preachers, teachers,  
These rapists and killers, these fathers,  
Who offer us love at the end, old men  
Who write us innocent, beautiful letters.



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## Not to be Trusted

*La migliore parola e quella che non si dice.*

—Italian proverb

Twenty years after  
my grandmother died  
I'm trying to remember  
her words of wisdom.  
I hear nothing.

I say—  
I'm writing a poem, Grandma.  
I need your words.  
Now I see her hands,  
fat, brown, and wrinkled,  
flying up over her head  
and behind her, tossing away  
my words.

Words are not to be trusted.  
Words have no answers.  
Words make trouble.

I say—  
I need your words for this poem, Grandma.  
I know what you meant.  
Now give me the words.  
I see her hand,  
the fingertips together,  
palm up, rising and falling,  
rising and falling, slowly,  
from the wrist.

Words have no answers.  
Words aren't necessary.  
Words make trouble.

I say—  
The world is waiting, Grandma.  
Everyone wants to read the words  
of the wise old Italian woman.



I see her hand,  
the back against her chin,  
pulled out from under,  
lingeringly, fingers and thumb  
spread stiffly upward.

Words aren't necessary.  
Words are disloyal.  
Words make trouble.

I say —  
I've written this poem, Grandma.  
They don't know what it says.  
I put my hands in my lap.  
I see her hand,  
fingertips together,  
rising to her pursed lips,  
a quick kiss, and gone.

Words aren't necessary.  
Words have no answers.  
Words are not to be trusted.

Nancy Humphreys

## Song of Lilith

"When she first came out, Hetty, in the modest dressing room of her innermost imagination, tried on a relationship with every new dyke she met. Each fitting brought new glimpses of what might be changed. Aspects of herself were highlighted; some in a flattering fashion, many in the manner of those cauliflower stalk clown collars, in a ludicrous light, and a few in a way that was simply sweet. None, however, really fit, or rather, the trying on was never, except once painfully impossible, done with the intention of purchase. Consequently, five years' and a couple accidental but brief relationships later, a weary Hetty was still struggling into and out of dreams while wondering when the Fates would finally yield a lasting reason to cease trying and start buying. Goddess knows, she'd already paid a high enough price for simply attempting to mix and match in her mind."

"How's that for some characterization?" a grinning Rita asked June after she laid down her manuscript on the table and took a sip of lemon-lime mineral water.

"Well, it's pretty good Reet," drawled June as she leaned precariously back on the rear two legs of her chair, "but I think it needs a little something." She cocked an eyebrow.

"Oh yeah?" Rita felt the little turrets of the tanks in her eyes rotating the barrels of their guns outward toward June, and in spite of her best resolve, fired off her first defensive volley, trying to be humorous while she did so. "It's got sex; what else could it need?"

"Uh, oh sorry," said June after bringing her chair down onto Rita's left foot. "Not hurt? Good! Uh, well I'm not sure exactly what it needs, but..."

"You think it needs more plot, don't you?"

"Well, I guess . . ."

"You think I can't do a regular story, huh?"

"Uh, no, I didn't say . . ."

"Well, I can, you know. I can do a regular story."

"I'm sure you can, Reet. I'm sure I never said you couldn't," asserted June hurriedly.

Rita mused for awhile, sipping her mineral water and massaging her wounded foot now tucked up under her right leg on the chair. Then, Rita downed her drink and sat up straight in her chair. "You want plot? Okay, I'll give you plot!" Her low voice began filling the air around them.



## The True Nature of Temptation (A True Story)

Once upon a time there were just two people in the world. One's name was Eve. The other's name was Lilith. Now, both Eve and Lilith were created in the image of the One, but there were two of them so they could keep each other company. And they weren't created alike. Eve was big and brown, very strong, but kinda emotional and had just what she needed in the way of brains. Lilith, she was the opposite. Dark, frail, wily, and maybe just a little too damn smart for her own good sometimes. You see, she brooded and questioned everything. Luckily Eve kept Lilith laughing most of the time. The rest of the time they were either making love or taking care of the place where they lived.

The place where they lived was called Eve's Den (later shortened to Eden in the 10th century A.D. when men didn't want women to own property, but that's another story.) It was named Eve's Den because Eve was created first. Being alone, Eve named her place after herself. In fact, Eve was around for quite a long time alone. During that time she grew a magnificent garden, full of wonderful things, and she named everything she grew. She brought home stray baby animals, and she named them, too. Then she decided she'd like some babies of her own to name. So she went to see the goddess.

The goddess instructed Eve how to stand in salt water and chant at the moon. Pretty soon Eve had a litter of her own. Four bright shiny girls: one black, one copper-red, one cream-yellow and one brown. Eve sure loved them. Oh how she loved them! But still, something seemed to be missing. Eve couldn't figure out what was missing, but when she told the goddess that something seemed to be missing, the goddess smiled and said, "Aha." Then the goddess created Lilith. After that, nothing was missing in Eve's life anymore.

Lilith adored Eve's Den, especially the garden. She took to walking around chanting "garden of Eve Den, garden of Eve Den," because she liked the rhyme, and after that wrote many songs and poems. Lilith adored the creator of Eve's Den, too. Many of the songs and poems were about Eve. Most were spiritual poems and songs, though. These were about the goddess, especially the goddess as seen by Lilith's eyes when looking at Eve. This pleased the goddess very much. She looked down on the garden of Eve Den and said to herself, "Yes, it's very good. Very good indeed. Even if I do say so myself."

Now, Lilith and Eve shared the chores equally, but really there

wasn't much to do, just a little weeding of the garden and occasional sweeping out of their cave dens. Eve took care of the animals and children. Lilith also took care of the children. She even taught Eve's girls, little Aleph, Bes, Gimmel and Daled, how to talk and sing. She taught them her songs which they warbled gleefully, their little Eve's apples bobbing in their little throats. Eve didn't sing because she couldn't carry a tune. That didn't daunt Lilith. She just cut a reed and made a flute so Eve could pipe along. They made lots of music. They were a most happy family.

Now, Lilith, as I said, had a real keen intellect and time free to use it, so she invented lots of things. First, she invented paper, pens and ink. That was so she could write down her songs. Then she invented a symbol for each of the daughters, and from that she created the alphabet. Lilith (with the assistance of the rest of the family, of course) compiled the first dictionary — no easy feat, since they had to make up all the words from scratch. Still, even that wasn't enough to keep Lilith busy all the time.

Lilith decided that she needed something to do with her hands as well as her head. So on the eastern edge of Eve's garden Lilith planted an orchard and started growing all kinds of trees: pines, maples, walnuts, pear, cherry, all kinds of trees, all in neat little rows. Soon she started grafting and making new types of trees and new kinds of fruits. Then she learned to prune. Soon she began to carve and carpenter and construct gigantic bonfires to roast corn and dance around while loving the goddess. This project added many, many pages to the dictionary and made Lilith quite proud. It also pleased the goddess. She looked down on Lilith's orchard and said to herself, "Yes, it's good, indeed. It's as good as Eve's garden. Yes, indeed, it sure is good."

However, as the goddess herself could've predicted, there's never a yang without a yin lurking somewhere. In the way of all earthly flesh, but a little earlier than the goddess had scheduled, little Aleph met her Omega. She was a bit too incautious while following a mountain goat to its home. Eve was in shock. Her first daughter gone. She couldn't believe it. Then she did believe it. In a rage she stoned the goat. That didn't remove the pain, though. So she cried and cried and Lilith invented kleenex, boxes of it, but still the pain didn't cease.

Finally Eve decided to go see the goddess. At first, the goddess was most sympathetic. She apologized profusely for not keeping a better eye on Aleph. Eve was not appeased. So the goddess got tough. She berated Eve for stoning the poor goat. Eve was not to be shamed. On and on she complained. After awhile the goddess got royally weary of that. Sternly she reminded Eve that death was



an obligation, not an option. The goddess explained patiently that as Crone of the World she had to remove little Aleph to make way for others. Eve would see the value of Death if Eve would just open her eyes and use her brain a little. Eve did open her eyes, but she did not see how good Death was.

Instead, Eve saw an ugly old hag sitting on a wood throne cackling over the cold body of her dear little Aleph. In disgust, Eve denounced the goddess and stormed out of the interview. When she got home, Eve sat and pondered a long while. Finally it all became crystal clear. Eve realized that the wood throne was an invention from the orchard, and that Lilith was the ugly old woman who sat on the throne. Eve took to sleeping in her own cave den and once a week, solely for the sake of the children, had a silent breakfast in the garden with Lilith.

In vain did Lilith plead and cajole Eve to speak of her grief. Eve responded only with the Original Silent Treatment. Lilith knew the Coldness of Eve's arms and shuddered as the ache of its iciness spread through every cell of her body. After that, Lilith spent less and less time at home, and more and more time with the wolves and weasels who hung out in the orchard among the nectar trees. Gradually she solaced her pain. Pretty soon Lilith was so into nectar and songs with her animal companions that she stopped coming home at all. The goddess was extremely displeased, but there was nothing she could do. Eve wouldn't listen to her, and Lilith couldn't. Miffed, the goddess packed a few things and took off on a tour of the rest of the galaxy. The goddess figured that Eve and Lilith could settle things themselves.

Eve, at least, did settle down finally. With the sweet assistance of little Bes, Gimmel and Daled, Eve's sorrows in waves of peaks and troughs gradually crashed and subsided on the shores of the sands of time. One day, in a mood of placid bitterness, Eve (merely out of idle curiosity, she told the children) decided to find out what had become of Lilith. When Eve reached the nectar patch, however, she was too horrified to go in. There in the trees ahead sat a hideous skeleton of the former self that had once been her dear sweet friend. The memory of lovemaking long ago with Lilith made Eve shudder; every cell of her body revolted. In disgust and anger, Eve stumbled away from the nectar patch. "How could Lilith have become such a beast?" Eve wondered in righteous indignation. Then she stopped and wailed in pure rage.

It was in the midst of Eve's most aggravated wail that Satan stepped, or rather slithered, out from behind an apple tree in Lilith's orchard and hissed at her. The wail abruptly halted. Then it became a shriek. Eve did not like snakes, even though she'd seen

that the goddess often wore them around her arms and even carried a few spares down her bosom. Still, Satan was not your ordinary snake. The more Eve stared, the more there seemed to be to understand. Yes indeed, Satan was quite a salesperson, and Eve, although she didn't know it yet, was hooked even before he'd spoken a word.

Satan sold Eve on the idea that second best is better than best. "How's that?" she asked, skeptical at first. He explained, it's because the second is a new and improved model, with all the glitches and bugs of the first ironed out. So, second best was better than first best. You see, claimed Satan in a voice like velvet, the goddess had lied to Eve.

"Now darlin', don't flinch like that. Hear me out, just hear me out. You see, the goddess told you that you were created in the image of the One. Am I right? Yeah. I am. And she told you that you and Lilith were One, right? Aha! I see you're beginning to get my drift, hey? Surely you don't believe that hooey anymore, do ya darlin'?" Eve hesitated, fatally. Satan smiled. He knew he had her now.

"Yes, indeed," concluded Satan as they sat back from the lunch table Eve had spread, "it's a dog-eat-dog world, Eve. You got to look out for number one, 'cause sure as hell, no one else will. Now I tell you you've got just a great deal here for yourself. You try this new and improved model for thirty days, and I guarantee you'll be satisfied enough to keep it forever. But if you're not, you just holler before the 30 days are up, and I'll come and take it back. Now what's to lose, huh? Nothing! Now surely that's a great deal, isn't it darlin'?" Eve hesitated. As if oblivious, Satan crooned on, "Now Eve, no down payment even. All I ask is if you like it, you give me credit for it. As much credit as you would have given the goddess if she had made you as good a deal. Now where's the harm in that, huh?"

Eve looked high and low, but she had to admit it. She couldn't find where the harm was. Face it, Satan was right. Yes indeed. It was an offer she couldn't afford to pass up. Sheepishly she bent and signed the contract Satan's secretary had typed up. Eve signed. Then she looked up. Satan was gone. A rustle made Eve turn her head. From behind the bushes at the end of Lilith's apple orchard Satan emerged, beaming in anticipatory satisfaction. "Yep. Here he is, Eve, in all his glory — ADAM!" Uncertainly, Adam took one step forward, then stopped and grinned. Eve was utterly taken aback. Those flat breasts! And what was that hideous thing hanging between the legs?

Satan, as if reading her mind, eagerly grabbed the thing in question. "Yeah darlin'. This is it. Remember what I told you about? The



instant babymaker? Right! No more standing around at night in cold saltwater. Just insert this and poof you got a kid. Nice huh?" Adam continued to grin sillily as Satan held up the thing between his legs. Eve began to feel annoyance well up inside her innermost energy channel, but she shoved it back down. After all, she hadn't agreed to take Adam, just to try him for thirty days. Surely, even if he was an absolute moron, she could get some fun out of having him around? Maybe the kids could use him for something? So she assured herself, then calmly held out her hand to Adam. Satan, chuckling delightedly, disappeared.

Adam took one step forward, then stopped, a look of terror beginning to steal into his eyes. Fearing Adam would run off and she wouldn't even get her thirty day free trial, Eve desperately looked around for a way to keep him with her. Spying an apple above her, she snatched it off the tree and held it out to him. Adam sniffed suspiciously. "Oh damn!" grumbled Eve, then took a bite of it herself, chewed and swallowed. Adam waited a moment to see what would happen to Eve. When nothing happened he grabbed the apple and, grinning, crunched into it. Neither of them heard the noise in the bushes behind them.

Mothers, as we well know, have inherited many gifts from the goddess, not the least awesome of which is their power to appear at just the precise moment one is doing something one ought not to. So with a cosmic swish and to no one's surprise except Adam and Eve's, the goddess arrived home from her tour of the galaxy at the exact instant Adam bit into the apple. The goddess arrived. And was she ever pissed? You bet. Eve knew it immediately because of the way the ground shook under her feet. Adam, however, being utterly inexperienced in the ways of the goddess, mistakenly assumed it was Love which had just arrived. Tossing away the apple, he made a lunge for Eve.

Well, to make a long sad story short, the goddess kicked them both out of the garden of Eve's Den. Adam, of course, being none too bright, thought it was because of the apple they ate. Eve, although she knew better, decided not to tell him. It was a good joke, she thought, and heaven knows she needed a good joke during the first forsaken days when she found herself out of the goddess' favor. Often she chuckled silently to herself. Really, that Adam was so dumb!

Life outside the garden was mostly peaceful, except that now Eve had cramps every moon, and childbirth from Adam's babymaker hurt like the devil, and Adam, for some crazy reason, worked out in the fields all the time, but unlike Lilith he wasn't happy about it and sure was slow to learn anything productive out there. Still, her

life was mostly peaceful. Eve didn't think she could complain. After all, as Satan had pointed out, it was a dog-eat-dog world, and Eve had made a pretty good deal for herself. It could be worse, she reminded herself. With a shiver of revulsion, she recalled the last time she had seen Lilith. Yes indeed, it could be worse, thought Eve as she worked on mixing up a new perfume that Satan had promised her would for sure bring Adam back from the fields to spend more time with her and the kids. Uh-huh, it could be worse.

The goddess did, of course, repent of her anger, but not, unfortunately, until the thirty day trial period was over. The goddess dropped in on Eve one day while Adam was out tinkering in the fields, and asked her to come back to Eve's Den and be forgiven. "Without Adam?" Eve wondered.

"Yes, of course," replied the goddess testily. "Whatever would you need him for?"

"Well," Eve lowered her eyes and pouted. She'd kind of gotten used to him being around. And really he was so helpless without her to pick up after him. He'd never manage without her. And if anything happened to him she'd feel so guilty. No, she'd have to take Adam to Eve's Den too.

"Absolutely not!" raged the goddess while the earth shook.

"Well then," pouted Eve as she dabbed the new perfume on, "forget it. Who needs you or your stupid garden anyway?" Divinely hurt, the goddess wrapped herself up in her favorite snakes and departed.

Back at Eve's Den the goddess turned her angry eyes on Lilith. It took all of her power to get Lilith out of the nectar patch, but the goddess at last succeeded. Clean and sober now, Lilith refused to believe the goddess' story about Satan and Adam. She looked all over Eve's Den for Eve. But gradually her forays became less and less frequent. Lilith did not return to the nectar patch, but she sat so lonely and forlorn-looking that the goddess just had to say, "It's not good. No siree, it's not good." Satan tried a couple of times to interest Lilith in another second best model, but she talked him in circles and sent him slithering off. Finally she made a decision. If Eve didn't want the den, Lilith didn't want the den either. Sadly, the goddess assented. Eve's Den would be abandoned.

But there was one condition. The goddess insisted that Lilith was not to let herself be seen, at least not as long as Eve remained with Adam. Lilith argued, protested, and even whined, but the goddess was adamant. So, disguised, Lilith left. Lilith left Eve's Den and drifted about the hills above Adam and Eve's home. There she sang so sweetly and sadly that they came to believe they were blessed



because a goddess roamed their hills. And sometimes late at night, while Adam was asleep, Eve even sang along.


Rita leaned back in her chair and smiled contentedly at the ceiling. She'd seen the wide-eyed look and the gradual leaning forward as June's younger self had emerged to listen to the story. While the part of her in her head still argued that she was too worthless for anyone to listen to her, the part of her near her heart gloated contentedly as if swinging in a hammock on a glorious summer day.

Quietly June sighed and said, as Rita knew she would, "Jeez, I wish I'd written that!" They sat in silence for a moment. Then June asked, "Reet, I thought Lilith was created first?"

"No, Eve was. See, when Eve finally told Adam about herself and Lilith, he was utterly humiliated. He had to tell the other guys something before Eve did, so he told them he'd had Lilith as a partner, but she was too uppity, so he'd gotten rid of her. And you know how guys are. They had to pretend they believed him, but they knew better. They figured it was Lilith that dumped Adam. But, of course, they never said so, except among themselves, so as not to make him mad."

"Oh, yeah. Sure!"

"You know, June, Lilith did write down her story, but Adam's great-great-great-great-grandson, Alan, substituted "Genesis" in place of "The Song of Lilith" as he was taking the Bible to the scrollmakers. Actually, Alan changed a lot of the other chapters too. Say, did I ever tell you about the day the Queen of Sheba met Jezebel? No? Well, . . ."

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Patricia Filipowska

## According to Guinness

twenty languages on this planet  
now hang by threads—  
in each case  
by a single human's  
vocal chords.

There isn't one set of ears  
alive to hear  
nor another pair of lips  
left to answer  
the last speaker of each tongue.

But Eyak  
is still spoken  
in southeast Alaska  
by two old sisters  
if they meet.



*Pshi-Polnitsa — The Flax Crone*  
Max Dashu, 1986



that dark shining thing

(for Sandra Rounds, Bessie Jo Faris, & Denise Brugman)

You've shut the door again  
to escape the darkness  
only it's pitch black in that closet.

Some buried part of you prevailed  
elected me to pry open a crack  
hear the unvoiced plea  
see the animal behind the bars  
of your eyelashes.

This is not new.  
Colored, poor white, latent queer  
passing for white  
seething with hatred, anger  
unaware of its source  
crazed with not knowing  
who they are  
choose me to pick at the masks.

I am the only round face,  
Indian-beaked, off-colored  
in the faculty lineup, the workshop, the panel  
and reckless enough to take you on.  
I am the flesh you dig your fingernails into  
mine the hand you chop off while still clinging to it  
the face spewed with your vomit  
I risk your sanity  
and mine.

I want to turn my back on you  
wash my hands of you  
but my hands remember each seam  
each nail embedded in that wall  
my feet know each rock you tread on  
as you stumble I falter too  
and I remember  
he/me/they who shouted  
push Gloria breathe Gloria

feel their hands holding me up, prompting me  
until I'm facing that pulsing bloodied blackness  
trying to scream  
from between your legs  
feel again the talons raking my belly  
I remember hating him/me/they who pushed me  
as I'm pushing you  
remember the casing breaking  
flooding the walls  
remember opening my eyes one day  
sensing that something was missing.

Missing was the pain, gone the fear  
that all my life had walked beside me.  
It was then I saw the numinous thing  
it was black and it had my name  
it spoke to me and I spoke to it.

Here we are four women stinking with guilt  
you for not speaking your names  
me for not holding out my hand sooner.  
I don't know how long I can keep naming  
that dark animal  
coaxing it out of you, out of me  
keep calling it good or woman-god  
while everyone says no no no.

I know I am that Beast that circles your house  
peers in the window  
and that you see yourself my prey.

But I know you are the Beast  
its prey is you  
you the midwife  
you that dark shining thing  
I know it's come down to this:  
vida o muerte, life or death.

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## Just Plain Hanna

The alarm clanged me awake, yanking me out of the protective cloak of sleep. "Damn!" I mumbled. "What an eerie dream! If that clock hadn't gone off, I'd have remembered it."

In the hotel bathroom, I flipped on the tape player and stepped into the shower. My pre-recorded voice spilled out: "Leave Birmingham by nine. Head south on thirty-five for Opelika. Interview Hanna Driscoll." I almost remembered the dream. I shivered with the presentiment that I was going back to an old, well-known place to retrieve something long forgotten. To a place even more frightening than it was beautiful. I stepped out of the shower and began collecting my things.

At nine o'clock on that balmy Birmingham Saturday, I tossed my battered briefcase—which sheltered this writer's prized pens, paper, camera, and tape recorder—into the BMW's back seat. By eleven fifteen, I had exhausted the meager portion of smooth highway which testified to the South's drunken lurch toward the wavering lights of progress. I was near the tree-studded, lazy, twenty-five square miles of sticks called Opelika, Alabama.

As if it were a protective charm over the racist perils which awaited me, I turned up the radio. Already I'd discovered how little Birminghamians' collective mentality had changed. I could only *guess* what I'd encounter in Opelika, where I was sure change happened about as quickly and uneventfully as the polar cap shift.

From Birmingham's sole classical station, strains of Delibes' "Lakme" poured. I breathed deeply as my fears quieted, subdued by the honey-and-jasmine voiced Indian maid serenading her mistress. I shuddered. I'd heard and seen the opera at least twenty times, but it had never occurred to me that this loving "maid" was actually a slave. I wondered whether she was treated as were my foreparents. The trip was already getting to me. Unbidden memories were invading. Angry and a bit unnerved, I changed the station. Tammy Wynette was still begging women to stand by their men, and I changed the station again, settling on a thunderous voice booming out the benefits of eternal salvation over the perils of everlasting damnation and writhing in fire. I smiled wryly. I was in the South, alright. I was back home.

The sun had climbed high enough to make me grateful for the rented car's air conditioner and painfully aware of my thirst. I pulled over to the antiquated Sinclair gas station with a rusted sign admitting that this was Jimmy's Gen'ral Store. The sign hung limp as a once-white sheet trying to dry in a windless backyard. I stopped in front of the unleaded pump,

pulled out my Nikon, and shot the sign. No one materialized to pump the gas, so I headed for the store.

The gravel, red mud, and warring chickens made the short trip to the rickety store treacherous. I pulled open the squealing screen door and sighed relief at stepping into the cool, moist, but musty place. I'd entered another world.

Darkness transformed the Alaga syrup bottles into stalagmites in this primeval cave; changed the benign kitchen and farm utensils into eerie sacrificial instruments; and metamorphosed the long, low, cool Coke freezer into a yawning sarcophagus.

A frail, stooped figure, scuffling along like a pre-human which had just learned the trick of bipedal motion, moved toward me. Once my eyes adjusted to the lack of light, my ears picked up the powerful silence. Walking to the shack, I'd heard the tinny twanging of country chords and high-pitched human hooting. Now, all was silent. The peering death-skull before me frowned. It drew together its deeply furrowed and slack cavern of a mouth.

"Whut c'n I do fer ye, gal?" The voice was soggy and sexless as a paper towel.

"Hi." My voice cracked. "I need ten dollars of unleaded and a six-pack of Mountain Dew, please." I fished through my wallet, almost laughing when my fingers touched the well-used MasterCard. I pulled out a twenty.

"Humph!" the frown sneered. "Ain't cha got nothin' smallah, gal?" It spoke slowly, like thick, cold ketchup glugging out of a bottle. "Ain't got enuf to change thayat . . . *Ma'am*." The frown became an obscene thing trying to imitate a smile.

Suddenly, I felt their eyes on my body, their razor-thin animal noses sniffing for victim. The three women and two men perched like vultures on the upturned Coke cases. They spat tobacco juice into Thrifty Maid pear cans. Had I been a Black *man*, their vulpine greed and stale deathly smell would have been my last experience in life.

"Here, then," I said with smooth bravado. I handed the creature a ten and a five, then snatched my twenty out of its hand.

"Zeke," the bent-over person yelled, "go 'n git 'er ten dollars unleaded, heyer? Ah'm sure gas nevah poured thuw *them* purty darkie fingahs." It was a *she*. And she was jealous. She shoved the six-pack of soda to me. "Has it, gal?" she crooned. The five pairs of murderous eyes grew snickering, snarling mouths. They cackled acknowledgment at the sick, centuries old game their people played with mine: Burn the nigga.

The bristling hairs on my back and neck, the sudden and maddening tingling of my scalp, the dark rusty taste of fear in my mouth . . . all relayed to my soul the command old as hate, itself: Survive! I took my change and walked blindly to my car.



I pushed the button to roll down the window, and shakily drank a soda. Zeke leaned his hirsute arms on the windshield and squinted pig-like at me. "Sure is a nice car, gal."

My hand froze en route to my lips.

"You ain' frum roun heah, is ya?"

I stared at the grinning, sparsely-toothed, tobacco-stained mouth; at the shaking, sweat-smudged, and fat-stained t-shirt; at the malicious little eyes into which greasy, yellow-gray locks fell. Instead of puking on him, I rolled up the window and sped away. What else could I have done?

What else could I have done? Fantastic resolutions danced through my brain, absorbing me as my car shot through the dead Alabama heat like an arrow from the god's bow. I could've slammed open my door into his groin. He'd've doubled over, and I would've slammed a knee kick into his face. Then, the others would've slunk out of the store, and . . .

I was so absorbed in this fantasy of avenging those hurt and murdered by the Zekes who carried their foreparents' legacy of hate in their veins as surely as I carried the strength and perseverance of mine, that I nearly missed the sign. The weather-beaten piece of wood was almost swallowed in the field of ragweed, black-eyed Susans, and Queen Anne's lace: "Miss Hanna Driscoll: 5 mi." I took my first real breath since leaving the store. I could hardly wait to get to Hanna's house. Unfortunately, I'd have to rush the interview in order to get back to Birmingham in time to make my self-imposed ten p.m. deadline. The interview was due on my editor's desk in two days. I'd have to hurry.

The wicked, jugged road divined my thoughts. It began to wind, rise, and dip maniacally. I felt like a june bug on a wet sheet with a mischievous child on either end, shaking the sheet for all its worth. Finally, the road ended. A sign proclaimed that I'd have to walk the remaining two miles, and that "Patience is a virtue." This Hanna had a sick sense of humor.

To romanticizing, homesick Southerners and frigid, fantasizing Northerners, a solitary trek through a pine-studded Southern woods is the closest thing to god's great heaven. They envision an undulating, rich brown earth coquettishly covered with goldenrod stretching as far as the eye can see.

For me, it was hell. I stomped through pastures of fermenting cow dung and plodded over a defiant wench of an earth who threatened to trip me up and reclaim me. All this to interview an old woman who'd never been out of Alabama.

I stooped under an ancient willow tree and suddenly Billie's voice moaned through the woods. *Southern trees bear a strange fruit.* We had run so hard, so determinedly, from this land of murdering ignorance, this land inhabited by the mutant Zekes, that we'd left behind some neces-

sary baggage. What it was, I certainly didn't know. But my editor—himself a runaway from the South—thought this Hanna Driscoll could provide me and my Southern compatriot expatriates with some clues. *The burning flesh, the lolling tongue.*

I just hoped I could get through the interview quickly and catch my flight back to New York, to civilization. At least I'd have some amusing stories to tell my colleagues at the next cocktail party. I smiled. A vine clawed into the skin beneath my left eye, snapping the smile off my face. "Shit!!" I screamed.

Forty-five harrowing minutes later, I emerged sweat-drenched, bee-stung, and burning, from the thicket. My briefcase dangled from my right hand like a forgotten rag doll. I'd long ago relinquished my right pump to a fresh pile of dung, and used the left as a machete, slapping aside tendrils and vines which blocked my progress.

Lifting the shoe over my eyes, I squinted at the hovel about one hundred feet in front of me. Two old Black women sat fanning themselves and drinking deeply from tall jelly glasses. They lowered their heads conspiratorially, then flung them back in conjuring laughter. I walked closer, still mesmerized by their camaraderie, by the necks which pulled tight as drumskins as they drained their glasses, Adam's apples sliding up and down, more graceful than any lover's body I'd ever swum. They flicked small, pink tongues over soft, berry-colored lips, and shook their heads.

"Hello." I grinned foolishly. "I'm Margaret Mays. Is one of you ladies Ms. Driscoll?" That's the last thing I remember before the greedy earth came up and grabbed me.

I awoke to warm brown kitchen smells and the clatter of pans. The sinking sun's rays lighted the bedside clock which read five fifteen, but shadowed the overstuffed armchair, chest of drawers, and other furniture which crowded the neat bedroom. I closed my eyes and floated back to a place I'd left long ago and never visited: my childhood.

Summer was my favorite time of the year, not because I was out of school, but because I got to leave already-beginning- to-sprawl Atlanta for much smaller Valdosta, Georgia. My grandparents lived there, on sixteen acres of land so fertile that my grandmother didn't even have to *hope* it produced.

"All the sweat an blood we colored done put in this here land, she got no choice *but* to be fruitful," she'd declare. Looking up at the woman who towered even over my grandfather, my mouth would drop open in wonder. "Yep, honey. Hang on to this land, cause it holds the memries. The good *and* the bad. Your past. And if ya don't know where ya *come* from, how can ya know where ya *goin*? Humm?"

"Yep," I'd say, as if I understood.

Why had I locked up the memories, as if they were an unwanted,



embarrassing child? Who was looking after the land now? I sighed.

At the end of summer, my grandfather would stomp through the woods, searching for the most potent dandelions. From them, my grandmother would make a viscid brew to ward off that otherwise inevitable winter demon, the common cold.

"Margie," she'd say, "drink this an get under those covers, yonder, an sweat." She'd wrap me up in a bed as deep, soft, and high as Hanna's. Then the tales began. She'd spin those old tales around me as lovingly as she wound precious yarn around her large hands. Then—

"Hi there, Margaret. Feelin better?" Hanna stood beside me, bearing some steaming potion. "Sassyfras tea, honey. Don't you worry none. Just drink it up an rest a spell longer, whiles I finish fixin supper. We'll have plenty time for your interview." She straightened the pillows beneath my head. "Passed out like a shot deer, you did. Common sense oughta told you to take it easy on these burnin hot days. Fall still a few weeks off." A few more pats and an admonishing frown, and she was gone. Turning back, she said, "You look a little puny anyhow. Don't know *what* you city folks eat." Then, under her breath, she added, "Not much, by the looks a you."

I stifled the grin which threatened to grow like the sun over a freshly plowed field.

"Hope you like fresh garden picked collards, venison—shot it myself, you know—cornbread, an garden tomatoes. But of course you will!" she dismissed with a wave of her hand.

Venison. It had been years since I'd last tasted the tender, wild sweet meat. "Yes, ma'am," I said to the empty doorway.

She walked back to the door, legs spread wide and her head cocked to the right. Peering through narrowed eyes with crows feet radiating out almost to her hairline, she challenged, "Where you from, child?"

"Well, New Yo. . ." I stopped short of giving my stock, long-winded explanation, and said, "Atlanta. But my grandparents had a farm in Valdosta. I spent my summers there."

"Well, well, *well*," Hanna moaned, shaking her head. "I got family down Valdosta way, myself. Ain it a small world? Why, we practically kinfolks, chile!" The grin finally broke across my face. This Hanna and I would have more to talk about than I'd imagined. "You can go on an git washed up. Supper's bout ready."

As I wrapped my lips around the first bite of venison—so delicate it lay like a kiss on my tongue—my eyes teared with gratitude and remembrance. So long it had been, but my salivary and olfactory glands recognized the feast. I closed my teeth over the morsel, and I smiled to Hanna, who was watching carefully. She beamed, then dove into one dish, then the other. "Yep, you're from the South, alright. Try the collards," she mumbled, filling her mouth with a forkful of unbelievably

red tomato. I cut some slices onto my plate, the seeds spilling out, scarleting the dark greens.

"Ummm," I moaned in abandon, naked toes curling over the wood floor. "It's been *years* since . . ."

"Yep." She took a long, lithe drink of lemonade, then swallowed. "Y'all leave here thinkin you can forgit all this..." she continued, sweeping her hand over the room and toward the back porch beyond which the land lay. "But, you *can't*." She pounded the table for emphasis. "You're smart, though. Even if you *ain't* got sense enough not to go traipsin through the woods in the dead of summer. *You* came back. Yeah, you're smart. Pass the cornbread, please."

I was so confused, but I knew all along that there was something inevitable about my coming back South. The truth was in the old woman strong and sure enough to fell a deer, strong enough to remain in the South. It was in me, brave enough to leave and come back. Even if only for a while. It was in the food, springing up out of the earth as relentlessly as our people, themselves.

I inhaled, and my hunger leapt again. I refilled my plate, then sliced a couple choice pieces of venison for Hanna.

Finally, I pushed back from the nearly empty table. I was sated. In a way that no amount of quiche and salad or steak tartar could ever have done. Hanna passed me a broomstick twig and said, "Well, Margaret, I reckon you'll be here for quite a spell. Yep . . . it's gonna be—"

"No; I'm sorry, Ms. Driscoll. I've got to get back tonight."

"Well, chile. You can call me Hanna." And she burst out laughing. I sat up straighter. Had I said something funny? "Just plain Hanna. That's me." She tried to cover her guffaw by clearing her throat. Then I laughed, too. How could I call her Ms. Driscoll after sharing that repast. Old habits die hard, I mused. "It's gonna rain cats and dogs tonight, honey. An that ole road? Pshaw. Even ole Noah wouldn't be able to travel it. Anyhow, how d'you expec to find your way back through them trees?"

I smiled generously. Hanna was kind, incredible, but obviously dotty. There wasn't a cloud in the sky. So, about five minutes later, when the first pelting sheet of rain pinged against the tin roof, I was more than a little surprised. Now, it was Hanna's turn to smile.

"I got a little help with the predictin," she admitted, placing her weathered, warm hand on top of my manicured one. "Ole Arthur Eyetis been actin up on me like nobody's business. But I tole you we'd have plenty time for that interview, didn't I?"



## Purple Garlic

I miss you yes when I see purple  
and white garlic cloves when I take knife  
in hand to peel and slice and mince I remember  
the hot day you showed me how patient  
and amazed that I was a woman over  
thirty years old and had never cooked garlic

I miss you yes when I hold my one kitchen knife  
ready to cut up onions shallots leeks what I remember  
from our years is in slices trimmed moments and patient  
hours around stoves trips to the grocery dishes full to over  
flowing with food even alone I always add garlic  
now and see you sometimes by my sink wearing that purple

faded shirt I miss you best when I remember  
our cooking our dinner parties easy talk the patient  
measured moments waiting for a pie to set I eat left over  
salad spaghetti gnaw on yesterday's garlic  
bread and want to stop at this the sky grows purple  
dark orange jagged pink a sharp knife

cuts clean cuts quick best you said my hands practiced & patient  
still want to pare away the bad spots we were over  
each other suddenly cool & sure raw wild garlic  
and dandelions grew up fast in the side yard our purple  
bruises faded while we moved furniture you gave me the good knife  
I stay busy buy books try new recipes still remember  
still find I miss you when I almost lie outloud and stop over  
come with recounting the lies I told you garlic  
flavoured spicy and smooth you knew all along said purple  
is a colour of healing as though that would help put down your knife  
put down a handful of carrots glanced shrugged I remember  
I was in a hurry for some reason for some reason you were patient  
for some reason this all comes back to me at the first taste of garlic  
comes back whole uncut a bulb with little roots purple  
around the top I'm less apt to slip these days find knife  
suddenly cutting flesh of other hand I'm more apt to remember  
the words without mincing them bruised I'm more patient  
perhaps I miss you yes when I say something hard something true  
to someone else I miss you and this is not over

Sawnie Morris

## Through Daylight

(for Sally)

In the morning, between Albuquerque  
and Socorro, at some just beginning hour,  
when the blue-purple mesa takes on shapes  
like the moon, I am riding in my truck,  
my mind up against the impossible,  
when the hawk slams against my windshield.

A hawk, rising up off the ground and  
turning into the glass unexpectedly.  
A little hawk, and  
I cannot tell if it is immature,  
or only small.

Bird who can see far.  
Predator, with an eye for detail.  
Bird that circles, in the early hours  
hits the shield between my body  
and the world,  
slams its body, with the full force  
of unrestrained flight, into the  
force of my own flight, at  
sixty miles per hour,  
in another direction.

My black hair flies out from  
behind my round head like a storm,  
my white polished teeth,  
my small brown eyes,  
my hands weathered with the  
creases of the desert and black  
earth of a plowed field,  
gripping the wheel as I drive  
into the face of the hawk, that has risen  
and come to meet me.

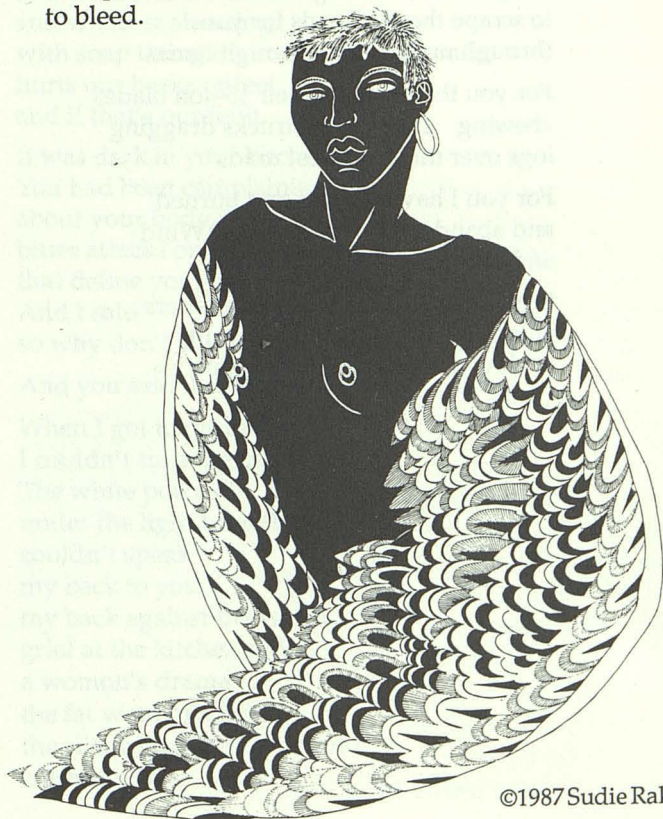
Who suffers,  
the burst of energy into form  
like an eggshell dropped in haste,  
like a bird who rose off the



warm skin of the pavement before  
me, with perfect grace.

The breaking up of bones, the  
bashing flat of a small skull,  
the small, or only immature  
body left behind me on the road,  
for which I do not stop, keep  
no souvenir, no feather,  
claim nothing.

I fly on through daylight.  
Leave the desert behind.  
And in the cool dark, behind  
the drawn curtains of the city,  
I lie down between pale sheets,  
cramped swollen  
to bleed.



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## My Heart is a Forest

Sitka spruce and ironwood  
Ramu River meranti for plywood  
mahogany veneer from the Ivory Coast

All measured for maximum yield  
all weighed on the scales of time between  
systole and diastole

For you I have brought in bulldozers  
to scrape the skidroads for you  
through underbrush through lianas

For you the chippers their 15-ton blades  
chewing For you the trucks dragging  
logs over muddy forest roads

For you I have slashed and burned  
and abandoned the clearings Wind  
and rain carry the ashes away

Eroded and scarred the heart falters  
at last Nothing remains but silt  
to slow the dark arterial stream



## the real fat womon poems

### I

I went to get a glass of water  
and was overtaken by grief  
grief at the kitchen sink  
womyn's grief  
for the life that vanishes  
hot water and grease  
for the hundred fears  
about what we eat  
and what size we are  
and whether standing,  
with soap lining the creases of our hands,  
hurts our backs or feet  
and if that's our fault.

It was dark in your kitchen.  
You had been complaining  
about your body,  
bitter attacks on the new swells  
that define your belly and hips.  
And I said  
so why don't you hack yourself to pieces?

And you said I wish I could.

When I got to the sink  
I couldn't turn the faucet on.  
The white porcelain  
under the light from the yard  
couldn't speak  
my back to you  
my back against the world  
grief at the kitchen sink  
a womon's drama  
the fat womyn's fight  
the silence we were born into  
catching us.

## II

Will the real fat woman please stand up?  
We want to take a good look at you.  
Don't you trust us to look?  
What is it you think will come to focus,  
where do you think we'll begin?  
With your double chin, the roundness of your cheeks,  
the width of your upper arms—there  
does the flesh ripple, or are they full?  
Do they bulge, are they smooth?  
Where are your stretch marks?  
Did you gain weight fast or slow?  
Do you eat a lot at once or  
do you eat a little all day long?  
We all know a fat woman is  
what she eats.  
Can we watch you eating?  
You must be hiding something  
in your flesh,  
is it rage or sex?  
C'mon, we're your friends,  
we just care about you and we want to see  
that ass, those hips, your thunder thighs,  
calves like trees—  
When was the last time  
you went out in shorts or a bathing suit?  
A bathing suit now,  
let's see how you look in that  
where the fabric hugs the expanse of your stomach  
the rolls at your waist  
the fat that collects in pockets on your upper back.  
What kind of stomach do you have?  
High and round, or does it slip, slowly,  
towards your knees, do your nipples  
scratch the top of your pants?  
Do your pants fit?  
When your clothes are too tight  
do you feel like you're  
exploding out of them  
into the street  
and all you want to do is  
get out of sight?



### III

Asshole, asshole,  
I can answer for myself,  
you don't know anything  
You ask these questions  
as if I were an interesting specimen  
as if I wasn't you  
Who did this to us?  
And what makes you think  
I would ever trust you?

### IV

There is being fat,  
and there is eating.  
There is eating, and  
then there's the food.  
There is fat and  
there is aging  
There is aging  
and there is disability.  
None of these things  
are the same things  
though they are used,  
often, interchangeably.  
Who did that?  
Who did that to us?  
And with each of these words  
is the word: ugly.  
Even with the word  
eating, the word ugly is paired  
by womyn  
in North America  
in the late 20th century.

### V

Now there are politics  
for these things.  
Unpopular politics,  
but there are some.

We live in a country  
that consumes,  
that needs consumption  
to continue consuming,  
and what gets consumed  
are the resources and the lives  
of dark skinned and poor people,  
the lives of womyn in sweatshops,  
of womyn carrying rocks on their heads  
in India to build American hotels.

We saw a lot of newsreels in the 60s.  
Some of us stopped watching the news  
but the news doesn't change.

Even if I choose carefully,  
don't want my "major purchases"  
to contribute to the evil  
done to people in Soweto,  
some woman in a factory  
compromised her eyes or her lungs  
her back or her labor  
for my computer  
for your vcr  
for the stereo, hell, for the music.

When did we let ownership  
purchase our analysis?  
Consider it: they don't have to buy us out  
we pay them.

It would be nice to have a target  
an easy simple target who could take  
some of this unease  
about our consumerism.

The fat woman, she'd do.  
She moves slow, and she's wide.  
It's her who starves children  
across the globe  
it is her hideous appetite  
that makes us ashamed to be Americans.  
All those fat cats living off the fat of the land  
we don't have access to,  
the fat cats who are  
lean men in limousines.



We call them fat  
because we have been taught  
that fat means eating  
means consuming  
means taking the rights to what is not yours  
and these things which are not the same things  
become the fat woman's fault  
it's a shame she's so out of control.

We hope she stays indoors.

## VI

Oh, those politics  
I thought you were going to talk  
about the other stuff.

What other stuff?

You know, the stuff about the diet industry  
and the stuff about women  
hating ourselves  
wanting to hack off parts of our bodies  
sew our mouths shut  
pull out our intestines  
suck the fat with syringes  
wrap ourselves in constricting plastics  
take drugs that make our hearts race  
race away from us.

## VII

In the zoo they have signs  
polar bears may weigh up to half a ton.  
A girl is reading the sign out loud.  
"Wow!" she says.

We are standing there admiring the polar bear  
who is doing back flips in her pool.

If they stuck a sign on the human race  
and said members of this species  
occasionally reach a weight of 1,000 pounds  
but weights in the range of 1-400 are most common  
would that help?

## VIII

Saturday afternoon, doing errands,  
I catch pieces of a radio speech  
on power relations.  
A woman is talking about  
the pleasures of mutuality,  
not power over, but power with.  
How we might better express power to our benefit  
by touching and being touched  
hugging and being hugged  
feeding and being fed.

On the radio she said  
it is a good and mutual pleasure  
to feed and be fed.

I catch my breath.  
Is it still possible  
to transmute  
the power relations  
around eating  
so that there is  
mutual pleasure left?

## IX

I am a fat woman  
I can speak for myself  
but what would I say to you?

Why do I think I need  
to tell you how much  
sugar, how much meat  
I eat in a day, in a year?  
Why do I think I need  
to tell you how often I go swimming  
or how, if my feet hurt,  
it's a problem anyone can have,  
fat or thin, why  
do I want to tell you  
the statistics about dieting  
the fact that it's thin people  
who suffer most from heart disease.



And why do I think  
no matter what I tell you  
you will you think Im lying.

Unless I tell you I spend all my time  
eating chocolate cake in front of the tv.  
That I eat three chocolate cakes a day  
and two six packs of coke  
in between my six meals  
and I get up in the middle of the night  
to eat pancakes.

You'd believe that, wouldn't you?  
And I remember  
when they characterized  
fat womyn as dumb.

X

I am a lucky fat woman.  
If I lie in bed and have a fantasy  
about eating six chocolate cakes  
of being fed six chocolate cakes  
by six fat womyn  
who are admiring my six new rolls of flesh  
I can get pleasure from my fantasy  
and know that it's resistance  
to this ridiculous persistence of shame  
thrown at me.  
I can get up and go about my business  
without too much pain,  
struggle with how I eat like every woman I know—  
does wheat give you arthritis,  
do the chemicals they inject into apples  
give us cancer in our apple juice?  
How do I balance my years of anger and deprivation  
with my desire to eat what's "good for me"?  
How do I know, when they say it's good,  
it isn't this year's medical fashion hoax,  
another way to hate fat womyn?  
I like to eat.  
I like to feed other womyn  
and be fed  
when I can bear that intimacy.

I like intimacy when I can bear it —  
when I can trust you.

I have appetites in my mind  
that I cannot express in my body  
at least not yet,  
I work on it.

But I hear what's been said  
when I look in the mirror  
and I'll be honest  
I have the words fat and ugly  
paired in me.

The pairing of the words  
makes me turn away faster  
than what I actually see.

I touch myself and I  
feel good beneath my hands  
Sometimes I have lovers sometimes  
they enjoy my body and enjoy me  
enjoying theirs.

When I don't have lovers  
I feel good beneath my hands.

This makes me a very lucky fat woman.  
If I believe the evidence,  
the testimony of other fat women,  
it makes me an extraordinary fat woman  
and that's a tragedy.

## XI

A very thin woman, disabled,  
tells me how she spent a day crying  
because she was afraid to get  
on cross country skis  
afraid of her own fragility,  
afraid to be physical in the world.  
She tells me because I would understand  
and I do.

I know women who are fat who vomit.  
I know women who are thin who vomit.

Women close to me hate their bodies,  
women who know everything in this poem already



hate their bodies.

Womyn hate our bodies.

We have been working for justice, out of love,  
in the different ways we understand it,  
for years, in a hundred movements.

We have been going to twenty therapies  
bodyworkers and twelve-step groups—

And remember we're lesbians  
we lust for one another in our good moments  
we tickle and rub

and we hate our bodies

What keeps you from understanding  
what you do to me?

What did they pay you to do this to yourself?

Who does this to us?

Where is our courage?

And what happened to our resistance  
to our simple stubbornness  
not to let our enemy win  
not to let our enemy win inside us.

Susan Stinson

## The Lesson

The white girl wakes up with a charley horse.  
It's a suburb, but she's naked.  
She rubs her fist against the knot,  
then eats an english muffin.

It's the first day of school.  
She gets a blue dittoed handout.  
Her vocabulary words are:  
sparklers, gumballs, Pez,  
Tampax, and Judy Garland.

She square dances in gym class.  
Down come her hips, not to blame them,  
but bells rings when she shakes them.  
She doesn't have to shake her breasts  
to make them an issue.

In science, her throat hurts.  
There's nothing she can ask.  
The filmstrip starts with  
"clean, safe energy."

The voice doesn't say, "bodies in the water tanks,"  
or, "women with their skin in flaps,  
their hair straight up,  
walking in the street."

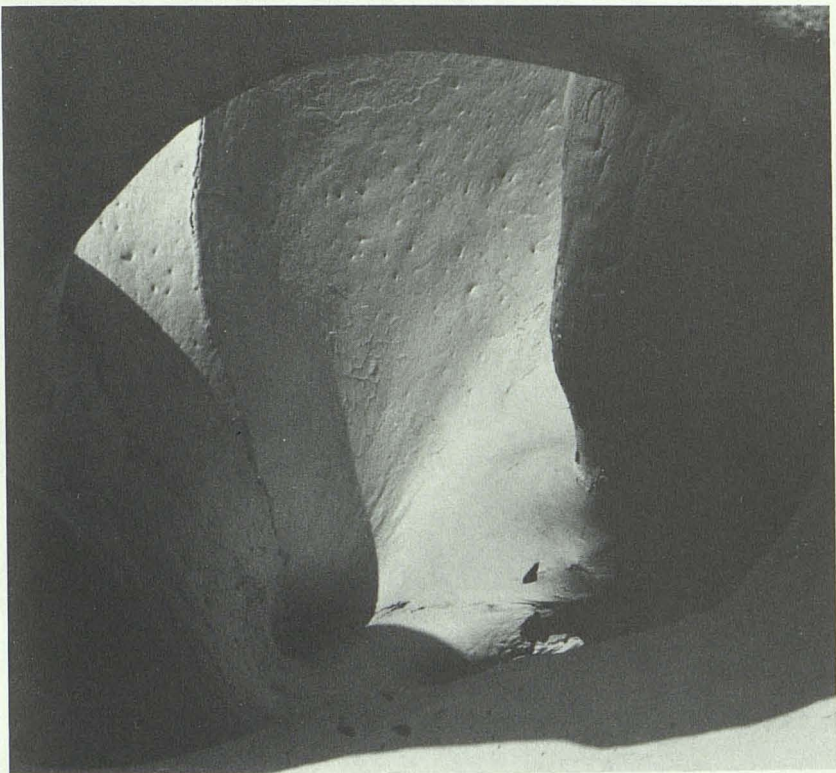
They are talking about  
how blood is like saltwater.

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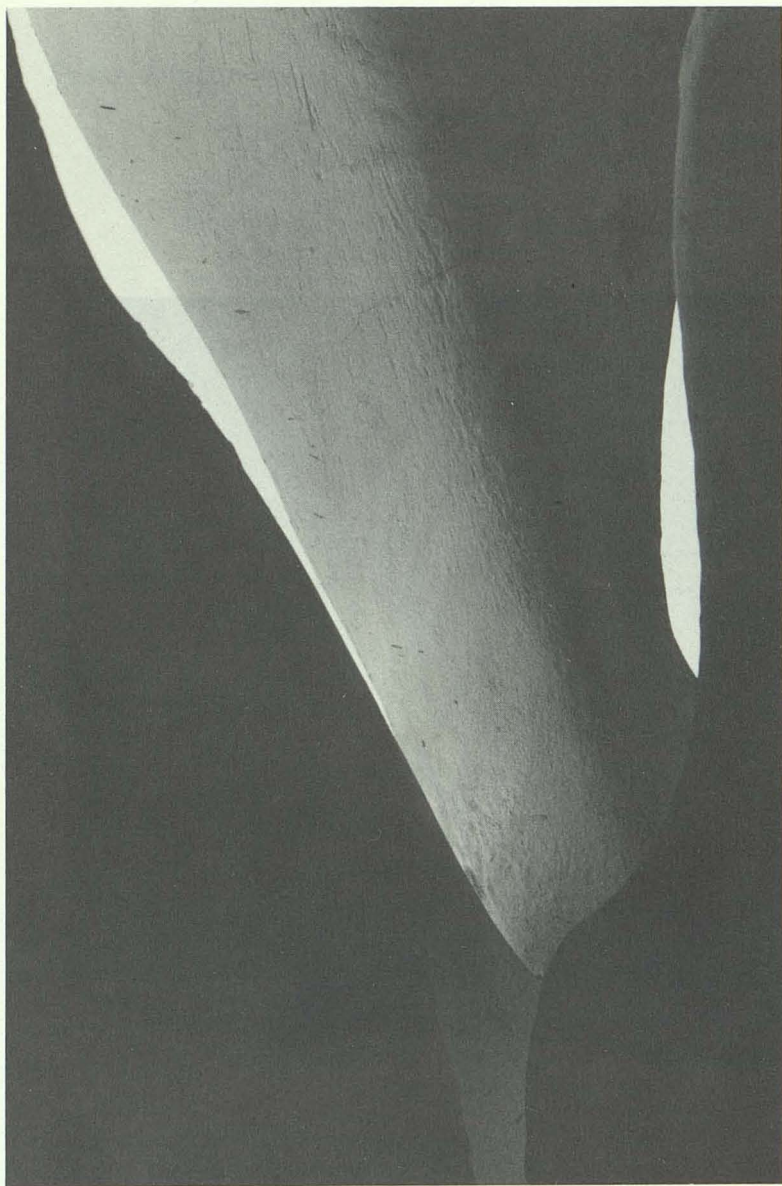
## The Cool Reticence of Privilege Covering Its Ass

Well, yes.  
It could be that.





*Blue Whale Skeleton '86*  
Anita Schriver



*Blue Whale Skeleton '86*  
Anita Schriver



## Camp Stories

### THE FIRST

The summer I was twelve, my Girl Scout leader tried to drown me. Well, I don't think she was actually trying. But her cavalier notion of swimming instruction came very close to accomplishing it. This all happened at Scout camp in Minnesota. It probably wouldn't have, except in the magic year of 1930 my Scout leader was the last of that kind of racy, casually self-assured sort of women just far enough over the edge of being young to be regarded as daringly worldly; maybe touchingly bitter. It was a class advantage that would have otherwise left her rather cheap and overlooked.

Mrs. Larson, that social title a fact of her status I found impossible to reconcile with her image and thus set arbitrarily aside, utilized a voice called "deep" in a woman and made arresting by a trace of huskiness acquired from smoking too many Chesterfield cigarettes straight out of flat white and black and yellow tins of 50. It was a voice meant to be heard and felt that insinuated itself into all the unexposed responses churning half-formed in my twelve-year-old libido.

Mrs. Larson also drove a pure white Kissel roadster; a car of elaborate sporty elegance slung so low that only her sure élan made it possible to negotiate the single, deep-rutted road into camp.

One bright intoxicating morning, as luck and unrevealed design would have it, she chose me to drive with her to a sort of general store on the opposite side of the lake where we would ostensibly pick up necessary supplies for camp. Like cigarettes, a case of Canadian Club Soda and a large heavy brown paper sack containing four bottles of bootleg gin which the man from the store stowed with anxious solicitude and annoying gallantry behind the driver's seat.

On that day, I sank down beside Mrs. Larson into the pure white Kissel roadster. The soft leather seats warm in the Minnesota sun, smelling of saddle soap and Coty perfume, the sudden sulphurous flash of a struck match, cigarette smoke indolent in the sunshine; all mingled in a musk redolent of her alone. I became more drunken with every moment as she drove with enviable arrogance, and the sunlight flickered a shower of gold coins ahead of her path through the pale green poplar trees. The scent of deep green balsam pitch streamed like honey on the breeze, and the white paper birch trees were crisply shadowed like the linen driving jacket she wore and the white silk scarf wrapped and tied around her short black hair.

When she smiled a dashing red-limned smile and handed me her cigarette to hold while she pulled on first one and then the other creamy

capelike glove, I just held my breath and crawled inside of them to share the touch of both her lovely, lean, tanned hands. I could have died blissfully then. Drowning was another matter, however.

How could I refuse when at afternoon swim she said, "Just hold onto me and we'll swim out to the raft and then I'll let you go and you'll see how easy it is." Well, it wasn't. I drank a lot of the lake and finally got back to shore in a canoe with one of the counselors. Of course, I forgave Mrs. Larson.

I swim very well now, but she reminds me that few of us are ever born at the right time.

## THE SECOND

The summer I was fifteen, I fell in love with my Girl Scout leader. The same one who nearly drowned me when I was twelve. Or at least I thought it was my Scout leader I was falling love with. The two experiences, being drowned and falling in love, were astonishingly similar since they both involved me in situations where life is considered to be writ large.

At twelve and upon the point of just possibly being drowned, the pageant of my years was neither vast nor enviably exotic; a shoot-and-chase marbles championship of the fifth grade; beating up Billy Wharton when he tried to show me his dumb dick; in sixth grade getting my hair cut like Tarzan of the Apes. With little more than that to flash before my eyes, drowning lacked romantic appeal.

So, throughout most of that fifteenth summer, in resigned and soulful secrecy, I bathed Mrs. Larson in the fevered glow of my emotion. A landscape imagined in languid *fin de siècle* detail, gracing me with world weariness and a mantle of casual disillusionment absolutely essential to true maturity which, fortunately for her, largely escaped her notice. It found instead a focus far more appropriate and rich with abrupt enlightenment.

That summer was my fourth at Scout camp; one more and I would be a Junior Counselor. That summer was also the second I spent with Jeanne-Marie LeBrecque. She was my best friend at camp. She was a year and a half older and she was French; the real thing. She had actually been born in Paris. Her mother was a concert pianist who had remarried when Jeanne-Marie was eleven. Her step-father worked for Agfafilm which, she told me, was sort of the Eastman Kodak Company of Germany. By 1933, he didn't much like what was going on in Germany. He had his own reasons, according to Jeanne-Marie, which were okay for him, but she didn't much share them. Because of them, he had persuaded her mother to send Jeanne-Marie to live with some relatives of his in Minnea-



polis. She hated it, really, and she hated the relatives even more. Although she was fair enough to admit it was hardly their fault. But she wasn't ready to admit it to them. I think she joined the Scouts and came to camp to escape them.

Nobody at camp liked her too much. She was dark and beautiful in a surly, superior sort of way that I found went rather well with my attempts at ennui. When she attached herself to me, I didn't mind at all because her bristling foreignness made me feel a little less like a fake.

Besides, she read a whole lot. Things I had at first found through suggestively vague and puzzling references in other reading. Things I had bird-dogged for hours and finally flushed out of the cover of endless card files obscured in the thickets of the Minneapolis public library. A lot of the time, my searches would run down fading paths that ended nowhere, or that veered off into things like Natalie Barney being ambiguously transformed into a brokerage house in New York with international connections, and none whatever with her. For all of that, I was pretty sure there was a whole lot more than loneliness to draw out of the well.

At first, Jeanne-Marie would just smile in a half-secret, condescending way when I told her about things like I guessed my wanting to Junior Camp Counselor next year was not working too well with how I was beginning to feel about helping little old women across streets and running useful errands for them. I wanted to help more than ever, but the women were suddenly getting younger and certainly didn't need that kind of attention. Whether there would ever be merit badges for what I had in mind, however vaguely, Jeanne-Marie assured me was doubtful.

One terribly hot afternoon, all of us in camp were allowed to spend rest hour out of doors instead of confined to our bunks in assigned cabins which was the usual stricture. Obviously, during that time, we were supposed to rest. Which meant sleep, or just staring at the roof of the cabin in an agony of compressed fitfulness, because reading or conversation was deemed inimical to rest and so, off-limits. Most of us sneaked candy bars, made slingshots out of rubber bands and blasted wads of tinfoil out of gum wrappers at those pious enough to be lying in obedient repose, hands penitently folded on their breasts. Or we sent notes of a conspiratorial nature from bunk to bunk through a chain of reliable hands. These usually had to do with speculation about Vera Utley's menstrual periods, which seemed as endless as her satisfied talk about them.

But Jeanne-Marie at rest hour would lie in her bunk and read, with challenging arrogance, poetry in French. All of her books were in French, and since none of the counselors could read French and none of her books had pictures, they didn't have a clue. So they left her alone. If anyone had thought of taking them away from her out of prudence, suspicion, or their own duplicitous curiosity, I doubt if they'd have gotten away with

it. So, on that particular afternoon, Jeanne-Marie took one of her books out of the bottom of her dufflebag and while everyone else in our cabin went down to the lake shore, we walked off together to a small grove of birch and poplar trees across the softball diamond.

There was a little clearing among the trees, covered with green sorrel and white clover, and tiny pink and yellow flowers Scouts are supposed to know the names of and I didn't. Jeanne-Marie flung herself down, stretched out on her back, and turned her head and looked moodily at me for a long moment as I sat cross-legged beside her. Then she put her arm across her eyes, the book held loosely in her fingers. In the silence, I brushed the clover with my hand, looking for a four-leaf without finding one. I wondered if she wanted to talk about something. Not because she was silent; Jeanne-Marie was given to long silences she never felt obliged to explain, and I had learned not to ask her to. I just felt she had something on her mind.

"What are you going to do? Just lie there and read that book?"

Without moving her arm away from her eyes, she smiled just a little, the corners of her mouth moving in a way I'd not noticed before.

"What would you do if I did? Go off someplace and do something forbidden and athletic?"

"No, of course not."

"You'd rather stay here and do something forbidden."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"That I would rather you stayed." Jeanne-Marie opened the small yellow paper book and began to read to me. She read in French and I didn't know one word of it, but I felt I understood it all.

"Do you know what that means?" she asked.

"You know I don't."

"Which means you think you do, doesn't it?" Jeanne-Marie turned the book over, folded open on her chest and clasped her hands behind her head. She raised her chin and squinted through the leaves overhead. Like she was waiting for me to do something with my discomfort.

"Well, I do," I bluffed. "I mean I certainly understand some of it."

Jeanne-Marie put the book aside and sat up. She pulled a blossom from the clover and separated it carefully with her fingers and began to suck the sweet nectar out between her teeth.

"If you do, why do you have this stupid crush on Larson?"

"Well, that's why I do, isn't it?" I had no idea why I said that. It just came. "Anyway, I don't. All I ever said is I think she's pretty neat. And she's awfully nice looking, for your information."

"Her looks are *passé*." Jeanne-Marie tossed the wilted clover blossom aside. "Which is something else you should know. For your information. Besides, she makes me sick, running around in boots and riding breeches



all day. With that scarf."

"What's wrong with that?" As if I didn't know. People just didn't go riding and then sit around in smelly riding clothes hoping it created the right effect. Nor did they wear them to give the impression they were into all that when they were not.

"It's tacky," Jeanne-Marie said. "That's what's wrong with it. She's not Vita West, after all."

"Who?"

"Vita West. Virginia Woolf's lover." Jeanne-Marie smiled at me, watching me intently, waiting while I bit into a sorrel leaf and the sudden crisp, sweet and sour taste lingered while I tried to think of what to say. No, Mrs. Larson wasn't Vita West. Nor anything else much.

"What you were reading just now. What is it?"

"Something from René Vivienne. *A Woman Discovered Me.*"

"It sounds so lovely. I mean the way you read it."

"Actually, it isn't. René Vivienne led a wretched life. What there was of it."

"I guess I mean it sounds so lovely to be discovered by a woman."

"It is. That's why you deserve something better than Larson."

Jeanne-Marie had graciously given me a little breathing room with that remark. She ran her hands through her tangled dark hair and assumed at least some of her more usual air of casual boredom.

Relieved, I said, "That sounds like stuff my mother says." Jeanne-Marie raised an eyebrow at that, and I stumbled on in an imagined sophistication. "'You should have friends your own age, dear.'"

"One's peers are only for sharing ignorance."

"Is that what you think of me?"

"There *are* exceptions. But I do think it is rather true. What can you possibly learn from them?"

"I'm learning a great deal from you."

"I'm only giving you names for what you already know."

"I guess I can't imagine anyone having to do that for you."

"There's always someone who does. That and more."

"So there was someone for you."

"There is now."

I just sat there without saying anything and sucked in a long breath of fragrant, warm summer air. Everything I knew about how I felt, all the disparate bits and pieces I had read about fell into marvelous shape like the bright, hesitant patterns in a kaleidoscope. The perfect design was revealed, and I stopped turning the tube against my eye, against my mind, satisfied. Wanting to know more, yet not ready to turn again to the

next pattern where I wanted Jeanne-Marie to be standing; where her voice was coming from.

"I would never tell anyone but you, Jessi. Her name, I mean. But I think you might know who she is. Frances Cash." Yes, I did. I had seen her picture in the paper. I always found myself looking at pictures of women like that; finding them so easily. Some sort of story about brilliant law students at Minnesota. Standing there, leaning against her golf bag, one ankle crossed over the other, Frances Cash looked like she could have been Gary Cooper's twin sister. "She came to dinner at the house because my uncle was trying to get her to join his law firm."

"Is she going to do that?"

"No. Fran says she doesn't want to practice that kind of law. Protecting corporations and all that. She wants to protect people; women especially, and getting laws changed that don't. You've a lot of those in this country, too." Jeanne-Marie looked at me and I hoped I didn't look too guilty, as though everything wrong with this country was something I was about to defend. Or had to.

"Is she a good lawyer?" Which was scarcely what I wanted to ask.

"I think she is. Fran likes to say she'll have to be if we go on together much longer. But I keep telling her I'll be eighteen so soon she doesn't need to worry about it."

"Worry about what?"

Jeanne-Marie unwound herself from where she was sitting and was on her knees close in front of me, her back very straight. She put her hand on the back of my neck, her fingers curling, moving just a little into my hair still cut and straggling like Tarzan of the Apes. Her eyes were more clear and more green than I had ever seen them.

"About sleeping with me, that's what. About making love. Jessi, dummy, please grow up." And she kissed me. Deep. Inside me. "It really isn't forbidden. When you read the right sorts of books." She laughed and kissed me again, as lightly as the touch of her laughter. "I think this rest hour is about over, and I don't want to hear anybody blowing that whistle on us. Come on."



Karen J. Hall

## Misdemeanor

for Radclyffe Hall (1886-1943)

Long after I have died  
misunderstood and alone,  
long after my work  
has gone out of print,  
long after my body  
has fallen in on itself,  
my writing will live  
on a shelf, forgotten.  
A young woman  
hiding in study  
will find a dust-covered  
book with the last due date  
thirty-eight years old.  
Intrigued by the title,  
by my picture on the frontispiece  
and by the story I have left for her,  
she will sign it out,  
take it home to share  
with her lover, her friends.  
And though she may be  
an honest young woman,  
let this be the first book she steals.

Meredith Rose

## For a Limited Time

An old man lies on the grass. He's not drunk or infirm, he's just trying to have the best edged lawn in town. So he lies there every weekend, on his side, in his khaki pants and plaid shirt and fisherman's cap with his clippers in one hand and a basket in the other so he can deposit his grass droppings in a convenient place. By the end of the summer he should have no lawn left, just the gray dusty dirt that settles under the green blades.

This wasn't the worst summer of my life, only the strangest. I never had enough nerve to ask the man why he did it, why he worked so hard at destroying his own lawn, and I bit another nail as I walked past his house and tried not to stare.

That was also the summer when I met the woman who had moved into the red brick house behind me. When my face flushed hot as the July sun as she called me over to her backyard to help her lift something, but she called, "boy," not "girl," and I had to say my name loud and two times over before she apologized and said, "You can't tell nothing from nothing these days." I helped her every now and then when she called my name, but the fondness I expected to develop was lost in my resentment.

This was the summer when everyone vowed to do something, but only a handful of people actually did. When the popular attitude was to be positive and the out of character response was despair. Bad wasn't "in." Apathy wasn't even "in." Good was. But I was immersed in a silent fear, and without trying, I avoided all of these categories.

"No one's paranoid *these days*," my sister said as we ate lunch together one afternoon. "What do *you* have to worry about?" But then paranoia for her arrived only in the mail in the form of forgotten credit card charges or temptations to purchase the entire works of Beethoven.

I knew what her response would be before I even told her all of my current perceptions. She was a good sounding board, but always said "walk" when I was shouting "run." I appreciated her pragmatism and left our talks filled with the urge to feel better. Right now I was screaming "dig" while she was whispering "roll." A roll would have been a relief. I imagined a gently sloping hill covered with clover and wild blue phlox. Tall grass blew in the warm breeze. I lay down on my side on the top of this hill and pushed myself off. Before long I was at the bottom, a little dizzy and out of line, but farther along. You already know what happens when you try to dig your way somewhere, dirty fingernails are the least of the effort.

But this feeling I had, this fear, was something my sister couldn't



understand. It wasn't that she was insensitive, but only that her approach was different than mine. For her, in order to feel something it had to sound nice to begin with. I remember one time we were having one of our few discussions about sex and she said if the word "masturbation" didn't sound so awful she'd probably do it more often. We were different, but she tried to help in her own way.

Part of what made this summer so strange was my location. It seemed as if I was living in a foreign country. This made no sense because I had been born and raised an American. Except for an ethnic identity that placed me in a three percentile category and a sexuality that removed me from around ninety percent of the population, there was no reason to feel on edge.

My friend, Sandy, said she had the answer to my feeling of alienation. All I had to do was buy a plane ticket and go to some strange land. Let me see for myself what was foreign and what was home. She brings this up as we are lying in bed, the type of Saturday morning when two women are naked and taking the time to talk to each other. A piece of morning sunlight rests on her shoulder as she props herself up on one elbow. Her bangs are masking her eyes. One of them is brown like her hair, the other green, shades lighter than the old man's lawn. I see myself in her iris and regret that I don't feel like kissing her.

Instead, I tell her about the man and his lawn, how he's out there every weekend, destroying his beautiful carpet of grass.

"This is what's making you upset?"

"I suppose there should be more," I answer.

"How about this," and Sandy offers me her theory on the Big Bang. "There was this world before us made up of all the same stuff this earth is made of—trees and rocks and water and stuff. All different types of societies lived on this planet with their own systems of government. But it was all basically the same as now—fighting, pollution, nuclear doo-dahs. So one day a big war started. Bang, the world was blown up. Poof, it was gone, but that big bang was the beginning of our present life cycle. This is going to happen forever and ever. Life based on death on the primary level."

I told her I felt much better after hearing this and then we did kiss and I had no regrets.

I was working that summer, trying to save up money to see how high the number could go on the piece of paper the bank sent me every month. It was a new job. I could never keep the old ones because their oldness would creep up on me and then it would be time to change. Also, I never really knew what I wanted to do so I kept trying different things. I knew what I wanted to *be* when I grew up, but not what to *do*. I wanted to be healthy. In this way, my career choices were limited. There was that space on the resume, after the heading "Education," where I was sup-

posed to say what my goals were, my aspirations. I would tuck "healthy" right in that space and there weren't many positions available.

This job wasn't so bad. Someone paid me to collect money at the toll bridge. I wore a khaki colored uniform with an ominous looking hat placed on my head. The brim was shiny black patent leather with fancy silver braid thrown across it. I worked Tuesday through Saturday. Every week I'd get a different eight hour shift. During the early part of the summer something vaguely familiar and uncomfortably odd happened. It was near the end of my shift, around three a.m. and I was trying to concentrate on my work. I had to. I just couldn't sit there and hand out change. Always I was watching for some drunk driver to plow into the toll booth or a speed demon who would try to zoom by without paying and run over the little wooden crossing gate. But three a.m. was a slow time. I was thinking about that old man and wondering if he knew he was ruining his lawn or if he thought he was enhancing it. A car pulled in and I handed the driver his change and he said, "Wait a minute, son, I gave you a ten." I didn't know what to do. I didn't know if I should tell him I was really a daughter or ignore his mistake and spare both of us the embarrassment. I felt slandered. I handed him some more money and glared. He looked at me for two extra seconds and drove off. I wasn't sure if he saw what he expected to see or if my hair was too short.

"You're too gray," Sandy said. We were in bed again. This was the one place, where in a physical way, we fully understood each other. Our bodies spoke the truth. Sandy thought this understanding extended equally as far into our psyches, but she was wrong. She had just finished proving that I really was a woman and all those people out there were mistaken. "You're much too subtle for this culture. Everything in this country is predicated on the obvious. Obvious is 'in.' Subtle is 'out' and you're too fuzzy around the edges."

"I'm not well defined," I suggested.

"Let's just say you're veiled and whatever remains veiled is tossed out as not being black or white. In this country, gray is against the law. It's not like some other places I've heard about where gray is a national pastime. There are countries where people engage in gray to the point of chaos and that is still regarded as an acceptable social order, but this is not that place."

My sister agreed that I was too gray, but again she missed the point. She insisted we go shopping together and she would help me find the right thing to wear — bold, brave colors that brought out the real me. Bold is "in" she told me.

"I don't want to be 'in.'"

"It's just an expression," she said as she handed me something in day-glo orange to go with the neon green shirt I had just purchased.

Later that evening I got dressed up in my new clothes and went over to Sandy's house. We were going out to see a foreign film.



Since I couldn't leave the country, she thought this would be the next best thing. All through the movie she kept nudging me when important scenes flickered on the screen. Afterwards we went out for coffee and doughnuts.

"Did you see how they drank their coffee out of a bowl? Would you want to do that? And all those men wearing white socks and smart black shoes and driving motor scooters all over the place. That's what it means to live in a foreign country."

"What about the women that walked arm-in-arm on the sidewalks in the middle of the day?" I asked.

"They have to walk like that so as to appear unavailable."

"But didn't they seem to enjoy life, get the most out of it?"

"You can do that here. We've got baseball and free speech and gay rights. Do you think those women could walk down the street like that if they were queer? Hell no."

"We can do that here?"

"If we wanted to, in certain cities, maybe not this one."

I took her hand and brought it to my lips but she pulled away and said, "What's wrong with baseball and free speech?"

On the way home I told her I wanted to pick up some art supplies, so we stopped by the grocery store. I bought a can of soda, a chicken pot pie and a box of those little paper towels that stay damp forever as long as you don't open the package. The next day I poured the soda in a glass with some rum and drank it. The cats ate the chicken pot pie. I emptied all the packets out of the box of paper towels. I cut a hole in each one of them large enough for my finger to fit inside. Next I marked the date on the outside of the packages and set them on the kitchen table. I planned to test the dampness of the contents and see how long it took for the little paper towels to dry out. Then I glued all the containers to a wooden board and painted on it "Offer Good For A Limited Time Only." This was to be my new morning prayer. Each day when I woke up and went into the kitchen I would know what the boundaries were.

Throughout that strange summer my limits expanded. At first they were confined to the kitchen, but as the weeks went by the lines became jagged and stretched. On television, in the grocery stores and gas stations offers were being made for a limited time only. I was able to travel more freely throughout the city and know that I was in my own territory. This made everything easier except for the corner house where the old man lived and that occasional person who insisted on calling me "sir."

My sister noticed a change. She said I seemed calmer and thought it was due to her saying "walk" all the time, but she was mistaken. Underneath it all was a quiet panic. If the offer was good for a limited time only, that could only mean an eventual end. I could wear all the bright colors in the world and still the offer would end.

"Everything ends," Sandy said matter-of-factly one evening. "The nature of life is death."

"I've heard this theory before," I mumbled into the pillows.

"Well then what do you want from me?"

"One more kiss."

"One more kiss, one more kiss. That's all you ever want," she said with an edge of desperation in her voice.

"What else is there?"

"We could live together for one thing."

I sighed the heavy sigh that meant everything except what Sandy wanted to hear. Our situation contributed to those alien summer months. When Sandy and I were just friends I would always tell her who I was sleeping with and it was always my bedroom wall. I learned to curl up right next to its coolness and feel the silent pressure on my arm or my ass. I knew that any night I didn't want to be alone I could be with my wall. At the end of spring Sandy offered to help. She suggested that I sleep with her or us together—some combination that would put us together during the darker hours. It was not a question of saying yes, but of not saying no. I slid into this arrangement that went from weeks to months to her final suggestion of temporary permanency. The nature of the relationship was open ended and was a sore point between us.

"We could just try it out. That's all I'm asking," Sandy persisted.

"But I don't want to. After we love each other we live together and after we live together we leave each other. So now we only love each other but at least it's the best of the three choices."

"Maybe for you. I don't even know what we are."

"We're friends with a twist," I said trying to comfort her.

Sandy stood up and walked over to the window. A light breeze blew at the curtain and brought in the smells of summer night and jasmine.

"You're so nonchalant about it all," Sandy said. "I'm the only sure thing you have in your life right now. You're looking at dependability."

"I'm looking at dependency." I got out of bed, stood behind her wrapping my arms around her body. "One more kiss," I said softly. "One more nonchalant kiss." At least this was something we both agreed on.

The summer travelled past my life with no answers and no explanations. At a party I met a man who was studying to be a foreign war correspondent. His confidence emanated from the worldwide knowledge that there would always be a war waging somewhere. He felt secure in his marketability. Meanwhile, the newspapers proclaimed that this was the year to be American, a nationality every other person in the world either strived to attain or denigrated out of jealousy. I was part of the strongest nation in the world and we were peaceful and loving and full of wrath just like god used to be.



All the cheering and free giveaways on the radio and all those offers that were good for a limited time only were a magical spell. The country ran around buying everything in sight for fear the shelves might be empty one day. People went to work and didn't bother to vote with the conviction that if one does the same thing every day then it will last forever. The machine was working overtime, but that's not what made the sweat form above my lip. I wasn't a cog in this machine. I was on the outside, veiled, staring in with my mouth agape. I didn't feel caught up in the swirl and false hope of Madison Avenue. There was something else tugging at my sleeve—that old man and his lawn.

In the middle of August I vowed to ask him the question. I decided that before summer ended I would just walk up to him one Sunday when he was out in front of his house and ask. The worst that could happen is he would snarl at me and maybe threaten me with his garden clippers. Just knowing I was going to do this put my mind at ease. During work my thoughts turned from the old man to that hill, yellow sweet clover and crimson clover blanketing its gentle slope. Me on top on my side, wearing loose shorts and a soft shirt, no shoes. The sun shone and the wind blew. With a steady movement from side to side I would roll my body over and spin away.

The last couple of weekends in August I didn't see the old man at all. The grass was overtaking the bare gray patches of dirt and reclaiming its rightful place. Instead of the man I saw an old woman who walked slowly down the front walk, using a silver colored walker to help her make her way to the empty mailbox and back again. I stood on the opposite side of the street and watched her, not wanting to get too close for fear she would want my help, and mistake my sex, at the same time.

Summer would be over soon and I looked for the man every day now. I made sure I drove or walked by his house once a day. It wasn't hard to imagine him dead. The natural state of affairs as Sandy would say. His clippers and basket would collect dust in the garage. His clothes would be folded neatly in his bureau. The woman who walked with a personal pain would punish herself for not dying first. Now he's dead, I thought. Now I'll feel better not having to think about this guy and his weekend recreation. But even though I never saw the man clip the edges of his lawn again, I remembered that he had. And just as he had departed I felt other things leaving too.

My job was getting dull and routine. Eight hours a day handing out change and listening to the radio. My sister wanted me to stick with it, check out opportunities for advancement. But I didn't want to travel up. Even the thought of rolling down that hill became distant.

"This is your third job this year," she said in bewilderment. "No wonder you don't feel stable."

"I never said I wasn't stable. I said I was afraid, and that was months ago."

"But you didn't even know what you were afraid of. It's obvious that a lack of job security has you on edge. This is a common symptom of the underemployed."

I didn't consider myself underemployed. That implied a better and more satisfying job awaited me somewhere, somehow. I wanted to be healthy for a living; therefore I considered myself unemployable and therefore every job I got was a bonus and earned me a gold star on my kitchen calendar. Now I was bored at work and that was unhealthy so it was time for a change.

Sandy also marveled at my desultory career changes. She was interested in stability these days, our stability, and was frightened by any movement on my part. She wanted a guarantee. During one of the last times we would be in bed together, I reminded her about my morning prayer.

"You can convert to a different religion," she said. "You don't have to believe in a limited time only."

"But I got that philosophy from you. You're the one that's always saying everything changes with time. Death after life. Entropy. The universe falling in on itself."

"That's different and you know it. We can't control nature but we can control ourselves."

"You want me to say I'll love you for ever and ever."

"I just want you to say you love me."

I knew I didn't which made the words more difficult to say, but I told her what she wanted to hear so her world wouldn't change too quickly.

The summer was almost over and the image of my gently sloping hill was replaced with a different imagining. This was a picture of an endless night in any of three summer months. My lover was leaning over me kissing my hair and lips and throat. I was carried away by these movements, taken to a land of pure physical pleasure. And at the same time that I was watching this occur we both smiled at each other with looks that could turn on the kitchen stove. This summer night was repeated in the daytime also, for a limited number of weeks. Of course the offer was limited, as part of a national heritage it had to be. When it expired, I feared I might also, but instead I had a sorrowful summer and wondered why an old man destroyed what he so tenderly raised up.



## The Intensity of Our Loving

I've kissed you  
like a carrot from the ground,  
fall-thickened and heavy,  
clayed-earth still clinging.  
Crisp carrot bites I've kissed  
all up and down your thighs.  
Bright eyed caresses you've given  
over smooth ridges of skin,  
skin like the surface of a carrot  
filtering everything: pesticides  
manure decay, to make into food  
for the next growing.

I remember being a carrot,  
of sure steady orange with  
two or three sturdy legs or odd  
curvings from growing 'round rocks,  
occasionally straight and narrow  
thin enough to be packaged  
eight to a bag to the pound.

I remember being a carrot  
with you,  
the steady orange burning of  
my cunt growing against the  
solid of your side;  
you, dark warm clay, wrapped  
around and through the curvings  
of me rooting into you.

The force of my plant curving  
against the giving of your stone.  
The intensity of our loving  
unearthed  
like a carrot from the ground  
packed in sand  
overwinters in root cellars  
brings spring sprouting  
curving 'round  
for the next growing.

Michal Brody

## Transit Waltz

On the wall of her bedroom hangs a silver-framed photo  
Of a large, smiling woman running next to a bus.  
And from all the bus windows there are many hands waving,  
And it's signed on the bottom, "With love from all of us."

—CHORUS—

Oh, cry for us, dance for us  
Jump and sing chants for us,  
Centuries pass with no  
More than romance for us.  
Cry for us, dance for us,  
Keep making plans for us,  
It's starting to look like  
There's a pretty good chance for us now.

I opened the icebox. There was nothing much in it,  
But a crumpled-up brown paper bag caught my eye.  
Inside was a carton of milk and a mango,  
And a note signed "Love, Mom" that said "Eat well. Goodbye."

Oh, die for us, live for us,  
What will you give for us,  
Jungle and desert us,  
Ocean and river us.  
Save and deliver us,  
Some are carnivorous,  
Rumble your mountains, and  
Come on and quiver us now.

We went for a ride in her shiny new Plymouth,  
But the headpipe fell off and she started to cuss.  
Inside I was choking, my heart it was broken,  
But I looked down the road and saw, here comes the bus.

Oh, dance for us, sing for us,  
Round in a ring for us,  
Boxes and straight lines, they  
Don't do a thing for us.  
Glide on the wing for us,  
What did you bring for us,  
Exquisite autumns, and tender green springs for us.

—REPEAT FIRST CHORUS—



very sing song...



*Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*

by Gloria Anzaldúa (Spinsters/Aunt Lute, 1987. \$8.95.)

This book is a map of Gloria Anzaldúa's odyssey, her becoming: *mestiza*, *curandera*, writer, resident of *la frontera*. It is a chronicle of the individual specific woman, the *tejana*/chicana/dyke/*bruja*/poet, and all she is linked to by those identities. Gloria shows us the struggle, the tension between the one and the whole. And how to make art from that. As she says in "Cihuatlyotl, Woman Alone": "I remain who I am, multiple and one . . . of the herd, yet not of it."

Also, this book contributes to the tradition exemplified by *This Bridge Called My Back*, which Gloria co-edited. Both books provide instruction to women seeking to unlearn racism and classism. "We need you to accept the fact that Chicanos are different, to acknowledge your rejection and negation of us. We need you to own the fact that you looked upon us as less than human, that you stole our lands, our personhood, our self-respect." Gloria's words expose the brutality of poverty, of prejudice. This is particularly true of the poems in the first and second sections ("*Más antes en los ranchos*" and "*La Pérdida*"). The order of the poems in the first section is very effective, beginning with three stories of *la gente* (although one suspects the "Prieta" of "Cervicide" is Gloria herself) to the overtly autobiographical "Immaculate Inviolable: *Como Ella*." There and in "*Nopalitos*" we are shown Gloria's otherness within her biological family.

In "*La Pérdida*," the stories presented in "*El sonavabitch*" and "We Call Them Greasers" are unforgettable. The first is Gloria's recollection of an event from her past, triggered by a sight caught from the window of a car. In "We Call Them Greasers" she assumes a male Anglo persona and makes undeniable the connection between imperialism and rape, the invasion of the land, of woman's body. Between these two devastatingly powerful poems, "A Sea of Cabbages" gets lost; it isn't strong enough to hold its own.

The poetry section is preceded by a footnoted prose section called "*Atravesando Fronteras/Crossing Borders*." (The footnotes were so fascinating, I found myself frustrated when they were occasionally out of order or missing altogether. I hope this will be rectified through editing a second edition.)

In the first chapter, "The Homeland, Atzlán," Gloria explains how for *mestiza/os* who came North to the U.S. Southwest as porters for the conquistadores and for contemporary *mestiza/os* who come North to escape starvation the journey is actually a return to the homeland, to Atzlán. Gloria demonstrates how history shapes us, how injustice injures us.



Gloria reveals her personal iconography, and how she makes art of her pain, her explorations. In the chapter "The *Coatlicue* State," she describes the darkness, the inertia, from which the words emerge. (*Coatlicue*—"Serpent Skirt"—is a Mesoamerican creator-destroyer goddess, precursor of Our Lady of Guadalupe.) Gloria writes, "As the Earth, she opens and swallows us, plunging us into the underworld, where the soul resides, allowing us to dwell in darkness." Gloria returns to this theme again and again. She tells of being "Alone with the presence in the room" and in "*Canción de la diosa de la noche*" she writes, "I seek *la diosa*/ darkly awesome./ In love with my own kind,/ I know you and inspire you. All others flee from me."

It is not only the others but Gloria herself who is tempted to flee, though compelled to stay. In "Creature of Darkness" she spells out the tension of this ambivalence: "I want to sit here and pick at these scabs/ watch the blood flow. lick the salt from my face,/ while all the time/ a part of me cries Stop Stop/ Behind that voice/ shadows snicker/ No we like it here in the dark/ we like sitting here with our grief." The poem ends: "a creature afraid of the dark/ a creature at home in the dark." And as further exploration of this territory, the sweet compulsion of picking injury, picking the scabs, making poems from the blood found there, she writes, "Wounding is a deeper healing" and "jumping off cliffs/ an addiction" ("Poets have strange eating habits").

In order to be able to write, Gloria must not only invoke the *Coatlicue* state, but, having lived her entire life subjected to what she calls "linguistic terrorism," must continuously assert the legitimacy of her languages. Language is central to identity: "For some of us, language is a homeland closer than the Southwest."

In the chapter "*Tlilli/Tlapalli*: The Path of the Red and Black Ink," Gloria names writing as shape-changing and describes its transformative powers: "I write the myths in me, the myths I am, the myths I want to become."

This is lonely work, this shape-changing. Gloria makes poetry of the hard truth of this solitude, this separated core in each of us, and of the futility of our desire to be rescued. In "Letting Go" she says, "No one's going to storm/ the castle walls nor/ kiss awake your birth/ climb down your hair/ nor mount you/ on the white steed . . . There is no one who/ will feed the yearning/ Face it. You will have/ to do, do it yourself."

Interestingly, the closest thing to a love poem in the book is written to a spirit. It is a marvelous poem, describing what it feels like to love someone disincorporate who, through the course of their "affair" acquires a body. Many of the phrases are lush and lyrical: "What does it feel like, she asked/ to inhabit flesh," "a smell between candles and skin," and "I wanted no food no water nothing/ just her—pure light sound inside me."

In general, I find the narrative poems such as "horse" and "*Nopalitos*"

more successful than poems such as "The Cannibal's *Canción*," in which metaphors are developed to elucidate a point about the "we" being described. Gloria is a wonderful storyteller and I like best her poems that tell specific stories.

Gloria takes what is given and turns it upside down, throwing away what does not further her/us, re-combining what is left with what she has unearthed, synergistically layering mortar with brick, blood with ink. I look forward to maps of her future journeys.

For now, I delight in the new/old ways of knowing that she reveals, and in her naming of the common ground. This "tolerance for ambiguity," this delight in contradictions is how we mongrel queers survive, to write and write again. As she says in "To live in the Borderlands means you": "*Cuando vives en la frontera*/ people walk through you, the wind steals your voice . . . (I)n the Borderlands you are the battle ground/ where enemies are kin to each other . . . You are wounded, lost in action/ dead, fighting back . . . To survive the Borderlands/ you must live sin fronteras/ be a crossroads."

—Barbara Ruth

## Books Received

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Sinister Wisdom makes a special effort to support the work of the independent lesbian and women's presses. Unfortunately we can't review all the new releases, but we would like to draw your attention especially to the following:

*out here flying*, lesbian poetry by Jan Hardy, \$3.95, Sidewalk Revolution Press, P.O. Box 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224.

*To Live With The Weeds*, lesbian poetry by D.A. Clarke, \$7.00, HerBooks, P.O. Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

*Awakening, An Almanac of Lesbian Lore and Vision*, by Nett Hart, Lee Lanning and others, \$6.95, Word Weavers, Box 8742, Minn., MN 55408.

*It's Time*, a novel of an "alternate reality set in the here and now," by Jana Bluejay, \$7.95, Tough Dove Books, Box 548, Little River, CA 95456.

*Different Daughters: A Book by Mothers of Lesbians*, edited by Louise Rafkin, \$8.95, Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

*Sex Work, Writings by women in the sex industry*, edited by Frédérique Delacoste and Priscilla Alexander, \$10.95, also from Cleis Press.

*Shoulders*, A lesbian novel by Georgia Cotrell, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

*The Threshing Floor*, short stories about the lives of Black women in England by Barbara Burford, \$7.95, also from Firebrand.



*Sanctuary, A Journey* of a member of Witness for Peace captured by the Contras in Nicaragua in 1985, by Judith McDaniel, \$7.95, from Firebrand.

*Look Under the Hawthorn*, a novel of a stonedyeke's search for her daughter by Ellen Frye, \$7.95, New Victoria, Box 27, Norwich, VT 05055.

*Runway at Eland Springs*, a novel set in the 1930's in East Africa by ReBecca Béguin, \$7.95, also from New Victoria Publishers.

*Radical Feminists of Heterodoxy, Greenwich Village 1912-1940*, history of the club for "unorthodox women," by Judith Schwarz, \$8.95, New Victoria.

*Searching for Spring*, lesbian novel of incest recovery and love by Patricia A. Murphy, \$8.95, The Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

*Memory Board*, life-long lesbian couple deals with one's loss of memory, the other's brother, by Jane Rule, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

*The Always Anonymous Beast*, lesbian mystery set in Victoria, Canada by Lauren Wright Douglas, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

*Dreams and Swords*, lesbians short stories of mystery and speculation by Katherine V. Forrest, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

*Dusty's Queen of Hearts Diner*, homophobia in 1972 threatens Dusty's diner and relationship, by Lee Lynch, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

*Going Out of Our Minds: The Metaphysics of Liberation*, by Sonia Johnson, \$10.95, The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019.

*Long Time Passing: Lives of Older Lesbians*, edited by Marcy Adleman, Ph.D., \$7.95, Alyson Publications, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

Naiad has also republished Ann Allen Shockley's three books, and we will run a review of them by SDiane Bogus in SW #35.

This listing does not necessarily imply editorial endorsement.

## Correction

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Sinister Wisdom regrets a misprint in Vickie Sears' poem, "On Father's Death" in SW 32. On page 45, the last line should read "Shadow shattered splendor." The last three stanzas, then, read:

Irene poked at remembering with  
"He left you this."  
holding out his fountain pen.

Shadow shattered splendor  
I never cried for my father.

I just hit the ball in twelve-year sun  
and ran.

We also apologize for the incorrect spelling of Vickie Sears' name in the Table of Contents of SW #32.

## Contributors' Notes

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Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa: I am a Chicana-tejana-lesbian-anarchist-feminist who loves to write. My problem is there are not enough hours in the day. Right now I'm soliciting material for *De las otras/de los otros: A collection of writing and art by lesbian and gay Chicanos*. I'm also working on *Entre guerras/Entremundos*, a book of stories mentioned in my essay. *Borderlands/La Frontera*, a book of essays and poems came out in July.

Cleve Boutell is a begun-again writer and a positive, happily out lesbian living in Southern California. After spending twenty-two years working for a publishing company getting other people's stuff into print, I'm now seriously concentrating on my own. One story and a novel excerpt were published a long time ago. I'm currently working on another novel.

Michal Brody lives in Chicago (her kind of town) and works in a printshop as an engraver. She is currently writing a novel (slow going), and collecting recipes for Five Fish Salad. Please send her yours c/o this magazine.

Paula Brooks is studying Psychology and Creative Writing at the University of Tennessee. She lives in Knoxville with two persian cats. "Aside from the expected joy of being published for the first time, I'm especially euphoric at the idea of being read by a lesbian-feminist audience. It has always been my desire to write for my sisters."

Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum are currently working on their book, "Cancer in Two Voices," from which this excerpt is taken. They are life partners, colleagues and collaborators.

Chyrstos: Born in San Francisco, 1946. Continuing work with Big Mountain support. My relationships keep me going - a particular thanks to Vi Haskell, Dian Million & Amanda White who make it so much easier to be a Native Dyke. Press Gang of Canada will be publishing a collection of my work called *Not Vanishing*.

Lynn Crawford is a poet and clinical social worker. She practices in SF and at the Iris Project, a multi-cultural women's drug and alcohol recovery program. Her work has been featured previously in *Sinister Wisdom* #21 and #32, *Broadside (A Canadian Women's Publication)*, *The San Francisco Bay Guardian*, and at local readings in San Francisco and Ann Arbor, Michigan, her former home.

Cathy Czaplá: Born 1950, fat (like in huge), part-Abenaki native person. Born and raised in Rutland County, Vermont. Recent chapbook, *Abenaki Ghosts*, from *Blue Cloud Quarterly*. Now customer services representative for a wood stove manufacturer.

Max Dashu teaches women's history freelance via her Suppressed Histories Slide Series. She writes, draws and paints in Oakland, California.



Patricia Filipowska was born in Iowa, studied art under Moholy-Nagy in Chicago (this will date me), lives in Lexington, MA. Her poems have appeared, or will soon appear, in *Sandscript*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Radcliffe Quarterly*, *The Worcester Review*, *Farmer's Market* and *Poet and Critic*.

Winn Gilmore: I am an inveterate lover of language, martial arts, travel, music, and fishing. Having grown up in a house full of Black women in the American South, I continue to explore life's dichotomies, ironies, and subtleties in my writing. After graduating from Smith College, I moved to California, where I continue writing short stories, erotica, sci fi, and essays.

Karen J. Hall is a recent graduate of Denison University. She has been writing poetry for many years and is very pleased her work is beginning to reach the community which inspires it.

Jan Hardy believes that honest poetry can do more than crystals, aspirin, and therapy put together. Her new chapbook, *out here flying*, is available from Sidewalk Revolution Press, P.O. Box 9062, Pittsburgh PA 15224.

Grace Harwood is a recovering lover who lives in Oakland, CA. Her photographic images are available through WomanCrafts West on Valencia St. in S.F. Her short fiction and poems have appeared in publications as diverse as *Bridges*, *Chrysalis*, *Christopher Street*, *Feldspar Prize Stories*, *Paragraph*, and *Zyzyva*; her interviews and opinions regarding contemporary feminist fiction are often found in *Mama Bears News & Notes* and in *The Bay Area Women's News*.

Nancy Humphreys: I am a recent transplant to the Bay Area, a joyful place for me. I write to make myself and other women more aware of the importance of our lives. My thanks to Mary O'Sullivan and the women in Sandy Boucher's writing group for helping me to shape this story.

Ann Hutchinson: I live in Maine, the state I was born in. I was born a daughter to a family of three daughters, to a mother with three sisters, to a father the only and youngest son in a family of three daughters. I'm fond of country music, cilantro, and the words of women in laundromats.

Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz was editor and publisher of *Sinister Wisdom*, 1983-87. With Irena Klepfisz, she co-edited and co-published *The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology* (available from SW Books, POB 1308sw, Montpelier, VT 05602 \$9.95 + 1.25 p/h). In the 70s she worked in the movement to stop violence against women. "War Stories, 197-" is from a new collection of stories entitled *Some Pieces of Jewish Left*.

Jasmine Marah, eclectic eccentric.

Judy Meiksin is an MFA candidate at the University of Pittsburgh and teaches composition writing. She designed a poetry workshop for women and her next project is to design a literature course on 19th-century women poets. She also loves raising her 2 1/2 year old daughter.

Sawnie Morris lives in Taos, New Mexico and is currently at work on a collection of poems and short stories.

Sudie Rakusin: I am a lesbian, a Jew, a painter, 39, an Aries with 5 other planets in Fire...live in the woods with my 3 dog companions...paint and draw whenever I can, giving back to the goddess what I have been given.

Adrienne Rich is living and writing in Santa Cruz, California, teaching part-time at Stanford, and is on the National Steering Committee of New Jewish Agenda as one of two open lesbians elected at-large.

Rose Romano: The theme of "Not to be Trusted" is Silence— as is the theme of the first issue of *La Bella Figura* (see ad on p. 121). Because of our Silence, in part a defense against prejudice, Italian-American women are suffocating in white male misinterpretation while our culture is destroyed by assimilation. I hope that *La Bella Figura* will provide a place for us to preserve our stories while helping others to understand. My most recently published work is a poem, "Family Reunion," about Italian-Americans, in *Footwork*. I've also had work in *Common Lives*, *Earth's Daughters*, *Home Planet News*, and the last two issues of *Sinister Wisdom*.

Meredith Rose: I am a transplanted Southerner living in the cold North. I write short stories and am working on a book. A couple of my stories have appeared in *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*. I try to write for fun.

Barbara Ruth is a warrior and a peace maker, a dream weaver and a rank opportunist. Although broken in body, heart and mind, she fully intends to survive to struggle another day and love another dyke.

Teya Schaffer is holding on to her wisdom while getting educated.

Anita Schriver is a photographer and a special education teacher living in Oakland, California.

Susan Stinson is a fat lesbian who has been reading about how the lungs work because of the importance of breathing. She often goes about things in this way. Her writing will be in upcoming issues of *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Heresies*, *Yellow Silk* and others. She lives in Boston.

Margaret Tongue: I am alive and writing in Michigan, finding my own voice at last. Have published in such places as *Poetry*, *Kenyon Review*, *Hiram Poetry Review*, *Vassar Review*, *Stone Country*, etc. About a thousand years ago I was a Robert Frost Fellow at Breadloaf.

Leslita Williams was born & raised in north Florida swamps by a family of possums. She's the author of *Hidden in This Picture*, poetry, and a member of the Websters writers group in Atlanta. She lives with 2 dogs and she's an herbalist, a separatist, and has an odd sense of humour.



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## Announcements and Classified Ads

### CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

*la bella figura* Finally, a literary journal devoted exclusively to Italian-American women, with a special welcome for Lesbians. If you're an Italian-American woman wondering why your work is so often rejected, or if you're anyone wondering why you so rarely come across poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and art work by Italian-American women, send SASE for writer's/artist's guidelines and subscription information to: Rose Romano, P.O. Box 411223, SF, CA 94141-1223.

Submissions sought for an anthology of short stories by women to be published in 1988 by Cleis Press. Theme: **Unholy Alliances**—how people interact, collide, make connections across differences of lifestyle, race, sex, politics, etc. Louise Rafkin, 1044 1/2 53rd St., Oakland, CA 94608. Deadline: December 31, 1987.

*Lesbian Bedtime Stories* are wanted for book of same name already guaranteed publication. Although all topics are welcome, we want quality fiction or first person non-fiction stories that inspire our sisters and offer them empowering visions for a good night's sleep. Payment in copies at least. Write it down! Send to Bluejay, Tough Dove Books, Box 528, Little River, CA 95456.

For an anthology on **women and their relationships with other animals** (earthly, imaginary, extraterrestrial & otherwise), we are seeking short stories, poems, non-fiction articles & graphics in a diversity of styles, lengths, genres, points of view, etc. Deadline: 12/31/87. Guidelines for SASE from Theresa Corrigan, 2224 J St., Sacramento, CA, 95816 or Stephanie T. Hoppe, 612 West Standley, Ukiah, CA 95482.

Submissions are being sought for an anthology about **the experiences of lesbians whose sexual assault or attempted sexual assault by men was motivated by anti-lesbian sentiment**. By recognizing this extreme form of violence, the anthology seeks to empower survivors and expose the extent to which our homophobic society condones crimes against lesbians. We welcome short stories, journal entries, poetry, political analysis, and essays. Selections will be published anonymously upon request, but a name and address must accompany all submissions. Deadline: March 1, 1988. Send to: Sharon Vardatira, Box 2304, Harvard Sq. Station, Cambridge, MA 02238.

**HURRICANE ALICE: A FEMINIST QUARTERLY** publishes essays, re-views, creative prose, autobiographical excerpts, and the occasional poem. Upcoming Issues: *Women and Violence*—Victims, perpetrators, violence against the self, resistance. Deadline: Jan. 15, 1988. *In Honor of Meridel LeSueur* (Fifth Anniv. Issue)—Appreciations of her work, original contributions in her spirit. Deadline: April 1, 1988. SASE to: 207 Lind Hall, 207 Church Street SE, Minneapolis, MN 55455.

**Lesbians who have relinquished children for adoption**—including intra-family adoption. Contrary to what most of us were told, the effects of surrendering a child for adoption are life-long and negative. This book is for the articulation of our experience. Send manuscripts, queries, and SASE to: Natural Mothers' Publishing Project, P.O. Box 146401, SF, CA 94114.



*There's Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* - an anthology on lesbian and gay parents explaining their sexual orientation to their child(ren), is looking for submissions from anyone who has had any significant child-raising interaction around this issue. They are especially interested in configurations that are not exclusively white, middle class and upwardly mobile. Send submissions and inquiries to Lorelee MacPike, P.O. Box 6369, Altadena, CA 91001.

THE NAIAD PRESS is looking for several full length lesbian science fiction novels. They want an intelligent balance between the fields of interest, not pseudo science fiction nor tacked on lesbian characters. Contact Barbara Grier, P.O. Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

The National Women's Studies Association announces *NWSA Quarterly Journal*, a new interdisciplinary, multi-cultural, feminist journal. They are soliciting scholarly articles of interest to women's studies researchers, teachers, and others involved with feminist concerns. For more information, write: MaryJo Wagner, Editor, *NWSA Quarterly Journal*, Center for Women's Studies, 207 Dulles Hall, 230 West 17th Avenue, Ohio State Univ., Columbus, OH 43201.

The APA Committee on the Status of Women announces the *FEMINISM AND PHILOSOPHY NEWSLETTER*. They are interested in literature overviews, book reviews, suggestions for curriculum revisions or transformations, discussion of feminist pedagogical methods, and so on. Manuscripts and other inquiries should be sent to: Nancy Tuana, Editor, Arts and Humanities, JO 31, The University of Texas at Dallas, Richardson, TX 75083-0688.

#### UPCOMING CONFERENCES

CONFERENCE: WOMEN AND SPIRITUALITY, Univ. of Colorado, Colorado Springs, April 8-9, 1988. Seeking papers, panels and proposals. We would like to attract participants representing diverse academic, religious, cultural, and ethnic points of view. Deadline is December 15, 1987. Send two copies of all papers (not over 25 pages), abstracts of panels, and proposals for performances to: Lois Frankel, Dept. of Philosophy, Univ. of CO, Colorado Springs, CO 80933-7150.

The National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) announces its tenth annual conference, *LEADERSHIP AND POWER: WOMEN'S ALLIANCES FOR SOCIAL CHANGE*, at the Univ. of Minnesota in Minneapolis, June 22-26, 1988. Inquiries: NWSA 88, Lori Graven or Ann Veverica, Dept. of Professional Development, 315 Pillsbury Drive S.E., Univ. of MN, Minneapolis, MN 5545-0139.

The *Third International Feminist Book Fair* will be held in Montréal June 14-21, 1988. Bringing together editors of books, magazines and newspapers with writers, translators, distributors and booksellers from around the world, the Fair provides a unique forum for feminists to network and discover each other's work while making feminist authors known to a wider audience. For more information, write the Organizing Committee at 420 Est, Rue Rachel, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2J 2G7.

#### GENERAL

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**The International Women's Guesthouse Registry (IWGR)** was founded to meet the increasing needs of lesbian travelers. They maintain confidential listings of women-owned and operated Bed & Breakfasts, inns, and campgrounds. Write for more information: Fountain Institute for Women, P.O. Box 700, Rego Park, NY 11374.

**A LIFE OF SONG:** A portrait of Ruth Rubin, Yiddish folksinger and folklorist, is a 38-min., color videotape available in 3/4", VHS and Beta. For more info or orders, contact: Cindy Marshall, 76 Columbus Ave., Somerville, MA 02143.

**Independent Women** is a free newsletter containing hard-to-find information on new books for women from England and abroad. It can be obtained by sending a second class stamp or international postal check to Lavender Menace Bookshop, 11a Forth St., Edinburgh EH1 3LE England.

**Throwing Our Weight Around: a Video About Fat Women's Lives** is being made under the premises of Fat Liberation, to be released in Summer, 1988. For more info, or to send contributions, write: Sandy Dwyer, 14 Glenside Ave., Jamaica Plain, MA 02130

**Sinister Wisdom** needs to move 35 boxes from Montpelier, VT to Oakland, CA— if you are making a coast-to-coast move and have room in your vehicle or moving van, please contact Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz at PO Box 1308, Montpelier VT 05602, or Elana Dykewomon, PO Box 3252, Berkeley, CA 94703. Some funds are available.

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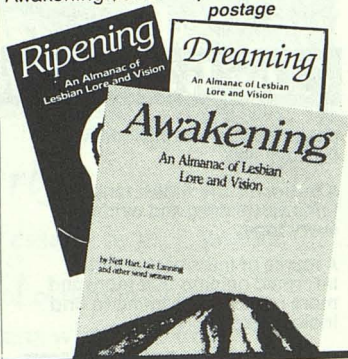
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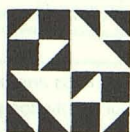
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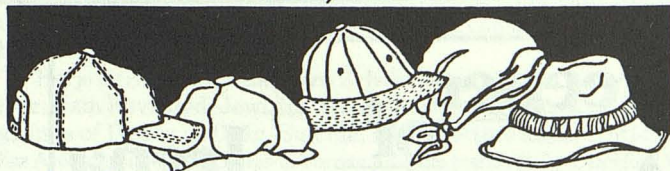
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- Maia Allegra Sears McDonald Waters Hansell Rosenblum Butler Stinson •

**#31/Special Focus on Sex and Fiction**, Coming out in the South, Found Goddesses, Waiting, Bobe Mayse, Sex and Socialist Feminism

- Smukler Blackwomon Romano Davenport Dykewomon McNaron •

**#29/30/The Tribe of Dina: A Jewish Women's Anthology**, edited by Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz and Irena Klepfisz

**#28/Special Focus on Women & Work; Body Image, Size & Eating**, Aging, Comedy about Outlaw Lesbian Communities, Courage, PC/PI, Letter on #26

- Clarke Heather Klepfisz Sturgis Gould Boucher Gomez Sardella Moran •

**#27/Special Focus on Girlhood, Sexuality and Violence**, Office Work, Navy Dykes, Feminism & Snobbery, White Trash, Passion, Poetry/Performance, Women of Color/women in Israel/women in Lebanon, Ed. Statement on #26

- Adnan Felman Grahn Schalet Bogus HaMa'avak Touch Quintanales Anzaldúa •

**#26/Special Issue: To Go To Berbir** by Jill Drew, a book-length journal written by an American nurse working in Beirut during the 1982 Israeli invasion

**#25/Butch/Fem in the 50's**, Women's Peace Encampments, Erotic Satire, Native American Roots of White Feminism, Welfare Motherhood, Palestinian, Haitian, Puerto Rican struggles, Jewish Radical Identity, Sexuality, SciFi

- Allen Cotrell Root Stecenko Love Paz Smukler Hall Lipstadt Brant •

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- Klepfisz Arobateau Segrest Simpson Tornes Addison justice Foley Crawford Wagstaff •

**#20/Lesbians Getting Fired**, Madness & Incarceration, Class Pain, Mirrors, Fat, Dykes in the Army, Japanese-American & Jewish Lesbians, Dyke Buddies

- Allegro Nestle zana Herstein De Araujo Moran Courtot •

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Thanks to all the lesbians in Vermont who helped Sinister Wisdom make a smooth transition to California!

