



*Sinister
Wisdom 34*



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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination
in the Arts and Politics

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Lesbian visions, fantasy, science fiction

I read in the papers
You're going to come here,
You're finally ready to take us back home.
I hear that you fly there, without any planes there
And you teach magic in the schools.
If you are on your way
Won't you give us some kind of sign?
If you are coming here to take us away
I want to be the first, first in line.
If you are coming to take us home
Let it be now.

—Linda Shear¹

Somewhere in our minds a thousand worlds lurk: all those different worlds we must be thinking of when we say, "take us home" or "I don't want to live here anymore." As if dykes could turn the sky inside out and shake new worlds from it.

Can we?

We certainly give it a good try. We agree, times are tough. But times appear to have been tough for womyn for centuries. Every time we reach for a fresh metaphor, a compelling image, a parallel universe, some inner peace, bedtime fables or political analysis, we create new possibilities.

Of course we have to live on this particular planet in this particular time. No goddess, no amazon space traveler, has come for us yet. Sometimes making stories and images isn't enough. We get restless. We want to find something that *does* turn the sky inside out. An imagination that reinvents or restates the social principles that govern our lives in such a clear and compelling way that we finally feel like we have a choice. Some new road to try. Not when technology either hurtles us to the stars or back to villages, but here in our day to day lives.

In fantasy, as in politics, the desire to invent new worlds can chafe against our material needs. We can recreate ourselves as beings who can cure cancer, turn ourselves into space heroes, envision perfect communal childcare, a world without war, inter-dependent utopian anarchist

lesbian colonies. But our very creativity can leave us with a bitterness, a sense of frustrated anticipation.

We need to understand all the different forms of fantasy as ways to heighten our sense of urgency² and affirm our belief in our ability to remake the world. We need to find ways to be patient with this urgency, knowing that every motion forward is made of a thousand small, individual acts; every story is composed from thousand of letters, the shape and form of which we take for granted until we struggle to find that "perfect" word. The word that will startle our creative selves into action.

This issue was motivated by a desire to share some serious fun. The works in this issue are a wonderful handful of imaginings. A few are science fiction, many are fantasy, some are descriptions of living with lesbian vision today. In this issue, we present as many takes on reality as we have room for. We have to hope that by encouraging imagination, pushing and prodding, inventing outrageous galaxies and the perfect amazon village, we push our minds towards their own evolution. We cannot quite reach the womyn we hope to become, the world in which we want to work and love. But we can infuse our present with all manner of fabulous images, challenge our habits of thought. Enjoy; be encouraged; invent more; share your inventions with us. We may get home yet.

Making a Magazine

Making *Sinister Wisdom* is work. It requires business and personal organization, many lesbians' hands and minds. Here in Oakland, *Sinister Wisdom* has many friends and volunteers, a computer and access to a wide spectrum of technical resources. The mailing lists are computerized, invoices and bookkeeping are on disc. Still, we have to send bookstores reminders to pay; renewal letters have to be folded and stuffed into envelopes. Exchange ad and periodical files have to be kept. The issue has to get discussed, discussed again, conceptualized, typed, designed. We have to deal with the printer, the post office, the bank.

Hundreds of submissions have to be read, logged, xeroxed, responded to. Hundred of letters have to get written. We want to give as much personal response as we can, though we can't always. Giving criticism that other womyn find useful is one of the greatest pleasures of this work; yet every detailed, thoughtful letter can take 1-2 hours. And sending rejection letters is worse than going to the dentist. It seems like

we're always slow on getting them out of here. I find I spend between 70 and 150 hours a month (maybe more?) working on *Sinister Wisdom*; the editorial readers, typists, distributors, contributing editors put in hundreds more.

But there's never enough time to do everything. When I am most over-whelmed, I think of how Melanie put out *Sinister Wisdom*, virtually alone for a year and a half, from Rockland, Maine, and then with the help of a small community in Vermont, primary among them Linda Vance and Irena Klepfisz. Melanie kept SW alive during a perilous personal and political time. I appreciate her experience and dedication as she continues to work with *Sinister Wisdom* as a contributing editor.

The response to #33 has been extremely positive. We appreciate your cards and letters. We encourage specific responses, criticisms, analysis, and will publish letters that give an in-depth treatment of issues raised in SW. We continue to need your financial support in order to survive. SW is a business, and we need to keep expanding our subscriber base in order to stay in business. Remember to renew your subscriptions, and encourage your friends to subscribe.

*Barbara Rosenblum, to whom
Sinister Wisdom #32 was dedicated, died
in San Francisco on February 14, 1988.
Her writing and her life continue to be an
inspiration to us.*

¹©Linda Shear, 1975, from the song "Let It Be Now, " on her album, *A Lesbian Portrait*.

²In the early 70's, we had a poster in the Northampton women's center with a quote from one of the suffragists. The quote went *something* like: In every woman's heart there is a core of bitter disappointment. It shall be my task in life to deepen that disappointment until she can stand it no longer, and revolt. A year's free subscription goes to the first woman who can identify the source and give the correct quotation.

#35. On Passing. By the time you get this, the deadline for this issue will have passed. We are particularly hopeful that this issue, and work in #36, will encourage more exploration of both passing and the emotional life of our communities. We hope to publish reverberations in issue #37.

#36. Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating Emotional Well-Being. When I wrote the list of things I am in my first "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 lesbians 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? Are there 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)

#37. Open. We get a lot of good material that doesn't fit into the theme issues (we include some anyway), and we get writing that's been sparked by one of the themes. Here's a space for that work. (Deadline: October 15).

#38. Italian-American Lesbians. Guest edited by Rose Romano: "What does it mean to be an Italian-American Lesbian?"

There's an Italian-American culture, distinct from the Italian as well as the American, yet many non-Italians don't seem to have noticed—including some Lesbians, who make a special effort to recognize and respect other forgotten cultures. Why?

Italian-American Lesbians remember the witchcraft of their grandmothers and mothers and still wear evil-eye horns, yet are thought by non-Italian Lesbians to followers of a woman-hating church. Why?

Non-Italians consider Italian culture to be patriarchal, yet most Italian-American Lesbians grow up in families run, without question, by women. Why?

Non-Italians believe a Lesbian is never tolerated in an Italian family, yet the Italian-American Lesbian most often finds herself accepted as Blood according to Italian tradition, only ostracized by families trying to Americanize themselves. Why?

What is the difference between north and south? What does it mean to be Sicilian? What is Omertà? Omertà American-style? How does it combine with Lesbian silence? What is l'Ordine della Famiglia? La bella figura? La miseria? Il Mezzogiorno? La via vecchia? Il mal occhio? La commare? Why don't you know how to speak Italian?

Given the strength and self-sufficiency of the Italian-American woman; her place of importance in the family; her memory of the Black Madonna; the tradition of Sappho in Sicily; and her determined urging of guests to eat, don't you think she's a natural as a Lesbian?

Basta! Write!" (Deadline: February 15, 1989)

#39. An issue on Disability. More definition to come ... (Deadline: June 15, 1989)

See the inside back cover for submission guidelines.



©1984 Sudie Rakusin
Diptyk, Tari Pennu: Mandala/We are all part of the whole

The Amazing Disappearing Woman Disappears from 41 Laments

I

On the edge of the rock and moss cliffs that border Willa Kaufman's country land is a tiny cabin with an army cot, a wood stove, and a pile of warm blankets. The cabin was already nestled here when Willa Kaufman bought the land. It was called then a hunting cabin but no women who came to it ever hunted. Instead they came from the town of New Chelm for solitude or else for trysts, secret and otherwise.

Nadine Pagan knew this cabin as well as anyone, for she and Rose came here often to make magic. Together they sat on the squeaking bed, smoked a joint, painted each other's faces with juice from the berries that grew outside. Sometimes they made love here, but those times were rare, for as much as Nadine loved Rose she often could not bear to be touched by her. She was afraid that under Rose's fingers she would surely fall apart at every seam.

When Willa Kaufman fell in love with that weasel, Sara Webber, even though neither one of them ever used it, the cabin was suddenly declared off limits and no women were allowed to go there at all. Sara reasoned that someday they might *want* to use it and a bunch of lesbians would be up there having a slumber party and then where would that leave them, and Willa Kaufman was forced to agree. She went herself and put a padlock on the cabin door. She dusted her hands off when the job was done.

So the little cabin sat and sat for many months empty. Rose came from time to time to tend her secret marijuana patch and peered in through the grimy windows. Then she sat down with her back to the locked door, looked out onto the woods below her and thought carefully about times gone by.

It is toward this very cabin, this padlocked cabin way up high on the cliffs of Willa Kaufman's land that Nadine Pagan comes walking after she creeps out of Audry Schaefer's bed in the middle of three o'clock in the morning. She is driven and she doesn't know what drives her, but the whole long way as she walks on achy legs and throbbing feet, she sees only Micky Robbins stepping hard on the wedding glass and her sister

Electa falling deep into his arms, she sees the flames she has made out of two movie theaters and a drive-in. The whole long way she walks on unsteady feet down the middle of Main Street, up onto the highway, and under the light of the moon, kicking at pebbles on the back roads that lead to Willa's land, she is wondering what can one of these events—my sister's wedding—have to do with the other events—these fires I have made.

By the time she comes to the land night has turned into morning and still it is Micky's foot she sees and still there is the smell of gasoline in her nose and still she cannot make these things together make sense. But here she is at last on the dirt road that takes her up through the birch forest, past the rocks as big as Lot's wife, up she goes into the woods. She carries nothing, she leaves nothing behind.

Nadine pries the padlock off with a branch. She closes the door behind her, wraps herself in a big red blanket, falls back onto the bed, and she cries. She cries until her teeth ache and her eyes swell, and then she sleeps without dreaming, she doesn't know for how long. When she wakes it takes her a minute to remember where she is and then she cries again.

For the next days she sits without moving, barely breathing, barely marking when the sun comes up and when it goes down again. The chickadees come to the cabin window and sing to her but they do not bring her pleasure. When she absolutely has to, she goes out to pee but she does not linger and never does she venture out into the deep woods.

Then one morning she wakes and it is a new season on the land, the air is crisp and cool, the sun is lower in the sky. Nadine pulls the blanket close around her and walks out of the cabin down toward the river that crosses Willa Kaufman's land. The waters run swiftly, Nadine dips in her hands and drinks and drinks. She washes her face in the chilly waters but when she sees the reflection of her own eyes she barely recognizes herself and again starts to cry. She howls like a dog, like a wolf, like a *vildachia*, because she looks like an animal to herself in the water, she has made of herself an animal, and because of this she can only howl.

Nadine closes her eyes by the bank of the river, and when she does she sees burning. Then she sees her sister Electa in her white wedding gown dancing slow with her sister Jane. She closes her eyes and touches the warmth that is Audry, wide shouldered, soft lipped. She closes her eyes and Rose is before her, who winks and whispers, "I know you set the fires, Nadine, all three of them, yes I do. And I know why."

Then as if to put herself out, Nadine jumps into the river and swims, first to one side and then the other, again and again, side to side, until she

can swim no longer. She drags herself out of the river, wet and shivering, back to the cabin. She peels her clothes off and leaves them to bake dry in the early autumn sun.

When she sleeps Nadine dreams of police cars. When she wakes she searches for food. The days go by and the days go by, and on the night of the new moon, Nadine has this dream:

I take a knife and with my right hand I slice off my left-handed fingers one by one. These I place in a big black kettle. With my bloody stump I hold an onion, with my right hand I chop; with my stump I hold a carrot and this also I chop. I slice I dice I rice I chop stalks of celery, cloves of garlic, green beans and tomatoes. These I throw into the pot with my fingers and begin to make soup, which I stir with a wooden spoon on an open flame. When it bubbles from boiling I ladle it into wooden bowls. In each bowl I am careful to put a finger, and of these bowls I gave one to Jane, one to Electa, one to Rose, one to Audry. The biggest bowl, the one with my thumb in it, I give to my mother who is at the head of the table saying a blessing over the candles. My Zayde Yitzkach is on the ceiling playing a froelich. "Why is she lighting candles?" I whisper. No one answers. Instead they sit, each of them chewing my fingers, sucking the marrow from my bones, gurgling and smacking their lips, eating me alive. "But why is she lighting the candles?" I whisper again. Zayde Yitzkach jumps down from the ceiling and pats my stump gently. "Happy New Year," he tells me. "It's Rosh Ha Shana."

II

When she wakes she moves not a muscle and counts the days. Her Zayde was right. It is *Rosh Ha Shana*, the Jewish New Year. She must go down to the river and let go of her sins. She takes with her a pen and a scrap of paper she finds under the bed. She slips on her shoes and to the river she walks.

At the water's edge she scratches the words, *Ha Bayita*, The Home; The Fire, *Ha Esch*; The Family, *Ha Mishpocha*, and these she throws into the river. She takes from her pocket her wallet, the few dollars she has, and these she throws into the river as well. From the pocket that sits over her heart she lifts out her notebook, her journal full of stories and lies, and also this she throws into the river, and with it her guilt, her shame, the sound of her mother's voice. She picks out of her coat pockets little pieces of lint and balled-up cookie fortunes, thirty-seven cents in pennies and dimes. All of this she tosses in and watches as it drifts, sinks and spins on the choppy waters flowing south. On an old playing card, the three

of spades, she writes the words Audry, Rose and pyromania. This she throws into the river, and after that her pen. Then Nadine takes off her earrings in the shape of the goddess Isis and her ring in the shape of a cobra, and all of these does she throw in. She reaches up for her labrys and feeling it gone remembers that this was her gift to Jane on the night of Electa's wedding, and so she doesn't have it now to throw away. Last of all she throws into the river her jacket, the one she found at the Goodwill with patches on the elbows that remind her of her father, Mel. And when she divests herself of all her goods, she sits on the bank and watches the river flow, the gentle waves lapping on the muddy shore, she sits on a stump of a log and thinks, "All my life drifts before me and after me who will stand up for me, who will love me after all I have done?"

In the chill of late September, in this spot in the woods where summer's smell still lingers, Nadine Pagan unties her heavy boots which have carried her so faithfully from one spot to another. She takes them off and places them by a rock on the river bank. Then she takes off her socks, and these she tosses into the river. She unclips her overalls, climbs out of them, and these she throws in also, and then her sweater and her flannel shirt, and her cotton underpants, and finally the tee shirt she wears that says across the front of it NO MORE LIES, until naked she stands shivering at the water's edge. And for the sin of her inability to know love when she sees it, Nadine Pagan throws herself into the river, leaving behind her only those fine brown hiking boots with their thick rubber soles to stand at attention side by side while Nadine falls into the river so sweet and yellow, how warm as it carries her down down into the deep of it, the sweet water tumbling over her as she falls down down down.

III

She flies and then she stops flying, the weight of her body in the swiftly flowing river pulling her further and further down into the riverbed, pulling her slowly through the layers and layers of clay and sand, through the muck and mire she pushes and pushes, pebbles and shells stick into her mouth. She feels she is suffocating but still she breathes, she breathes and she feels fingers pulling on her, hands grasp her ankles, pull her down down through the leaves and twigs which lodge in her throat. Her neck feels like breaking, her lungs are collapsing but she pushes still, she knows that if she does not come out the other side of this she will never breathe again. And so she thrusts herself further, her

cheeks full of pebbles, her nails packed with clay, she scratches the sediment walls as down them she is carried, butt first, certain she will never breathe again, so certain, deeper and deeper into the mud, and then suddenly the sand breaks and there is more water rushing and on the crest of this rapid she is carried to a grotto, where she can swim and rest and breathe at last.

Nadine swims toward the shore. When she stands, her feet touch slippery rock, solid ground, she is up to her shoulders in these waters and so swims, then walks, to the water's edge.

Nadine is met here by another woman, naked, round-muscled. Her breasts are large, her shoulders wide, the color of her eyes is brown and golden. This woman at the water's edge, Nadine's height, no taller, a head full of wild black hairs strewn through with white, holds out her hands as Nadine slips and slides on the grotto floor. "Come," she says, "come up with me." And Nadine grabs the woman's hand and is pulled up naked from the water, together with this stranger she stands naked and barefoot on the cold limestone floor. "Come," says the woman, who holds now a lantern, "follow me quickly, we have much to do."

Nadine glances down at her feet on this unsteady floor, sees now saltboxes tied to them with rags. Her legs are wrapped also with rags, and the floor of this cave is no longer limestone but covered with icy snow, which cracks and bites into Nadine's feet. She is no longer naked, but wears a heavy cloth coat, bulky, two sizes at least too big. On her head what's this, a little cap, and long *payism* brush against her cheeks. *Tsitsits*, religious fringes, hang down to her waist.

On either side are people dressed as she, some older, some younger, some women with shawls on their shoulders, some men carrying bundles, some have real shoes on their feet and some only rags. "Where are we going?" Nadine asks the woman who met her who now wears a long white beard, a wide brimmed hat and a heavy wool coat.

The old man touches a finger to her own wrinkled lips. "Shh, little one, these woods are full of danger. The soldiers from the Tsar's army, may they rot in Hell, would just as soon run you through with a knife as look at you . . . and they like to do it on Holy nights like this, just to make us crazy, but we can't be bothered with that now, come along, follow me."

The stranger leads the way through crusty snow to a clearing. In the middle of it, sticking up out of the snow, is a heavy wooden door made from rough-hewn boards. A big rusted ring is the handle. The stranger and some of the other men pull the door open. "Here," she says, "climb down." All the people do as they are told, all but Nadine who hesitates on the edge and peers down into the cellar. "Get in, little boy," the

stranger tells her, "God will protect you here, I promise."

Nadine looks into the old man's eyes. There is no one here she knows or trusts but everyone looks familiar. "It's safe, be a good boy, climb in."

In the underground chamber, torches hang on damp walls. Children like Nadine are huddled around women whose heads are covered with dusty babushkas. Some weep, some sing, others stand and pray. There are a few men, very old, who sit along the walls and bob their bearded heads over prayer books as they chant aloud.

At the end of this chamber is a door, but there are no windows. Nadine looks around helplessly. Here she belongs to no one, she has no family, there is no one who pays her special attention. Her eyes fill with tears, then a woman holds out a piece of black bread to her, and a ladle full of water. "Little boy, little boy, eat this. If God forbid those barbarians find us you'll at least be big and strong. Nadine takes the bread and looks into the woman's face. The woman pinches Nadine's cheek. "How old?"

Nadine shrugs.

"*Bar mitzvahed* yet?"

She shakes her head.

"Is your mother here?"

"No," Nadine tells her.

"Well," says the woman, "these are my children, Rivke and Shmuel." She puts her arms around the two sleeping bundles at her sides. "You don't know where your mother is, we don't know where their father is . . . went off to Cracow and never came back . . . did he leave me for another woman, did the Cossacks tear him to pieces, either way I'm an *aghuna*, we'll never know. Come sit by us, it's warmer to sleep that way. You have to rest when you can. You never know when they'll find us and we'll have to start running again." The woman pats the space between herself and her Rivke. Nadine curls into it gratefully. She falls fast asleep, the little piece of black bread still in her hand.

When Nadine wakes, everyone around her is asleep. The torches on the walls are turned down low. The sounds of uneven snoring and shifting bodies replace the chanted prayers. Nadine closes her eyes and tries to sleep again, but she cannot. Gingerly she pulls away from Rivke and her mother. She tiptoes over the sleepers who toss fitfully on the cold floor.

Nadine stands before the door at the end of the chamber for a long time. A glass lantern sits barely burning near a prayer book. Slowly Nadine pulls at the door and picks up the lantern. It is dark and cold out there, but something on the other side calls to her. She looks back in

order to remember all she sees here, then steps into the darkness and closes the door.

The path under her feet is cold and damp. Limestone drips, off in the distance she hears rushing water. Her lantern is dim, but Nadine sees enough to know that she is not in danger from animals or men.

Nadine is close to the rushing water. She feels it, she smells it, a river roaring madly, it's right in front of her, the cold spray tickles her face. She needs to wade through it but she isn't sure—if the water is deep, she'll be swept away. The foam splashes up against her naked body, the current is so strong she will surely be knocked over.

She lays back against the slippery rock that banks this river, turns down her lantern, and Nadine Pagan sleeps again.

IV

Nadine Pagan wakes in a place where the stench is human, human refuse, burning humans, humans rotting alive in their own shit and blood. On her feet are wooden clogs that scrape against her bones. On her body she wears a dress made out of wet cardboard, in the rain as she stands now it becomes heavy and heavier. The shoes stick deep into the mud. She has no hair, her eyeballs bulge.

Nadine picks through a garden of human manure. She sweeps out the bones from a giant oven, pushes them out and gags to remember that one of these sets of bones is her sister, her mother. In another part of this desecrated planet is her father, her brother-in-law. She sweeps, she cries, she makes this lamentation:

*My bones your bones
all of them the same bones
I'll shovel them up
until I drop
then someone other
will shovel up mine.
My bones your bones
in a minute I'll drop.*

V

Nadine wakes again on a plush velvet couch. She hears the scratch scratch of pen to paper, sees bent over a small writing table the back of a woman with hair very dark and curled, piled high on her head and tied with a ribbon. She has a shawl wrapped around her, a candle burns at

her side. Through a closed door Nadine hears the muffled voices of more women talking. For a minute she thinks she is in the upstairs room at Lechem V'Shalom.

"Excuse me," Nadine says in a voice whose rasp surprises her, "what place is this?"

The woman writing finishes her sentence then turns her head and says, "Rest quietly, Nadine. I'll get you some tea."

"But where am I?"

The woman comes to her bedside and touches Nadine's forehead with the palm of her hand. "Rest, darling Nadine, soon all questions will be answered." The woman walks out. Nadine watches her, this woman in a green silk dress, who is she, and what is Nadine doing here on a couch in a satin bathrobe, a fire in the fireplace, women talking in another room? She watches the shadows from the kerosene lamp flicker on the ceiling. She feels like she's been run over by a truck. When she tries to lift herself off the couch she can barely move her head.

The woman in green comes back with a little teapot and a china cup. Both of these she sets down on the night stand. She tucks the blankets in around Nadine. "Warm enough?"

Nadine tries to speak again but the muscles in her throat close all at once and the best she can do is nod. The woman pours the tea and holds it up to Nadine's mouth. The steam and smell envelop her.

"My name is Magda," the woman says and Nadine swallows the tea. "I live here with my three sisters. We are very glad to see you alive. Some of us wondered what took you so long to get here. You must rest now and recover quickly because there is much to be done." Magda holds Nadine's head as she lays the pillows flat against the couch then gently lowers Nadine down. Then Magda turns the kerosene lamp down low.

"But where is this place?" Nadine asks again in a soft voice.

"You'll know it tomorrow," Magda tells her.

Nadine falls fast asleep to the gentle voices of the four sisters meeting in the next room.

In the morning Magda pulls a square table up in front of the fire. Her sister, Esther, whose hair is wild and red, follows with a tray full of breakfast. A third sister, Shula, drags in two chairs. Nadine sits up and takes notice. "So look at her, she's a regular wide awake woman!" the fourth sister says, "I'm Etta, you're looking good."

None of these sisters looks anything like the others. Some of them have not even the same color skin. All of them wear clothing from a different time. Esther produces a deck of cards and a box of cigars.

"Not before breakfast—"

"Why not?"

"We have company!"

"Who's company. This is how I am in real life, Nadine. I smoke before breakfast and in the old days once or twice I lost my shirt at poker. Before breakfast."

"Does she know from the old days?"

"Do you?"

Nadine shrugs her shoulders. She has been so many people and things in the past hours she isn't even sure she knows who she is right this minute.

"Esther means in the days when she was walking up above—"

"The poor woman is barely conscious and you're telling her above. She has no idea what you're talking about. In the meantime, the food is turning to ice."

"So you won't play cards."

"Later, Esther."

"Later, Esther, she says." Esther tucks the cards into a drawer but she doesn't put her cigar out. "Come sit at the table, Nadine."

The sisters help Nadine to a chair and watch her while she eats, and while she spoons up mouthfuls of egg and black bread, the sisters talk.

"Let's get one thing straight. First of all, we're not really sisters. We're a family, we live here together, we have the same way of saving the world in mind, but in our blood we are not related."

"Also, we are not all of us from the same time."

"Though all of us have seen what the others have lived through."

Nadine stops eating and looks from one to the other. She thinks she knows what they are talking about but she isn't sure. "Where are we?"

"This is our house."

"When I came here, I came through a grotto. I was naked then and then I was a little boy from a time not my own. What am I doing here now? Am I really myself?"

"You're more yourself than usual, Nadine."

"How do you know me?"

"We Know you from before."

"Esther, you sound like a Zen master. How is she supposed to know what that means? It isn't important this minute, Nadine, that you understand everything. You have come a long way to be here, and we are happy—very, very happy—to have you. Things will keep changing. Sometimes you will wake in a different bed than the one you fell asleep in. Sometimes you will feel like somebody else entirely. But all the time, while you are here, the people you become will always be you. You have come here to do important work—"

"What work?"

"You're done with breakfast? Then come."

The sisters lead Nadine into the next room. They sit her in a comfortable chair. They bundle her up, then they blow the lamps out.

On the wall now is a screen, on the screen there are images: of women dissected, splayed on poles and spears, tied up with their legs open and their mouths shut, tied up with a knife to their throats. The women in the pictures are black, yellow, red, brown, white, and each of them is bleeding. The images are moving, there are men in the movies, the men in these movies pull the women's eyes out, then their guts, fuck them in the head while other men watch and laugh.

"This is a form called skull fuck," Magda tells Nadine in a soft voice. It is part of a cinema genre known as 'Snuff.' It is an example of a particular way some men have of looking at women and the rest of the world."

The films flicker like a tiny flame. "We don't mean to show you this so early in the day, but you have to know what we are up against, and we want you to know why you are here."

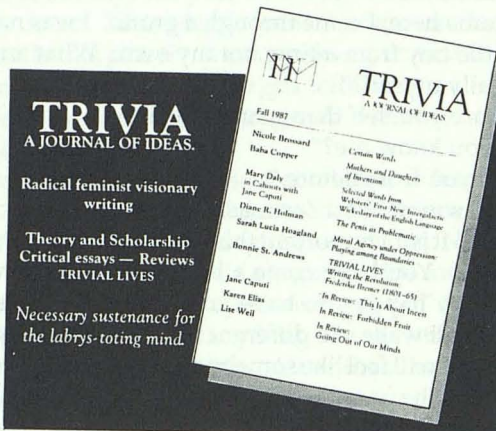
"Is it not true that you've done work against this kind of thing?"

"I've done it but it made me sick," Nadine says. "It made me so sick it killed me."

"You're not dead," all the women tell her at once.

"I'm not?"

"No," says Esther, "of course you aren't. Nadine, you are merely underground."



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The Grave's a Fine and Private Place

I felt her long before I saw her, a pressure, the sensation of weight. She was there every weekend. Saturday I'd rush home long before first light. All day I'd lay sleepily sorting her out. The heaviest spot must be her hips, the lightest her feet. I'd hold my hands as far in front of me as my coffin permits, estimating how wide her hips, her shoulders. I made phantom images of her, then caressed them softly. My blood-drenched vampire dreams grew suddenly human. Hundreds of years it had been since I last felt this need to touch flesh without drinking the blood that keeps me alive. I don't know how I knew she was a woman, perhaps a sense of shape, maybe just a lucky guess, a wish fulfilled.

I fantasized about her all the time. At night I stalked, I hunted as usual but even the kill began to lose its thrill. I allowed myself the easy ones, choosing only those looking for a woman alone, pale and small in the moonlight. Huddled on a street corner, wrapped in the illusion of vulnerability, I watched their anger find me, their eyes glazed with indiscriminate hatred, their hearts hungry for my fear. I drained the blood from these rapists swiftly. Leaving their bodies I ran home to dream. My weekend phantom lover softened me somehow. I no longer had heart for the slow torture, playing Death, recounting their sins and allowing them final repentance.

During the week I spent my days imagining finding her some night, touching her warm, mortal flesh, kissing her lips, her breasts, her neck, imagining her eyes glistening with love, with lust, her lips parting softly, "yes." I could almost feel the pull, the sucking and being sucked, the give and take of blood, watching her pale and die and wake again immortal, mine forever.

Then one Saturday she didn't leave. The earth around me slowly cooled as my excitement rose. At last she lay waiting for me. The minutes moved slowly past as I waited impatiently for the moment I could arise and finally meet her. She got up and moved away.

I eased myself up and out. Through the gathering darkness I saw her retreating form, a short, wide-hipped woman with long blonde hair.

"Wait!" I yelled, running after her.

She turned and blinked, startled.

"I, uh, let me walk you out," I stuttered. "It isn't safe here at night."

"Oh, right." Her voice was low and soft. "I fell asleep." She shrugged. "I guess that sounds silly, but I sunbathe here. It's private." She laughed, "Neurotic, right?"

"No," I whispered, "extraordinary." We passed under a street lamp, her skin glowed a deep, golden brown. She looked up at me. Light green eyes shone out of her tanned face. Her hair in the light glistened, sun-bleached, almost white.

She laughed again. "Look, we're opposites," she said, taking in my dark hair and eyes and white, white skin.

"Yes, we are. You're very beautiful. Shall we stop and have a cup of tea?"

She cocked her head at me, "Yes. I guess we should."

The night wore on. We sat in a small cafe speaking softly of all the inconsequential things that women talk about when all they really want to do is kiss. At midnight we parted. She promised to meet me again the next night by the entrance to the graveyard.

I drank well after I left her. The wanting made me hungry and I needed to be full and warm for her.

I passed Sunday in excruciating expectation. A few feet of earth separated us but I could almost feel the texture of her skin against my hands. I caressed her outline in the plush lining above me. I lingered to feel the width of her chest, the curve of her hips, the length of her thighs.

In my mind I wrapped my arms around her and cupped her breast, brushing her nipples lightly as they stiffened beneath my fingers, stroking her belly, her inner thighs, wrapping my fingers in her pubic hair, sliding one hand down into the folds of her vagina, saturating myself with her. Then she shifted, rolling over to lay on her stomach and my hips jumped to meet hers, my mouth opened as if to receive her tongue.

She left early and I was almost grateful. I wanted to rest before we met with nothing between us but need.

She was waiting for me, wearing a soft red dress that clung to her breasts and hips. She smiled and took my hand, surprising me by leading me back to my own grave. She sat, leaning against my tombstone.

"This is my spot," she told me as I lowered myself beside her.

We kissed, lightly, our lips barely brushing. Her tongue caressed my lips and teeth.

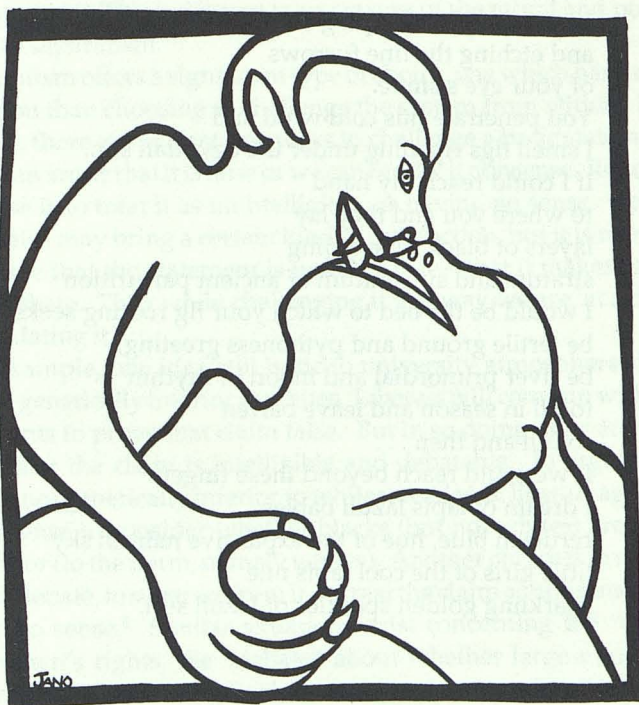
"What strange teeth you have," she whispered when we broke.

"Vampire teeth," I told her.

"Yes," she murmured as our lips touched again.

I caressed her neck, running my fingers along the pulse of her artery. Her skin warmed me. I kissed the nape of her neck. Unbuttoning her dress, I ran my tongue down her breast, licking her nipple softly. I could taste the blood beneath her skin. I ran my hand down her side, across her hips, and stroked her leg. She moved against me, rolling so my hand slipped around to cup the back of her thigh. I painted slow circles with my fingers, sliding my hand beneath her dress, exploring the round curve of her ass. She moaned softly, put her lips to my ear and whispered, "Please touch me now. I've been thinking of you all day. Don't make me wait."

I slid my fingers between her lips. Through her clitoris I could feel her blood racing. As I bent to lick her I knew I could not ask her to relinquish this rhythm for a stark white, grave-cold immortality. Not yet.



graphic by Jano

Parthenogenesis

for l.e.

In this white biting winter
your face is deep nairobi—
sweet and fertile bank of the Nile—
warm, brown, the rich black sun
eclipsing antiquity
(I reach my hand into)
old
old, older than I
moon and river lapping
and etching the fine furrows
of your eye's smile.
You penetrate this cold wind and
I smell figs ripening under the Egyptian sun.
If I could reach my hand
to where you and they lay
layers of black silt exuding
stratum and substratum of ancient parturition
I would be the bed to which your fig rooting seeks,
be fertile ground and pythoness greeting,
be river primordial and moon in rhythm
to fill in season and leave barren
so full and then . . .
If we could reach beyond these fingers
I dream of lapis lazuli babies
cerulean blue, hue of the expansive nairobi sky
little girls of the cool lapis Nile
sparkling golden speckles of lazuli sun.

Lesbian Separatism: An Empowering Reality¹

This was originally written as the introduction to For Lesbians Only: An Anthology of Separatist Writing, to be published by Onlywomen Press of London. It appears here in slightly shortened form.

The choice to separate is a central one for many lesbians. Yet that choice has been distorted or erased far too often. In developing my work on Lesbian Ethics I realized that traditional ethics does not recognize withdrawal, separation, as a legitimate ethical option. Within the society of dominance, separation is a non-choice. This judgment is reflected among lesbians. Too many lesbians hold the perception that separatism is not active, that separatists are hiding from reality and ignore the "larger picture." This judgment is an erasure of the moral and political function of separatism.

Separatism offers a significant type of choice, one which has a different function than choosing to challenge the system from within. Philosophically, there are at least two ways to challenge a basic statement or idea: we can argue that it is false or we can render it nonsense. Rendering it nonsense is to treat it as unintelligible, as having no sense. Arguing that it is false may bring a certain kind of satisfaction, but it is nevertheless to agree that the statement is possibly true—that it makes enough sense to debate. Thus while challenging it this way we are, at a deeper level, validating it.

For example, one idea still basic to university atmospheres is that blacks are genetically inferior to whites. Liberals will come up with a raft of arguments to prove that claim false. But in so doing, they are tacitly agreeing that the claim is intelligible and debatable. In arguing that blacks are not genetically inferior to whites, academic liberals agree that it makes sense to consider whether blacks (but not whites) are genetically inferior (to the norm, namely whites). Another choice is to refuse to engage in debate, to separate from it, to treat the claim as nonsense, to say it makes no sense.² Similar situations exist concerning the "debate" about women's rights, the "debate" about whether large numbers of jews were murdered during the holocaust, and many other "debates."

We live within a system of values, a system which constructs what we perceive as fact—for example, man is rational, woman needs a man's

guidance. When we engage in that system, we agree tacitly to its values. When we engage in a system that offers the system's background values as fact, for example white supremacy or male supremacy, we contribute by consensus to its underlying structure even when also challenging it by attempting to reform or deny such values. To withdraw from a system or a particular situation is a different kind of challenge. To withdraw or separate is to refuse to act according to the system's rules and framework and thereby refuse to validate its basic values.³

Withdrawal and separation are not perceived as options when the game played appears to be the only game in town and so is taken for reality. In a sense the game is reality, but its continued existence is not a matter of fact, not a matter of nature, so much as it is a matter of agreement: players agree on what will count as reality by what they focus on and attend.

Separatism is not recognized as a moral and political choice because those in power do not want us to perceive participation as a choice. To engage in a situation or a system in order to try to change it is one choice. To withdraw from it, particularly in order to render it meaningless, is another choice.

Within a given situation or at a given moment there are often good reasons for either choice. Further, both choices involve considerable risk; neither one comes with guarantees: while directly challenging something can validate it, withdrawing may allow it to continue essentially unhampered. But what is missing from traditional ethics and often from lesbian community ethics is acknowledgment that there are ethical choices at this level, that participation is one of those choices, and that separation is another. And in assessing those choices, as Anna Lee notes, separatists realize that to participate is to enact the values of a hostile society and so to participate in the attack on women and the erasure of lesbians.⁴

Thus, the perception that separatism is merely a reaction, a running away, and has no integrity of its own, is a failure or refusal of understanding. Separatism is not a retreat in the sense of hiding from reality and refusing to deal with the facts. Nor is separatism a reactionary movement: it does not emerge from a fear of men or an inability to cope or deal with them.

Similarly, separatism is not a phase during which we learn to feel better about ourselves and get rid of negative feelings so we can function better in coalitions. To understand separatism in any of these ways is to invoke a patriarchal context. As Jeffner Allen writes about manhating,⁵

it is not a whim or an aberration. It is a challenge to a context and values that accept, indeed find desirable, that men do what they do.

Separatism is a chosen response, separatists having taken cognizance of our environment, an affirmation of what we hold valuable to our selves. Separatism is a challenge to what counts as fact, and the beginning of the creation of new value.

In this respect, separatism is a yes-saying as much as it is a no-saying. No-saying is essential, as Marilyn Frye argues.⁶ But if we perceive separatism only in terms of a no, then as Nett Hart suggested to me in a conversation about separatism, we have serious conflicts. For example, we have a conflict between being open to creative changes in the universe on the one hand, and rejecting the direction of "new-age" or "sensitive" men on the other. Or, another example, we have a conflict between perceiving ourselves as caring beings on the one hand and not being willing to deal with little boys on the other. But such conflicts are not necessary; when we perceive separatism as a yes, we perceive ourselves as caring beings who create values possible for lesbians and all women.⁷ And we realize we can't do both—give satisfaction to boys' needs as constructed by society, for example, *and* move toward lesbian culture. Significantly, of the organizations I know that have policies restricting or excluding male children, none began its policy on purely theoretical grounds. Each developed its policy as a result of experience.

There's a choice. And separatists focus on what allows us to choose ourselves and lesbians, not always compromising that choice with manservicing. Once we perceive separation as a yes, we can build more and more choice on that initial yes and so create lesbian community for itself, not simply in response to an outside threat.

This brings in focus the question of separatist motivation, particularly decisions around when to work in coalition and when not. It's our impulse towards creating our own communities and values that guides our choices. As Joyce Trebilcot wrote in a letter to *The Women's Review of Books*:

Lesbianism for me excludes participating in relationships with men for their own sake, but it does not preclude political action that confronts men and their institutions. Sometimes directly facing men is necessary or worthwhile in order for us to establish our rights, to obtain the resources we need, or to defend and support other women. Many separatists are regular organizers of and participants in political actions that involve dealing with men both in confrontation and in coalition. It is a misunderstanding of separa-

tism to suppose that it is always or usually similar to the withdrawal of some Germans into an "interior life" during the Third Reich.⁸

She goes on to state that rather than valuing woman-only space as a means to a better relationship with men, she will deal with men only as a means to being with women. Sometimes our tactics might seem identical to those of non-separatists and non-lesbians, but separatists are doing something different.⁹

In this respect, as Nett Hart noted in conversation, it is erroneous to regard separatism as coming out of feminism. If we perceive separatism as merely derivative of feminism, we would think of it as an extreme reaction because of what passes for feminism today. Early feminism of this wave (very late 60's, early 70's), in its focus on women, was deeply disturbing to the status quo. In changing their relationship to the world—nature and culture—women were removing themselves from the world men had taken/dominated for their own purposes. Early feminists were separating from patriarchy and its values.

No, separatism does not come out of feminism; rather, feminism has developed away from separatism. Reform feminists broke from early feminism by assimilating their goals to the goals patriarchy has for humans (males). That is, they fight to be humans in patriarchal terms. It is not that there was early radical feminism and then separatists broke off as more radical. Rather feminists broke off toward assimilation. Early feminist groups were separatist; there was no place for men.¹⁰ As Bette Tallen comments, lesbian separatists are the only stability the women's movement has known, holding on to basic political analyses developed in the early 70's while other parts of the feminist movement wavered and often abandoned the politics with which they began.¹¹

Separatism is not perceived as an ethical choice in part because it is not perceived as active nor separatists as activists. But such a judgment affirms patriarchal values. As Joyce Trebilcot wrote in *Gossip and off our backs*:

To be an activist is to engage in actions intended to make changes in who has what political power. In male-thought, it is assumed that there is a fixed amount of power in a particular situation. Hence, activism is understood by men as aimed at a redistribution of power (as distinct from the creation of new power) and as essentially adversarial. In this context, the essence of activism is to persuade those in power that they morally (i.e., because it is right) or prudentially (i.e., because it is in their interest) ought to change

their behavior. Paradigm cases of activism include demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, and guerilla actions.

This heteropatriarchal concept of activism excludes two central kinds of feminist activism: separatism and private activism. The activism of separatists is based on the understanding that one way to change the distribution of power is for a hitherto powerless group to separate off and empower themselves. When women separate and hence create power for ourselves, certain men are deprived of power they would otherwise have had, i.e., power over these particular women; but the women's power isn't seized *from* the men, it is created by the women for ourselves. Thus, while separatism doesn't redistribute power, it alters, sometimes radically, the over-all distribution of power.¹²

And this brings up the issue of the "larger picture": Is our separatism the big picture or is it that we separate in order to come back to a big picture? What lesbian separatists have argued is that big political movements and legal reform don't bring the kind of change we're after. Yes, women can vote now, and that is a necessary step; and yes, segregation per se is no longer openly legal; and yes, the nazis were stopped, temporarily; and yes, in russia and china mammon does not reign supreme . . . yet; and yes, the official war in vietnam is over, temporarily, and on and on. But no, these accomplishments have not brought or even encouraged the kind of woman/lesbian-loving values that separatists and radical lesbians are working toward.

At most, large political movements and legal reforms stop crises, and at times we may decide that now is a time to work to stop some crisis or other. But such movements and reforms do nothing to change the fabric of our society, they do not undermine the structure and foundation that feed oppression and that will make it credible again and again in countless different arenas. Further, insofar as these crises force us to play by dominant rules, they reinforce dominant structure and ideology. Others forget or have not figured out that men create crises, when all else fails, to force us to play by their rules and game plan, to force us to stay focused on them. Responding to crises does nothing to deter the direction of a society that thrives on crises.

Those who dismiss separatist politics as hiding from reality tacitly agree with the patriarchy and help to keep us believing that patriarchy is the only reality, that what men call revolution is the only revolution, and that what men call change is the only change. In my opinion, it is separatists who are fighting the "larger" cause.¹³

Related is the issue of "widening" feminist politics to include greater numbers. Early radical feminism presented a choice for women. Watering down the politics to make them more palatable undermines that choice. It is more important to make the values and choices clear and allow each woman to choose than it is to lure a woman on false pretenses or worse, to change feminist politics to include those who would reject feminist values. That, of course, is not to "widen" feminist politics, but shift its locus from those who create its values to those who don't find the values valuable.¹⁴ It is condescending and demeaning to everyone involved. Beyond this, the "widening" has not resulted in the inclusion of more women, particularly more women of color, but it has resulted in the inclusion of men, particularly white men.

And this raises the question of racism. Separatism is portrayed as racist either because separatists allegedly do not recognize or acknowledge that men of color are oppressed or because it is alleged that the only way to end racism is to work in coalitions or because some women of color don't feel comfortable separating from men of color. Of course, some women/lesbians of color and jewish women/lesbians feel quite comfortable separating from men, and some white, gentile women don't feel comfortable separating from white, gentile men . . . ; the issue is, what value is enacted by the choices?

A more significant and problematic argument is that if wimmin/lesbians of color and/or jewish wimmin/lesbians separate, the separation is not only from the values of white, capitalist patriarchy, but also from the values of black or puerto rican or jewish culture, for example. This second separation involves conforming to the dominant culture's attempt to annihilate the values of mexican and chinese and black culture, for example, and brings up questions of identity and group loyalty which each separating lesbian must answer to her own satisfaction. Nevertheless, the lesbians/wimmin who do make the choice to separate do not totally reject jewish or chinese or quebeçoise culture, for example, though there is a separation from masculinist parts of the culture. Lesbian separatists of color and jewish lesbian separatists bring those values of black and seminole and jewish culture, for example, to lesbian community that enrich and develop lesbian values. (In like fashion non-jewish white lesbians bring those values of non-jewish white culture that enrich and develop lesbian values.)

Lesbian community is a rich source of diversity and offers us concrete access to a multitude and variety of differences virtually not available elsewhere, certainly not to lesbians. As Elana Dykewomon and

Anna Lee both commented to me, lesbian community provides us with the ability to really sweat it out together, to understand how our different values operate/engage/distort/contribute/mesh/clash/complement in our various political/cultural work. That others offer what I do not have direct access to is a gift I cherish, and it is part of what makes lesbian community so very special.

Labeling separatism racist *per se* is a way of disagreeing with separatist politics without any real argument or debate over political differences. Merely hurling a label no one of us would want to be accused of is an effective tool to avoid debate of the issues, to censor ideas and silence argument, especially criticism.

For example, there is a difference between concerning ourselves with racism as lesbian separatists and deciding that the only way to *really* work on racism is to stop being separatists and join with men. The latter claim presupposes both that lesbians are not valuable enough to receive our own attention and that lesbians are incapable of accomplishing meaningful work without men. Beyond self-effacement of this kind there is an unwillingness to learn from herstory. Time after time after time, both in the first wave of feminism and in this wave, when women bring in men, the values of the project, whatever it is, shift to men's values and purposes.

In some respects, I find labeling separatism racist functions to obscure a serious division between socialist and anarchist tendencies among lesbians. In my experience, antiseparatists have more u.s. socialist sensibilities—challenging the system by trying to substitute another one that, while addressing significant economic problems, nevertheless relies heavily on hierarchy (dominance and subordination), manipulation, and institutional control; often sacrificing means to end. Separatists tend to have more anarchist sensibilities—distrusting institutional power of any kind, wanting new value to emerge from small groups engaged in creating new ways of being, and realizing that the means determine the end—that is, how we behave toward each other is the value we enact.

And this leads to what is perhaps the most important aspect of separatism for me, namely its focus on lesbians (or wimmin) and a creation of lesbian meaning, lesbian reality. Perceiving is a process of creation. As we choose what we will pay attention to we determine what is significant and what is not. I am not interested in focusing on men, whether exceptional or normal. Separatism, for me at least, is largely a matter of what Marilyn Frye and Carolyn Shafer term lesbian connectionism and

also what french-speaking lesbians call radical lesbianism.¹⁵ By focusing on ourselves and pursuing what we find valuable, we create lesbian meaning.

Each lesbian who has chosen to separate has chosen to focus on lesbians, or in some cases, on women. Despite the lack of ethical and political acknowledgment and despite all the distortions, each separatist chose to begin withdrawing her focus from the dominant culture's romance with men and their values. And regardless of whether her focus is lesbians or women, the context is lesbian. Separatists do not disagree about withdrawing and refocusing. This tacit agreement gives life to a new reality. The point of my separating is to maintain this focus, this ground of being; to develop my own emerging perceptions and encourage development of the emerging perceptions of my peers, perceptions that grow away from the values of the dominant ideology.

Yes, of course, to have chosen to withdraw from—to cease validating—the dominant ideology is not yet to say what will take its place. While we have named the direction and suggested certain parameters of our ideals, we have not yet developed the full set of values that replace those which justify and validate oppression. We are acknowledging the task and setting ourselves to begin the creation of new value. That is precisely why it is crucial we focus on ourselves as lesbians and create lesbian meaning.

And we have begun. We have begun lesbian journeying. We have begun lesbian journeying to touch a rich source of imagination and dreams. We have begun exploring these ideas, living them to find out what works, what doesn't, and why.

Nevertheless, while we have begun, we have also let up in certain respects. I think u.s. separatists have much to gain from the work of both french-speaking radical lesbians and english separatists. Separatists in the u.s. have retreated from developing our analysis of heterosexualism and affirming the value of lesbianism. Sometimes I describe this as lesbian journeying coming to a halt. To this idea Nett Hart responded:

I don't think lesbian journeying ever came to a halt. Instead I think our words/actions became less identifiably separatist as they took on complexity, as we adapted our work to a much longer struggle than we anticipated in the early years. Much early separatist theory was developed by dykes (both urban and rural) in communal households/tribes, and in political action and work collectives. As things began to change, separatist theory had a hard time adapting to new circumstances, i.e., the proximity of men.

These circumstances changed both our focus and how we name that focus. I think our sense that the movement was coming to a halt emerges from a failure to validate what we have been doing.

She goes on to suggest that there may be more separatists now than at any previous time:

I think the betrayal of a radical agenda by reform feminists has been significant. Many separatists worked in female environments on straight agendas—abortion, childcare, battered women, welfare reform, sexual harassment and discrimination, rape crises, women's studies—and as the ideology with which we came to these commitments is supplanted by pieces of the "feminist" pie, we have come to realize how much we were feeding a reform agenda. Both these "political" movements and feminist therapy have served to help women adjust to the world as created by men. Not every coalescence around women is radical. In choosing to work with women (because "every woman can be a Lesbian" as Alix Dobkin sings) we accepted the circumstances of their lives and diverted ourselves from our lesbian focus. I think the realization that these reform measures neither engender nor tolerate Lesbian vision has catapulted many Lesbians into Lesbian separatist self-love.¹⁶

It is time to come back, to focus on an organic Lesbian journey. When we stop focusing on each other and instead focus on the agendas of the fathers, we engage in our own erasure. When lesbians turn our backs on each other as lesbians, we cease to exist in certain key ways. We can not exist as lesbians in the dominant society, and if we don't exist in each other's attention then we don't exist at all except as isolated beings left to survive and hang on and integrate as best we can into heterosexual concepts, or we are left to be complete loners with no fertile ground on which to grow and develop.

At the national radical thought conference for women in Cleveland, May, 1987, about 49 separatists came to participate. We found that while we had all come through a period of attack and retrenchment, we had endured; and we found we were moving toward creating lesbian value. It was a powerful time for us.¹⁷ And the conference worked for us because it was made up of self-loving women who, for the most part, were working on issues that directly concern us.

It is time to come back. We have many difficult and complex tasks ahead of us. For example, continuing to address world-wide gynephobia, without falling prey to arguments that use cultural relativism to

block criticism of the subordination of women and the annihilation of lesbians, while also realizing our own connection to a u.s. imperialist tradition. For example, dealing with the pressure of coalition thinking (vs. actual coalition work at given times for particular reasons) as men parade back and forth with nuclear "power" and try to transfix us with their existential necrophilia. For example, answering the challenge to lesbian feminism, from various french-speaking radical lesbians, which exposes how u.s. lesbian feminists have been remiss in developing analyses of the ideology of heterosexuality.

It is time to come back again to ourselves and our own ground of being with all our differences and ragged edges. It is time we refocus and continue our journey. The breaks we have made from patriarchal thinking come from lesbians daring to try to create something new. Such focus, away from erasure, defensiveness, silence, and mere survival, is important; it is time to move again as lesbians.

End Notes

¹I received much help in preparing this piece. In particular Nett Hart, Anne Throop Leighton, Anna Lee, Lee Evans, Elana Dykewomon, Julia Penelope, zana, Michele Gautreaux, Lilian Mohin, Anna Livia, and Kathy Munser have offered thoughtful criticisms.

²Note that the erasure of lesbian choice and existence by the fathers in effect renders the choice nonsense, unintelligible, unthinkable, non-choices within a patriarchal framework.

³The next two paragraphs contain arguments presented in my manuscript, *Lesbian Ethics: Toward New Value*.

Note that in this respect, separatism has a function different from that of segregation. Segregation is done by a dominant group to a group it wishes to subordinate and control, while separatism involves a person or group withdrawing from a group situation in order to avoid being controlled by the framework of that group. Thus the function of segregation is a dominant group separating off another group in order to keep the group subordinate and to determine the social perception of that group through such methods as stereotyping, thereby engaging in effective erasure. The function of separatism is a group withdrawing from an existing group's framework in order to not be constructed by that group's values—often to exorcise stereotypes, combatting that erasure—and to create its own values, values not attainable within the framework of the initial group.

The erasure is intimately related to choice. Michele Gautreaux, who

grew up in a totally black housing project isolated from Chicago proper, relates that "because most had not chosen that environment or that it be all Black, at the time separateness was a perceived disadvantage compared to Eatonville of Zora Neal Hurston's childhood which was chosen." (Correspondence.)

⁴Anna Lee, paper in progress on the lesbian community.

⁵Jeffner Allen, "Looking at Our Blood: A Lesbian Response to Men's Terrorization of Women," *Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations* (Palo Alto, California: Institute of Lesbian Studies, 1986): 27-59.

⁶Marilyn Frye, "Some Reflections on Separatism and Power," *The Politics of Reality: Essays in Feminist Theory* (Trumansburg, New York: The Crossing Press, 1983): 95-109.

⁷In fact, as Lee Evans mentioned to me in passing, choosing ourselves is part of what makes us lesbians, for traditional woman values dictate always choosing others.

⁸Joyce Trebilcot, Letter, *The Women's Review of Books* IV, 2 (November 1986): 4.

⁹Conversation, Nett Hart.

¹⁰Conversation, Nett Hart. Significantly, as Leslie Levy and Caryatis Cardea noted at the national radical thought conference for women in Cleveland, May, 1987, when compromise is called for it is the more radical elements who are expected to compromise toward a lesser politic; the less radical are not expected to compromise by increasing in radicalism.

¹¹As cited in "Doing Things Differently," J. Robbins, *Womanews* 8, 6 (June 1987): 2.

¹²Joyce Trebilcot, "In Partial Response to Those Who Worry That Separatism May Be a Political Cop-out: An Expanded Definition of Activism," *Gossip* 3: 82-83; an earlier version appeared in *off our backs* xvi, 5 (May 1986): 13.

¹³This argument first appeared in my commentary, "Dear Julia," *Lesbian Ethics* I, 2 (Spring 1985): 68-73.

¹⁴In other words, feminism is not for all women, feminism is for all women who choose feminist values. Those concerned with making feminism popularly palatable tend to forget this.

¹⁵See Ariane Brunet and Louise Turcotte, "Separatism and Radicalism: An Analysis of the Differences and Similarities," *Lesbian Ethics* II, 1 (Spring 1986). *For Lesbians Only* will have a section on French-speaking radical lesbians.

¹⁶Nett Hart, together with Lee Lanning, runs Word Weavers. Together they have produced *Maize: A Lesbian Country Magazine* as well as *Ripening, Dreaming, and Awakening*, three almanacs of lesbian lore and vision. (Word Weavers, Box 8742, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55408).

¹⁷One significant aspect of the conference as a whole is that at the end, separatists and non-separatists gave the organizers a standing ovation. While there were mistakes and problems, what we celebrated at that time were the accomplishments.

Seventeenth Sighting: Dead Heat from BULLDOZER RISING

Down the street walked a fatwoman. She trod carefully, if massively, her steps smooth, avoiding any extra swing of flesh, thighs apart, braced like a rider's, arms graceful at her sides resisting each urge to tug the suit top down over her waist, that ineffectual twitch which marks the vulnerable, the ones who want the ground to swallow them up. Her breath was even, studied. She wore formal costume. Though jiggle suits were welcoming in their easy give and take, the elastic contours molded themselves on the body so that every ripple of fat was starkly outlined. Costume is constricting, but it lends shape and anonymity to its wearer.

The pavement narrowed where a shopfront projected. The two youngmen behind the woman would find it difficult to overtake her without breaking step with each other. Anticipating this impasse, she speeded up. This only confirmed her predicament. Had she slowed, the youngmen might have passed her before the straits, but it is never safe for a fatwoman to dawdle and she was flustered. A blind friend was following, ten paces back, and, as she was also fat, it was naturally impossible for the two to walk together, even where the pavement permitted. Would the blind woman be confused by the sound of the youngmen's footsteps?

"Like overtaking a whale," observed one youngman.

"Or a monster slug," refined his friend.

"Stuffed slug in that costume."

"Would you like to lose weight? Ask me how."

"Well, slug, ask him."

"How?" asked the fatwoman.

"Try a full sentence."

"How do I lose weight?"

"Cut you down to half the size."

"Trim away unwanted fat."

"Display those fine bones you got under . . . What the shit . . . ? The blind woman had, unfortunately, caught them up. She stumbled into one of them.

"Watch where you're . . ."

"The flayed torso of a man has been found in a plastic bag in the burn-out park. A left leg, left hand and right foot had been deposited in smaller bags in the vicinity. Citizens' Watch states that none of the limbs belong to the same body. Though all are male."

"Get carried away?" said Desde when the report came over the speakers.

"We stabbed two hearts," said Soren, "the rest they did to each other."

"With holes in their hearts?"

"Not them. Other youngmen."

"Turn that thing off," yelled a voice from the dance floor. "This is a party."

"Switch out the voice but leave the ceefax," advised Malachi, "so we can see if anything happens."

"If you happen to be looking at the screen when it does," said Soren.

"All right, keep the sound low so only Soren can hear. She does boast how hearing's not directional."

"Nor optional. Why should I be on duty all night?"

They turned the screen down to newflash, timed for ten minute intervals.

"Did you really kill those youngmen?" The question sounded naive enough to warrant answering and the answer would echo and re-echo as each party guest arrived and heard the news. Gossip might as well relay the explanation while it mulled over the event. Though Soren was impatient of naivete. An ungenerous impatience and she disliked herself for it. Surely it was good to believe in a city where strangers on street corners are not feared but asked directions, offered help. But what fatal irresponsibility to behave as though that safe city were here.

"We have to kill," replied Soren, carefully.

"That reduces us to their level," the inevitable comeback.

"Yes," Soren agreed. "They have accomplished that. Except that we can only kill. We cannot warn or wound, we have no symbol of power with which to make a threat."

The room absorbed her response and argued it out in corners. Soren wanted a respite from bravery in which to mourn the dead. The physical details, the urgent intimacy which bound the killer to the killed, the fear beforehand that she would not be strong enough, skilled as she was, were already filtering in her mind. She felt disturbed to see the elements of future nightmares chisel themselves before her wakeful eyes.

"Bound, you and I, now," Malachi was saying.

"But not frozen," Soren returned. "We can make of it what we want." It was not conversation Soren wanted now but Essa. Essa warm, naked and miraculous. Essa's skin was always miraculous when Soren first touched it again. It made Soren feel real, entire, up against the very boundaries of herself along the line that closed her in and joined her to the world. The line of Essa's skin on hers.

"We killed two people," she would tell Essa. Not, "We killed two youngmen," as she must say, correctly, to the questioning Senectity. Essa would accept "people." That was the way she thought.

Soren could roar, "How many of us must kill before this is over?"

Essa would not add reprovingly, "How many more be killed?"

So often at these gatherings Soren, Malachi, Karlin and Desde sat by the back wall, hogging the radiant, throwing politics back and forth, while the others danced and Essa hovered. Essa would interrupt with a tray of hot jumpcakes or a fresh pot of akyan, devoured with enthusiasm but insufficient attention. Then she would throw down her views on the subject under discussion. They would wait politely till she had finished, pick up the lost thread and continue. At first Soren would excuse herself and invite Essa to dance, though it was well known that it terrified her to enter the circling throng. Everyone would be careful, but Soren could feel their heroic effort not to brush against her and it irked to place herself so entirely in their protection. Essa refused each time. Soren trembling and miserable was not the woman she had fallen in love with. So Essa flirted with Desde, and when they danced discussion faltered, for Essa well-partnered was exquisite. Her pavanne stately and graceful as an ibis in flight over water. Then the table thought it glimpsed what Soren might see in her.

It was comforting to miss Essa, to long for her humanism, her indiscriminate compassion.

"It was us or them," pursued Malachi, "and either way we'd lose."

"Yes," Soren agreed, "but we can minimize the loss."

"The way those bodies were cut up, no one will imagine two fat old-women stabbed their hearts."

"I'm not concerned with Citizens' Watch." "You should be. At any moment . . ."

"You're right," Soren sighed. "At any moment, yes, any moment. And I am concerned. I'm a concerned citizen. I don't want to live in a city where oldwomen are despised, where fat is shredded, where the pride of youth skin each other's corpses. But I know about that, I'm part of a movement for change. What I don't know is who is coming with me."

"Or where we're going," finished Malachi.

"So many of the Senectity act like killing is sin."

"They don't want to become people who have killed."

"They want to keep their ideal of a good city by acting like it's here already. Only young Ackademicks can do that, because they don't really live in it."

"Perpetually passing through."

"And occasionally glancing out the window."

"So where is Essa tonight?" asked Desde, sitting down with them in the radiant corner.

"I've no idea," snapped Soren. "We were talking about the Senectity."

"You and Essa had a row?"

"As it happens. I'll get a pot of akyan. Could do with some ingestible comfort."

Soren stood up, felt for her cane and began to tap her way to the food hatch. She moved slowly, steadily, so the others would see and get out of her way. Scarcely three steps later someone patted her hand and asked if she wanted help. Soren smiled graciously.

"I was going to fetch akyan."

"You sit down. I'll get it for you."

"We're fussy, I'm afraid," Soren smiled again. "We like it hot and strong, the water fresh, oxygenated and boiling."

"I know what you mean," the other woman sympathized. "I'll bring a selection."

"And if there were any jumpcakes . . ."

"Works every time," Malachi mouthed to Desde.

"It's because she's blind," Desde shrugged.

"It's because she's Soren," Malachi corrected. "Look at all the other blind women lucky to get a place in the queue, let alone told when it's their turn."

"Soren does push it with the pathetic blind number," Desde continued.

"Nothing pathetic about her, only very desirous and very grateful," Malachi retorted. "You don't object when she appropriates the warmest corner of the room."

"And gets them to switch off the bass," Desde agreed.

Soren sat down again. Malachi poured.

"They feel uncomfortable to be caught out in a compromise," said Malachi, pursuing the earlier theme. "That's why they're giving us a hard time."

"We all compromise," said Soren, "between the ideal and the street. But there's no safety in pretending the street's negotiable. When

someone's offering to slash you, you have to get them first."

"How do you know you'll manage it?" threw in Desde.

"You only know you have to," said Soren.

"Skill, constant practice and a sharp knife help," added Malachi.

"But you're neither of you strong," Desde objected.

Soren's impatience rose. The mechanics were not new to Desde, why was she too treating the killers as curiosities? How many of the Senectity had already killed? Soren pulled her knife from her sleeve.

"Here," she exclaimed, waving it at Desde. "It's springloaded and sonar equipped—tuned to the heartbeat. All you need is a steady hand." She pressed the trigger and the thin steel blade shot out like a laser, two feet from the knife.

"It's best to get them from the back," she went on. "Oldwomen can't afford heroics." Above the noise of music and the dancing, women's voices calling greetings, came a single, flawless soprano:

"Here I stand with my knife in my hand."

An alto joined it, then a mezzo, in perfect, abrupt harmony, the last note lying jagged on the air as the mezzo finished the round.

"I can't handle this," said Malachi.

"Let them sing," said Soren. "It's a hard life."

Those who called the Senectity extremist, not knowing what its outer limits were, fearing it had none, rallied beneath the sarcastic refrain. There was Soren, leader of the leaderless, who had personally collected many of the oldwomen now assembled. There was the knife clasped tight in her hand. What would she stop at? Sides were a while forming, misgivings great. This was the old woman who had left food on the doorstep, in the alleyway, the hidey-hole, night after night until the receiver, compelled by hope, exhaustion, curiosity, came out of her lair to glimpse her benefactor's face. Or to sniff out traps. Sometimes, on seeing another oldwoman, her short-lived hope would drain away; she would hurry Soren inside, protesting that she had enough to worry her without adding to her burden by looking out for someone else. Then Soren could set to work. Sometimes the regular gifts were too much. Soren would only know of her failure when the food was left untouched; then she might smell the rank odor of a corpse, or be forced to conclude that the oldwoman had fled to another hole where no one spied on her. But the rest, and there were a hundred successes to each despair, were slowly enticed out of hiding, told of the existence of many more like themselves, offered safe refuge in the foothills of the Ackademy until they found accommodation elsewhere.

It was said, also, that Soren would explain that the bonds of the

Senectity were strong because the oldwomen loved each other, and to disbelievers she would demonstrate. This was as true as it was untrue, Soren said. It depended how she felt about the woman in question and she did not need disbelief to spur her on. The same, she added, could be said of any relationship. Nor was Soren the only member of the Senectity who sought to dig out oldwomen from the wreckage, but she was the one who was remembered and such was her personal renown that even those who were exhumed by other hands would boast that it was Soren sought them out.

While the sides gathered, Soren was listening intently. Above their heads, somewhere in the shafts and conduits of the building, she could hear a rushing sound, like water. A burst pipe? But the noise was moving fast: something sliding down a tunnel. Soren tuned out the hall and concentrated. A sudden loud bump. A bang.

"Citizens' Watch," yelled an accusing voice. "They followed you here after the murders."

"They'll get us. All in one go."

"We're trapped."

"Nonsense," said Malachi quickly, getting to her feet and turning the picture on. "It's the screen; we tuned it to newsflash and it's about time for another one."

Soren walked toward the side door.

"Where's she going?"

"Don't let her out."

"Something's fallen down the laundry chute, that's all," said Soren calmly. "Who's coming with me to check it out?"

Desde was first to reach the mouth of the chute. Lying on the conveyor belt were the bodies of two oldwomen.

"Revenge," she muttered. "So we have been found out."

"Don't be ridiculous," snapped Soren. "A tooth for a tooth is for those in equality. We are not on those terms with the city."

The bodies were warm. One groaned. With great strain, the top woman was rolled off the other. It was Essa. The news sent fresh fears rippling through the crowd: had the Apres-Ski Tower heard the commotion? But once it was learned that the women were alive, there was a bustle of stretchers, trolleys and bandages purposeful enough to blunt the edge of acrimony. Still quarreling nervously, groups of party guests gathered to disperse: one oldwoman every five minutes. Though it was the early hours of the morning, it did not do to flaunt even empty streets in rowdy be vies.

Soren slept that night beside Essa, wondering what her lover had

been doing, glad that she was there. Things were as bad as they could be without snapping. The city was closing in, the Senectity so scared they were fleeing their own shadow. Euphoria at the sheer numbers of oldwomen unearthed was giving way to dread that their great number would wipe them out. Essa had been in an accident and she, Soren, had killed. But despite these obvious ills, Soren felt easier than she had for a long time, and for a long time, as she lay awake listening for Essa's breathing, she could not think why. She was happy, joyous; something good had happened. At last she remembered. Karlin. Karlin had said she was getting better.



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Progress

At last, I thought,
we are making some progress;
at least, I thought,
we're talking about it now.

She brought it up, saying
she was interested,
romantically—she wanted me
to know. But
then she said
she wouldn't know what to do
with me
in a wheelchair, and hardly
able to move.

So I wrote a poem, offering
a few suggestions,
and informing her of the
relevant facts: That my skin
was ready to dance my skin and hers
could enjoy all kinds
of choreography swing to our souls' orchestrations
That my thighs were alive, afire
between them melting
a swirling core
That my mouth
ached for her water
one bright drop let's mix our surfs
over a new island, our island
Why not
when all our senses work fine
only waiting to join hot
and wrestle in a whirlpool waltzing
Grab hold, said the poem for me

Then she said
that in relationships she was never
the aggressor.

So I wrote a poem
that when read a certain way
took charge took her laid her
down turned her over and held us bound
together up and down:
nose to cheek to cheek to nose
chin against neck belly by belly
legs locked
exposed centers pressed
together, wriggling
like movie hostages
and then let
our tiniest involuntary reactions
take over from there: synapses exploding
like popcorn sharp tender
forcing hot quick our breaths
carrying us
to a sudden darkness

Then she said
that she feared having me grow
to depend on her.

So I wrote a poem
disavowing any such need except
as suited the moment
which might be brief
and unique
as a web of saliva left spun
by our tongues
No need, said the poem for me,
to be careful I can stand to hurt
I'll grow again from a new place

Now she says
she still doesn't know.

Someday I'll ask her
no paper between us
Girl, when you gonna get your shit together
so we can have this fling?

A Sunny Day

A sunny day and no one to hold me and my cunt aching from doing those exercises to strengthen that long muscle that goes all the way around from your asshole up and its name begins with a p and it's a long name I can't pronounce no more than I can do those exercises more than two or three times. Pretend, the book said, your cunt is an elevator. Squeeze up to the first floor . . . second floor, then third floor. Then let the elevator come down slowly. Don't say nothing about people live in the country don't go in elevators much—just the one in that new mall—City Center—with all those empty spaces where they expected shops, and it's a glass elevator, just goes up from one floor to the next and back again but everyone in the mall can see you doing it. Up and down. That's what I imagined today in the car—getting that elevator up inside me and I was sure the driver in the car next to mine could see what I was doing from my face and there I am with this elevator up to level two—in the middle—and the light turns green and my car shoots forward and the elevator shifts down to first floor and then right out of my vagina and there I am with this tingling feeling like something should rub my clit yet I have one hand on the steering wheel and the other on the stick shift and I'm still thinking I should get that elevator up through one and two to third floor and then I look over and that man is still travelling in the next lane—looking worried now, like he's scared my car is going to shift suddenly forward again which I must say I am too, like these exercises seem to have a life of their own. The book said if I did it ten times three times a day for six weeks my sex life would improve but I'm not sure I'll make it that long.

Desire

“There she goes!” Sophie flapped her russet wings crisply at the figure rapidly retreating from her view. Always enchanted by the ongoing parade of women in front of their store window, Sophie particularly loved the excitement generated by Floss’s daily excursions back and forth to work.

“Don’t you think I can see?” Dora snapped, her small supply of patience already exhausted by Floss’s unremitting refusal to notice her. The brown plush bear dropped to her knees, imploring the retreating figure. “Don’t you know I love Floss?” Pressing her soft nose into the plate glass window, she wailed, “Floss, oh, Floss, come back.”

The woman of her dreams walked away.

Sophie and Dora were living in the window of a vibrator store on 24th Street in San Francisco, two blocks up the street from the variety store where Floss worked. Every morning and evening, they watched the woman walk by. But Floss never stopped to look in the window, not at Dora, nor at Sophie the owl who perched next to her.

Compressing all the aching anguish she could summon into one long soulful wail, Dora cried, “Oh, Floss, why don’t you notice me? Why don’t you want me?”

“Take it easy, she’ll be here tomorrow,” Sophie stated in a matter of fact way aimed at quieting the bear, but producing just the opposite effect.

“Another day is gone. Hope is lost. I am abandoned.”

“C’mon Dora. Be brave.”

“Even though you’re supposed to be so wise, it’s obvious you don’t understand the depths of my feelings for Floss. You’ll be sorry some day when I die of a broken heart and fade away and there’s nothing left of me at all.” Big tears formed at the corners of the bear’s black eyes and dripped down her round furry cheeks.

“You’ll get soggy.” Sophie flapped her wings vigorously in a futile effort to change the atmosphere. “Don’t be so touchy. I was only stating the truth.”

“Who needs it?” The fat little bear turned away from the window and fell dramatically into the heavy gold curtains which separated the

front window from the interior of the vibrator store.

"For heaven's sake," Sophie said crossly and tucked her head under a wing.

In the 1970s, 24th Street with its rows of small shops, cafes, and good restaurants attracted an ongoing pedestrian traffic, supplying the bear and the owl with constant entertainment. Day after day and month after month, they scrutinized Floss and all the other women who walked up and down the street. No one disturbed the little animals, because after all, the main business of JOY'S TOYS was vibrators. The women who walked in behind the heavy gold curtains were engrossed in other pursuits.

In the beginning of her sojourn at JOY'S TOYS, the bear had enjoyed this anonymity. Broken-hearted over her rejection from Joy's bed, Dora was content to watch all the different women, so many sizes and ages, varieties of skin color and costume. She found her endless excited debates with Sophie engrossing as they considered the relative virtues of each precious womanly attribute.

But then one spring day, everything changed. Floss walked by and Dora fell in love. Although she had seen Floss almost daily for the past three years, suddenly the world tipped over. Here was her beloved. In an instant, the ongoing parade of women became meaningless. Where once there were endless choices and variety, now, suddenly, there was only one person in the world: fat, gray haired, middle-aged, depressed Floss.

Ever since that day in May, Dora had been trying to flag Floss's attention. But with no success.

Dora could not accept defeat. She obsessed night and day, hour after hour, carrying on about unrequited love, driving Sophie to distraction with passionate tirades and heartbreaking grief.

"She has such a beautiful big soft belly," Dora said, her agony transforming itself into lust. Rolling away from the curtains, she sat up and shook the branch where Sophie rested. "Wouldn't you like to touch her? Wouldn't you like to feel that soft, gray hair, like fur? And those breasts! Hanging down like ripe sweet fruit. Couldn't you just curl up there forever?"

Hooting loudly to indicate her approval of Dora's change of mood, Sophie jerked her head up out of her wing. "Dora, you are getting very poetic. But I think you like that big soft belly because it is just like yours."

"That's true," Dora said, rubbing both fists over her own round furry stomach. "That's why people love us." She smiled broadly.

"We're very fat." She patted herself appreciatively.

"People love fat bears, but you know they're afraid to love fat women in the same way," Sophie said sadly, her golden eyes veiled.

"You've told me that a hundred times, but I just can't believe people are really that stupid. They don't know what they're missing." Visions of herself rolling blissfully over waves of billowing flesh danced in Dora's head. "Floss is perfect. Who couldn't love her?"

"Well, people can't be as wise as us. They have strange ideas."

"It's just hard to understand. But Sophie, if people think Floss is too fat to love, then she needs me more than ever. Oh Floss, when will you notice me?"


Flopping onto her back, Dora filled all the space in the window with desire for a soft, welcoming woman's body.

"For heaven's sake." But Sophie found it difficult to be stern. She caught Dora's vision and melted into it.

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Your Passing

What I should have said, was that I wanted you here with me.
What I should have told you was about the way the dirt comes down
at night through the straw and vigas,
and how when no one is home I can't stop moving
from the edge of the bed, and after a while the chair.
I am doing the dishes over and over,
or emptying the trash.
I pull used clothes out of a bag unpacking
and shove them away somewhere else,
sift through papers and stack them on the table.
I can't stop moving.
I go for the phone, for you.
Small white digits that get me nowhere.

What I could have said was I love you and will go anywhere.
Let's take off for the Washington Monument
and call it only an adventure.
I picture you walking down the streets in a raincoat,
your dark hair falling straight down your back,
the green grass cut evenly away from your passing.

I could live in an apartment nearby you
and read in the Square.
We could meet in corner booths
in delis, with checkered table cloths,
and talk quickly
in low voices.
In the evening make dinner. Exchange tastes.

What I could have said was
see me through it, and down the wide crowded street.
We can wander through museums
like the relics of our first few months together.
The way I sometimes wander through them
and hold to me other times

like things precious.

What I said was, it is morning and I'll miss you.

Your dark beauty,

your red eyes from crying and tangled hair,

the way you could go looking for your lost mother,

some woman who gave you up at a high price

in a world where everyone said to.

What I am saying is love me.

Be that brave.

I'll be waiting for you there

under those orange lights by the freeway,

on the industrial side of town

where everything is vats and railroads

and barbed wire.

We'll go looking in the night

behind untitled doors

for another world

with women.

man plague

“i’m having visions of hamburgers,” i groaned as the last of the cars disappeared down our hill.

“you know where that beef comes from? that’s what they’re bulldozing—”

“—the amazon jungle for. yes, i know. it’s horribly politically incorrect and loaded with chemicals, but i’m still dying for a hamburger.”

“yeah. well, i could use a coke myself,” rivertree confessed. “wanna drive into town?”

i grinned. “you bet. let’s see if anybody else wants to go.”

the other two were sitting at our kitchen table looking a little spacy. as we came in, i plopped into my wheelchair—an old friend i’d not seen in two months, now holding me again. rivertree scooted her chair over and i rolled into the space beside her. inez said, “hey, we were just talking about taking a drive, getting a pizza or something.”

we had just completed a two-month-long retreat on our land, for lesbians wanting to learn and practice survival skills. we’d taught such things on weekends, in smaller groups, but this retreat was a big undertaking. it wasn’t easy. we ate mostly foods we had grown ourselves or could forage. we built small shelters out of branches and leaves. of course, it was summer and there was no danger of cold. i had brought all my pillows and my foam pad, but still had more pain than i’m used to. or maybe just noticed it more because, without my wheelchair, i couldn’t be very active. and it put me in a bad mood that although we were all more dependent on each other than usual, i was the *most* dependent. i had chosen to participate, though, and to do it without my chair, which would have snagged on every rock and crevice. having gotten through it all, surely a hamburger was my due.

animated by the thought of junk food after two months of wild greens, we piled into inez’ old red car.

“well, we *all* grew up on it,” rivertree rationalized. “it’s probably imprinted on our brain cells. and it hasn’t helped to listen to 17 other dykes freak out ‘cause they couldn’t get their snickers bars.”

“they were really a great group, though,” inez said. “and some of

them knew stuff i didn't, or figured it out with common sense."

"yeah," juna agreed. "we should do this again next year for sure."

it felt strange to be off our 80 acres, to be on a road headed for civilization. i still felt disoriented and wished we had done a more focused closing ritual with the other wimin to center our energy and prepare us for this change.

strange, too, that the "burger whiz" on the highway appeared to be closed. what time was it, anyway? surely past eleven, on a tuesday morning.

"it's been vandalized!" juna shouted from the back seat. "look, that whole glass side is smashed!"

"well," i shrugged, "one more victory for the amazon rainforest. i can live without whizburgers. been doing it. so—on to the pizza place?"

there were hardly any cars on the highway. "is today some kind of holiday?" i asked no one in particular.

inez said, "i don't know, but we better get some mail. weren't they supposed to bring all our held mail today? I checked the box before we left, and there was practically nothing there, after two whole months!"

even in town we saw very little traffic, and most of the stores looked closed. no people were out on the street. we began noticing more store windows smashed.

"something really creepy is going on," juna shuddered. "let's get out of here."

i suggested we look for a phone and call a friend of ours who lived in town. inez made the call, then came back to the car looking worried.

"i kept getting a busy signal. not for her number, but even before i dialed. a busy signal and a bunch of clicks and static. let's go on over to her house."

but no one was home. inez tried the door—locked. nothing looked amiss, though.

juna kept me company in the car while the others prowled around. it was a little backyard apartment behind an old white woodframe house. no one appeared to be home in the front house either.

"i know," i said when the others got back. "let's go out to joni's."

joni was a het woman who lived a few miles the other side of town. well, *she* said she was bi, but we thought of her as het because she lived with a man. her social life was mostly dykes, though. rivertree had a long-standing, unrequited crush on her.

we drove up joni's long bumpy driveway, which always got me right in the lower back. at least her house was directly at the end of the

drive—no paths to walk, and no steps to climb. almost wheelchair accessible, except the house was so cluttered with joni's woodworking projects you couldn't have maneuvered around once you got inside. i hadn't brought my chair anyway, thinking we were just going to the burger whiz. it was a relief to spot joni's car, then see her in the garden, looking up from the tomato plants she was staking. she ambled toward us with that swaying walk of hers, her face glowing.

"it's wonderful to see you all," she beamed. "come in. i'll put some tea on."

"joni," inez began, glancing around the house, which was in its normal state of jumbledness, "have you been to town lately? 'cause we were just through, and . . ."

joni, fussing with the teapot, looked up and waited for inez to continue.

". . . and, well, no one was around. looks like a ghost town. some stores have their windows busted out."

joni kept staring expectantly. "oh," she said slowly, rubbing her cheek. "my god, you don't know. i forgot you were doing that survival thing. the whole time. wow. i can't believe . . . wow."

she just kept standing there holding the teapot and staring. we were all staring back. rivertree screamed, "what?!"

joni rubbed her face again. "your survival thing just ended?" i nodded. "and it started when?"

"june second," said inez.

"well," said joni carefully, "it must have been only a few days later. this . . . thing . . . started spreading . . . like an epidemic. killing people. well, killing men. and boys. the little kid down the road, who used to come ride horseback with me, he was one of the first."

juna sat—almost fell—down next to me on the couch. nobody else moved a hair. i wondered if i was really hearing this.

"they didn't know how it got started. then they figured out that it was this chemical that the government was testing secretly. they'd released it into the air over a couple of cities—it was supposed to make people more docile and suggestible. instead, it interacted with another chemical already in the air—from smog—to form this deadly compound. but deadly to males only. it seemed to go right for the y chromosome. not a single female has shown signs of illness, let alone died."

"how many men have died?" i asked.

again she stared, as if we were all just landed from another planet.

then, quietly but quite distinctly she said, "all of them."

juna jumped up and started pacing around the room, looking out the windows as if searching for an escape. i found myself unable to speak or even swallow. rivertree gasped, "all?" and inez echoed, "you're telling us all men have died from some *chemical*?"

"i wish you could find out more gradually." joni stood holding the unlit match above the woodstove, with the teakettle in her other hand. she took a couple of long, deep breaths. "that's just how it hit us all, like a bolt of lightning. i heard about it one night on the news, and by the next day thousands had died. all the deaths happened within a week. then so much else happened. seems crazy, but i'd almost *forgotten* the deaths. i guess i'd made my peace with all that, till you all reminded me. now i'm back there like i was at first, knowing how you're feeling, not being able to grasp it." she stopped, her voice breaking. again she breathed deeply, and finally said all in a rush, "when mel died, then i grasped it."

"mel?" i looked around. the place never had reflected mel very much. now he was dead and his absence didn't show.

joni's eyes were distant. "yes, he died early. one night he was burning up with fever—'man plague,' that's how it starts—and in the morning he was just lying there next to me, cold." she had recited this in a rather methodical way, and now she stopped and looked into space. she shook her head, blinked, and continued, "i couldn't believe it. i never even imagined mel dying. he was only 41."

juna came and enfolded joni in a hug. joni smiled raggedly, trying to allow juna's caring in. for a moment, i, too, wasn't in this place of horror, but in the warmth of their hug. i liked seeing them like that—both big wimin, strong-spirited wimin, juna very dark and joni very light. although few words ever passed between them, i had always sensed that they shared a quiet affection. i knew it didn't threaten my lovership with juna. she was as monogamous as they come, so i freely enjoyed her lovingness toward others. now, watching them, i suddenly felt so grounded that i knew all this was real. i was not dreaming some incredible dream. we were all here together and this moment was real.

joni went on, "i grieved hard, for a week or so, screaming and sobbing, hiking these hills till i'd fall down exhausted, hating the universe for pulling the rug out from under me. then my grief was over. i guess it helped that i grieved so hard, didn't hold anything back. after that, i could see that mel did have a good life, and maybe it was okay it wasn't longer. as far as me—well, sure, i miss him, but i won't pine away. we really led our separate lives."

she heaved a big sigh, lit the kindling, and set the teakettle on the stove. "when he was first teaching me carpentry, i looked up to him and we had the fire of teaching and learning between us. these past few years, since we finished building the house, it's been kind of dull. i realized we really didn't know each other. i was drifting more toward being with wimin. but mel was still here, we still got along okay. there was no reason to end it. but now it's ended by this plague thing. this may sound awful, but in a way i feel freed."

inez had come to sit beside me on the arm of the couch. i put my hand on her thigh and stroked a little as we listened to joni.

"but let me tell you what the man plague has been like. if i can. so many died all at once. i still can hardly believe i lived through it. the first news reports started coming in: men dying everywhere, all over the world. i thought about that 'hundredth monkey' idea, wondered if it really was a chemical, or maybe it was some kind of mass consciousness that struck everywhere at once. that was the only way i could make any sense out of it.

"some men castrated themselves, but that didn't help. it wasn't hormones the chemical attacked—it was their very maleness, the y chromosome. some men hid: locked themselves in apartments or ran to wilderness areas. but you really couldn't hide. it somehow spread rapidly in the air, all over the world. we don't really understand how that happened, we just know it must have because the chemical was only released in two areas of the united states, yet men everywhere died. there may be some that survived somewhere, but we don't know since we stopped getting news reports."

"no news reports?" rivertree's voice was high and sharp, as if she'd finally found something she could make sense of. she picked up joni's little radio and clicked it on. there was static or silence everywhere on the dial.

"well, of course the whole world's gone topsy-turvy. somewhere there may be medical researchers continuing to work on the disaster, but really, why bother? the men died, quick, and we all had to pitch in and bury the bodies, and take over all the work men had been doing—and grieve besides. no wimin have died or even gotten sick, so why waste precious energy worrying about something that's over and done with? we have to think about today, and tomorrow. we've got some big problems on our hands. most of the truckers and oil industry workers were men. so we don't have much fuel available—we can't run our cars, and we don't have trucks to bring food to our stores. anyway, big

agribusiness was mostly men. sure, men ate more than half the food, but we're still having a food crisis 'cause of the uncertain supply. at first all the food stores got looted. wimin broke in and took all they could carry. then, we started having neighborhood meetings." she gestured toward the radio. "that's mostly the kind of news we're getting now: what groups are working on community food supplies, who can operate a press, or a tractor or"—she gestured again at the radio—"broadcasting equipment. all those jobs wimin have been kept out of.

"what i've been doing is carrying news between neighbors on horseback, and every few days i ride to the house of a womon with a CB, and she relays our news to the radio station. by the way, i hope you all have the gas to get you home, 'cause every gas station in this area has sold its last. we have a small supply put away for community use, in case of emergency, that's all."

i felt so stunned i wasn't sure i was taking in all that joni was telling us. too much, too much! oh yeah, i had wished for a world without men—probably we all had. but to have it really happen—out of the blue! suddenly i laughed out loud, i guess kind of frantically, recalling the old saying from my straight days, "can't live with them, can't live without them." these goddamn men were causing us problems even by their absence!

inez leaped up with a cry.

"oh! carlos! i've gotta get to a phone!"

she stopped at the door, turned, and gave joni a pleading look. joni gazed back sadly.

"her brother," i said. "oh. i guess my father's dead, too."

we looked around at each other. for rivertree it would be the son she had co-mothered with an ex-lover. for juna it would be nobody. she was about the most separatist dyke i'd ever met.

juna murmured, "my grandpa. that old man taught me about fixing things. we used to work for hours on old clocks and stuff, down in the basement." the wetness in her eye caught the light. "well, he must have been in his 90's. i've been knowing i'd get the word he was dead one of these days. if that's the price of having all the other pricks die, i guess i'll pay it."

rivertree was scowling and shaking her head. i guess a child is the hardest of all—even a child not of your own body, who you rarely see. like juna, i could give up my father for a good cause. he'd had two heart attacks and i'd expected him to go pretty soon—had even wished he would, so it would be over with. but still . . . i wished i could have seen

him one more time. i wondered if, *really*, he was dead. if all men had really died.

"what about the human race?" rivertree shouted. "it'll die out!" she glared accusingly at juna and then at joni as if they were responsible.

"well, there are sperm banks, you know." joni sounded tired, shaken, but carrying on. "we'll have to portion that sperm out carefully and gradually. and they say a certain percentage of births have always been parthenogenetic. it looks like we'll have to readjust to having a much smaller population, and to having a lot more old people than young. but the world *was* facing serious overpopulation."

"yeah," i offered, "i used to wonder how mother earth was going to solve that one. nuclear war, i thought. i do like this way better."

rivertree gave me a nasty look and burst into tears. inez put an arm around her and they went outside.

joni poured hot water into the teapot.

"this is chamomile, from my garden," she said. "maybe it'll help soothe everyone's shock. i know it's hard to have to deal with all this."

"*you* seem well-reconciled to it, you steady old taurus, you," i managed to joke.

"yes, and i've hardly had to try. isn't that funny. somehow this has given me some direction in my life that i was lacking. sure, i'm sorry mel's gone, and my brothers, and the guys down the road, and little boys who might have grown up less sexist than their fathers. but it's kind of exciting to have a whole fresh start, a whole new society to make. we can make it what we want. reagan's dead, and bush, and the whole line-up of guys that were supposed to take over if the president died. nearly everyone in congress was a man. i don't know what's happening in washington—if anything! but i know what's happening here, how we've already started community gardens and an exchange point for food and seeds and clothes and tools. sure, some wimin are hoarding and freaking out, some wimin are still in terrible shock and grief and some don't know how to live without their men taking care of things. but i'm really amazed at how many of us have just pitched in and started doing what needs doing."

"wars!" juna burst out. "the pentagon's gone. the generals have died!"

"and most of the soldiers, too," joni smiles. "so we're finally out of central america. of course, all the central american men are gone, too. i wonder how wimin in other countries are taking this. i suppose, like us, they're doing whatever they can to keep on. what else *can* you do? at

least that's one thing wimin have been well-trained for—keeping on no matter what."

"my sister," i groaned. "her first husband died in an accident two years ago. it shook her whole world. now she's lost this husband, too. and they were really well-suited to each other. both jewish, both teachers, the same age, and both scorpios. she'd never found anybody who could keep up with her sexually before, and that's made her a much happier person."

"what's her phone number?" inez was standing in the doorway, grinning.

i threw a pillow at her. "yeah, well, i'll give it to you. she just might like you."

"does she go for girls?" she threw the pillow back, hard.

"i guess she'll have to—or quit being a scorpio." i lobbed the pillow back at her—we were both laughing wildly.

rivertree came back in. juna went over and kneaded her shoulders.

"i'm sorry," i said to her. "i guess i just don't know how to deal with all this."

joni handed around cups of tea. we were all silent a few moments, sipping, thinking our own thoughts.

"what can we do out where we live?" inez wondered out loud.

juna said, "i think we just got finished doing something. maybe we can do more of the same."

"sure," agreed joni. "most wimin need a crash course in food foraging pretty bad right about now. and though there's no housing shortage—with half the population and more than half the property owners gone—some houses aren't getting electricity or water. garbage isn't being collected. wimin need to learn how to live without depending on those city services, at least for awhile."

"but how will we get to them, or them to us, without cars?" i wondered.

"more slowly, looks like," said inez. "on foot, on horses—how about a covered wagon? well, i guess horses won't be easy to come by . . . they're probably in great demand . . . well, we can give it some thought."

"why don't you stay here a few days?" joni suggested. "there will be a broadcast tonight that we all can listen to; maybe that'll give you some more ideas of how to hook in to the transition efforts."

"i need to do something—*now*," rivertree said. "do you have some garden work that needs doing?"

"sure—always! and i'm expanding it a lot right now. there are so

many wimin needing food. it would be wonderful if you dug a new bed or two. there's also soil to sift and manure to rake, if anybody else is interested."


everyone but me headed eagerly for the door. joni looked at me, thought a minute, and added, "and there are seeds to plant, and beds to weed, and, let's see . . . some dried herbs to be stripped."

i chose the weeding. it felt good to sit on the soil, to tug hard at the deep-rooted weeds, then feel them finally give. i tossed them onto the straw around the plants to make a deeper mulch. some of the weeds, of course, were good eating, and these formed a separate pile for tonight's dinner.

so many thoughts spinning around in my head. a whole new world—one where hard physical work would be needed. it had taken me years to find my place in the lesbian country scene—or rather, to create a place where none existed before. small changes still knocked me off balance. like worrying, now, about how i'd do anything useful around here for the next few days without my wheelchair. what about the bigger changes we'd soon have to face—an unimaginable number of them? well, i could start where joni had, at ground level. literally. touching the reality of earth, feeling comfort and continuity there. we would plant and harvest into another season.

the sun felt hot and good. we all worked barebreasted. now, it would be possible to drive back through town with our shirts off. now, we could go where we wanted when we wanted, naked if we wanted, and not fear arrest or rape. we could cover our bodies only for warmth or decoration, like we did on our own land—not because we had to. i added a particularly nice lambsquarter plant to the dinner pile. so much different. so much new.

i looked up at joni, hoeing compost into a new bed. a slow smile spread across her face and i realized she was returning mine. beyond her i saw juna smiling at me, too.



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The Three Tongues

Tied to the backs
of some women are
bloody sorrows,
leech-like troubles
that make them weak.

In every strong woman
there are three tongues
all in contradiction,
silenced during the day
by a heavier hand.

At night
minutes before bed
the strong woman
must unbraid
the three tongues
and let them speak.
Only then can she sleep.

A Toast of Babatine

She still crosses the waters everyday. Babatine riding in a slim boat slices the waves under her direction. She looks like a short Masai — the face dark, full; planed cheeks; a hawk's fierce eyes, a horse's noble strength and her own enchanting grace.

I am a rider of the waters. This work I do for my town's keep. Lafuseton is a gather town where women who make cloth can exchange their life patterns with women who shape tools or the forms of their imaginings into wood. Women who net the sea can change meals with women who plow and pick from the earth, and everyone trades scents and beads to adorn themselves and those they love.

I was born here and count twenty women kin. I am at peace with my family. We work in Isafore house to be in harmony with ourselves, with each other, and with other women in the ways of the Goddesses. I've lived through 19 dry seasons and 20 wet. Launtsan says the women upriver count their time in moons and blood. A woman ages by moons until her aspect turns and she herself bleeds, then she counts her own cycle. My short Masai, Babatine, would claim an age around 240, which by our count, is 20 seasons, wet and dry.

Lafuseton is such a busy place that our servants made it law that we dance and play and eat and make music together four times each season. This custom has been our rule as long ago as all the way back to our ancestor, Donasim, who came here when women first decided to live with themselves. That was over six generations ago. There had been a war where all the world was called to fight. The women who said "no" to the call left to find a better way to live. From the nesting homes they built with each other, our nation took her being.

The first ancestors, who fashioned many of the ways that we live, decided there would be no rulers among women. We select servants each season. Their work is to sow the field where women plant and harvest our lives together.

In my kin group, we are musicians. People speak of the Isafore family as far as the Mango port, 10 days river travel away. That so much gift has settled in one family is praise to the Goddesses. We of Isafore house were to lead in the drumming, piping, playing on strings from our

many voices for both nights of loosing. Babatine had come over the water in the second part of the morning, as she always does. She steered towards our shore and I left my pluck harp to pull her in.

The rider of the waters guides women into shore safely. We keep large sharp rocks by our banks so that strangers' boats can be torn, damaged to the drowning point if they mean us harm. No family has ever forgotten that people once came to our shores, stole away the women who went out carrying the welcome, and then quickly left us open and bleeding for the family so strangely gone. It had been during a prayer time when all but a few women were meditating and praying to the ancestors and Goddesses. Launtsan and many other women think it was men who'd come to our part of the world, but no one has ever actually seen a man for over six generations. We remember, though, and have made ourselves ready should there be a next time.

It is common for unknown women to come to us from across the waters and from lands far away. The courtesy among women is to wait until invitation is extended to come into a people's home space, then a warm welcome is spread across a full table. Any woman who doesn't know the hard edges we put in the water is safe because natural custom protects her. When strangers or familiars come, a rider of the waters swims out and leads them through a safe passage.

I saw Babatine coming—I had actually been looking for her—and our stilled shores pulled her in, whereas on busy days she passes us by for her downriver destiny.

I spoke to her in Matriby, the language that links one people to another, and she answered in Lafuso. I was surprised to discover that she is one of us. I told her to follow me to an opening, and I swam on my back, showing off and wanting to look at her. I knew she'd be strong—steering a boat demands that your back and arms be able to match the waters wave for wave—but by all my family, ancestors, and humbly to the Goddesses, she was more handsome than if she'd been my twin. We came quickly to shallow water and sandy bottom. We easily put her slender boat by my sleep-in, which is close to the opening I guided her through.

"It seems so soon for a loosing," she said with speech that is slower than we use. I invited her to come stay with my family for the day and evening. She smiled, more beautiful than any of the handsome Masai I had ever seen.

She told me, "I'm Babatine, an informer for the fisher towns. I seldom come to Lafuseton because you do trade and don't need to know

the water movements. You travel like a fish," she said almost shyly. And then: "Have you ever been netted?"

We both laughed. She liked me at once, as I did her. We liked each other more as the morning stretched and went on to meet the day. Babatine left in the early afternoon to tell the other fisher towns and her upriver home that there was a loosing, to come to Lafuseton to share in the joy: there'd be no trade this day. In the early evening, she came to my kin house. Some other rider of the waters showed her to the long hut where we of Isafore family were getting ready with ourselves for the night.

I was already in beads and wore a flower's field of colors. My pants were loose at the legs for dancing and firm around the ankles and waist. I wore the soft bee cloth on my forearms, five strings of beads at my waist, and a single yellow strand criss-crossing each breast around my back. My brown skin was touched to a red sheen by each morning's sun, and I was shining also, with the desire that licked at me when I thought of Babatine.

I felt a lot of pride over my new friend. It is common to bring beautiful strangers to the kin house, but Babatine seemed special. Her body scents were musk and coconut, and of course: the river. Her life energy was still and deep and refreshing like the waters, and again, she reminded me of myself: I scented of somali and vanilla and a quietness that slowed women when they approached me.

I am not a social woman, which is why I chose my work as a rider of the waters. I like to be around women, but not so close with them that they can pull on my energy for their talk and chatter. I like to be alone with my thoughts and their music. My difficult kinswoman, Launtsan, teases that I'll never know a love-mating song since I can barely sing a civil song of friendship. The way I see things, I'll never sing sorrow and disappointment and weary peacemakings. Launtsan is forever spilling tears for some aspect of her many love-friendships.

Launtsan called me out back to help her attend to the strings and tones of our pluck harps. I wanted to go walking with Babatine through the fruit trees of Lafuseton, but clearly this was to be my day's gift time. All women know that at least once during the day, and on some days, many times, one must give a little more than seems fair. It is best to give generously with a minimum of resistance. I badly wanted to beg off from task with the talkative Launtsan, but with a salute to the wiser ones Who guide our lives, I made ready to stay as long as it took to oil the wood and clean the strings.

After a few minutes, the question popped into my head and out of my mouth, "How is it that women know their love-mates?"

Launtsan didn't rush with her usual eagerness to talk in her answer. Nor did she remind me I didn't have enough share in friend-loves to consider taking on a mate-love. She played some notes on the pluck harp and said it would happen with me just as it has for every other. I would one day be full in my season, my life so ripe my cup had no room to contain all the juices. She said a woman would tap me at the height of this season and love would latch and pour out of me, seeking to empty into her. "And you will want to give her everything," she told me, and I felt a great quiet. It seemed impossible that I, the almost unfriendly Cicatoo, would want to do any such thing. I liked to stay alone with my pluck harp and reed flute. When other women looked for one another to spend their loose time, I left them to be apart with myself. I couldn't see wanting to give everything, by which Launtsan meant time: the river whose flow is our lives.

Launtsan continued, "Everything from life blood to tears, for it will be a mighty pouring of sweetness—one no woman would want to stop." I held her words, a little afraid, and thought of Babatine; but I just wanted to spend time with her. I wasn't ready to tap my life flow and be carried away on a river.

Launtsan told me more. She said, "It will happen many times in different ways, but there will be a few where the juice runs so strong you will be lifted in its stream, ready to go wherever this river of your own savory fruit would take you. And at the season's end, the bottom of the cup will show a flower—its seed potent and meant for planting. In time and fertile soil, it will bloom—the season ripens to let the river flow again. And it will leave you, Cicatoo, just as the morning makes way to the high noon sun and as the evening stands aside for the healing darkness—which graciously slips away at dawn. You may try to stop its passing, try to hold this aspect a little longer, but as the moon will change her faces, this tide of ambrosia will pass through its cycle and take the next shape. And that form will unveil for you only after the well has drawn clear to the bottom of the cup."

Launtsan stayed me too long, as she always did, but this was a new way that she told me more than I wanted to hear. The bells of loosing were starting their song. First one clear note, then a duet for a time, then two more voices rang harmony, and on and on. I could feel the joy of music and dancing and women starting to surge through me. I took my place near my family women, who smiled with a new, sly laughter. This was because of Babatine, I was sure.

It started with the drums this time. Always for me, it begins with one instrument that hinges to my rhythm. This night, Fatusa of the million hands and even more rhythms pulsed through me. My fingers danced on the pluck harp, greeting each of the rhythms my family called.

I looked for Babatine, saw the sweat shining from her black-berry ripeness. Her colors were turquoise and blood amber. My foremind slipped and slowly it dismantled, strewn luxuriously across the waters. The loosing always had me awakened, yet melting from one state into another. Who was this rugged angel stroking the earth before me? Babatine danced and I played my song to reach deep into the heart of her.

I welcomed the winds as they blew me high and low. The music was silver and sweet. I saw how we were all each other's treasures. For me, the Goddesses' gifts were other women and music. I felt the swelling of love for my family, my kin favorites, our home, our nation. I was dancing through it all, seeing the women like water, rise in layers, swell, break into waves and wash our shore. I saw the women like trees come green, change their colors, drop leaves, and stand firm through every season. Six generations ago ancestors had reached out on faith. The sisters who came before us had believed in women and now the harvest was this night's glory. Emotion trembled on our voices making the chords richer and more full. The drums changed time and it started all over again. The rhythms were skipping nimble as light, hooking me to their wake. The strength I called on to match them was the strength every one of us had—we just kept moving along the path laid out to us.

And Babatine: I saw her and wanted to hold her, then, as I loved her. I saw her smooth crystal skin, the sap shining. Laughter was running all over her face; I saw her released into white light, stunning the stars. The rhythm of her thighs matched the music in my hips. I felt myself growing, as if I would push through my skin. Coming up to a new level and peeling through my flesh was more of the person that I am.

How can I tell the wonder and pleasure and ease of passage that took us to lie the night together? She taught me so much, just being easy with herself. I told her everything—the truth I knew about whatever she asked. While we talked and held one another and dreamed, the music faded, the sun replaced the moon on the throne of heaven. It seemed we two were forever.

I felt peaceful, friendly, and vigorous when I left her to set out the morning meal in my family house. I moistened and throbbed at the thought of Babatine as I selected the fruits with a new tenderness for the women who would peel apart their skins and suckle a ripe sweetness.

I returned to my sleep-in and was shy and unsure and glad to see her. Time had stopped as we went through the night, and now we were into the morning.

That afternoon, I asked Launtsan to help me clean and oil the strings and wood of our instruments before I stored them. Ordinarily, I was happiest doing this task alone. After a time, I spoke. I formed my words slowly and carefully, because I was full of Babatine living in me now, and on her way upriver. I was brimful with moisture as I asked Launtsan, "why do we open our hearts if it just makes room for sadness to fill them?"

Launtsan took her time before answering me. She studied her hand under the water and stirred up some sand. "Did you like the night of the loosing?" I told her yes, feeling the tears rock me. "Did you like it a lot?" My word was very wet and choked, but it was still the same: yes. "Was it a time very precious to you, little Cicatoo?" I was pouring too much water to shape any words now. "Well then, that's why we open: to take in the sweetness, to be made able to brew more of it."

And so I see her slice the waters everyday, steadying herself in the waves that seem to part at her directions. With a cup full to overflowing, I am more careful about how I carry my brew, but I can now say it out loud: I would gladly pour to the woman who taps me at root again.

And if she turns to cross the river into my stream, I will love her. If she walks over the land, my love has set and stayed and rocks me no matter what path Babatine takes. And if she sails past my stream and leaves me stroking with my brew, I have tasted such a mighty fountain of sweetness. The waters have not turned bitter. The sadness wrinkles the surface, but I am more stirred with love. My waves will rise to someday meet a woman whose stream can mingle with mine to stay, and we will flow and rock the sweetness clear to the bottom of the cup.



Scarab Goddess Max Dashú

Christian McEwen

Doubles

They told me she had drowned, and I
believed them. I saw her body,
watched them put it in the ground.
But now she's back again
her profile, her bleached hands
reappearing in a Russian violinist,
a Peruvian child.
She follows me dissolving
through the city streets, in and out
of the coloured shadows. Today
she is from Manchester, tomorrow
she is an old woman.
I am exhausted by her cheekbones
and the turn of her head.
There are too many of her
at too many times.
And I am a single I, eschewing comfort.

Southern Exposure

We sit silent
side by side on the couch
before this waning fire
in the house we have made
with our own hands
and my mind dreams down
like a diver descending
until I reach the rippled
fill beneath
strewn with bent nails
and bits of blue chalk
then sink down further
to the slope of native earth
gone pale like a wound too long
covered

The day the truck backed up
and spilled the sand
into gold breasts
we knew we had begun.
We drew rooms with sticks
had pizza delivered
and slept sound in the
invisible house

We took a long time in the
depressions of sand
handling the smooth plastic
pipes like ancestral bones
we laid down for eternity

When the concrete ran like lava down the chute
and into our forms

you said you believed in concrete.
I wanted to write sonnets just there
where the moon had spilled her sepia face.
You said you believed in sonnets too.
We made love in wet cement
and slept in the bathtub
under the tree

We who had never measured anything before
believing in concrete and sonnets
awoke with tape measures in our hands
reckoned square feet,
cubic feet, running feet,
sawed lumber into blocks
that miraculously fit
drilled holes
snapped lines
chalked hieroglyphics
on beams
and at last
raised the creature's bones

In Florida heat
our feet sticking to black tar
we nailed the roof
moving slow
like moon-walkers in space

Inside we grew used
to seeing through walls
to passing sandwiches
and wry comments
through airy division
to kissing between studs
sweet as a forest

We delayed sheetrock
put your old blue rug
on the living room floor
and perched on nail keg chairs
drinking coffee.
Your mother brought a plant
laughed at our "southern exposure"

Then the rains came.
We hurried
hoisting the heavy sheets
bending in our hands like damp cardboard
their chalky innards wanting to spill and return to dust.
We held them up and nailed them down
and square by square we taped the rooms
against ourselves

But time has shown us when to take our ease.
We sit here now before this fire
in the storm-lulled house
remembering back through the craft
that taught us both how
to see through walls

the radical feminist magazine

*Trouble
and
Strife*

ISSUE 11

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Without Will

Two times I scared the heron
the sound of movement
sending it into flight.
Both times I felt regret—
 breaking the quiet
 shaking the still reflection
 in the quiet pond.

The third time I went
with purpose
to see the wings
expand with graceful flight.

No heron appeared.

You cannot look for a heron.
It comes upon you unaware
when you walk
another road
with open eyes.

Haiku the heron
appear when they will
without your will.

The fourth time
I saw an image:
the leaf suspended
rising falling
no difference.

Without will
the haiku the heron
appear.

Moondancer

Tovah secures the ship access, then saunters down the ramp. She pauses on the dock to look casually around. No sign of customers. She hopes her passengers have not run into any. Tovah runs her fingers along the silver skin of her ship as she passes the rear of it.

"All fueled, Captain. Need a cargo loader?" the old dock hand asks.

"Not yet," Tovah replies.

"Good cargos found at The Lady."

"Thanks." Tovah flips a credit through the air. The man pockets it. Tovah strides off in the direction of the strip, absently fingering her i.d. bracelet.

Other gaudily dressed spacers, captains and crew, pass her in the dim gray corridors. The sign above the bar shows a veiled woman with old fashioned Terran paper money in her hands. The gothic script reads The Green Lady. "Must be the place," Tovah mutters.

She ducks through the open doorway, then stands looking around a moment, getting her bearings. She glances at the subdued decor of the bar and its clientele; this is obviously a smugglers' dive. Am I that easy to peg, or did that old grip make a lucky guess, Tovah wonders. Her pause allows other patrons a time to suss her out.

Kel watches the tall woman in the black flight suit enter. He notes her blonde hair, purposely worn short to display the navigation implants at the base of her skull. By this he knows she's pilot of her own hype-ship. He continues to watch as she moves through the crowd.

Tovah steps up to the bar. An old woman looks up at her from behind the polished wood counter. "Coffee, black," Tovah says. The old woman smiles as she sets the mug down. Tovah slides a credit disc toward her.

A large man takes the seat next to Tovah. He stares a moment before she turns to him.

"I'm Kel." He raises a huge hand in greeting.

"Tovah," she raises her own palm.

"Gamble, Captain?"

"Not tonight," Tovah shakes her head.

"Table?" Kel asks, certain now that she is on business.

Tovah glances around again. "Fine."

She follows him past the gamers into the back of the bar, where business is transacted. They slide into the privacy booth. He activates it, muffling the activity around them.

"I'm a procurer," Kel states.

"And you assume I need your services?"

"You talk like a pirate." He sees her hand tighten on her mug.

Tovah raises her brows. She neither agrees with nor denies the implied question. "How do I know you're not Customs?"

"You don't." Kel smiles, the warmth surprising in his craggy face.

Right answer, friend, Tovah thinks, smiling also. "No drugs, I don't deal misery," she says.

"Human cargo. What kind of ship you got?" Tovah looks annoyed and does not reply. "Customs wants this one real bad."

"Type II, fast, some defenses. What's my destination?"

"New Terra," Kel answers.

Thank the Goddess, Tovah thinks. She says only, "Dock 72-C, by 1800." Kel rings for drinks.

"To the Lady," Tovah says, knowing he'll think she means Lady Luck.

"Good trip, Captain," Kel says, raising his glass. As Tovah wends her way toward the door he scoops up several credits.

Tovah makes her ship ready for departure. Doing by rote all the routine tasks of securing possessions and checking systems. Her mind drifts to the last time she saw Isolde. Familiar face creased with anger and pain, dark eyes shut tight. She goes over their last argument in her mind.

Not wanting the tears to show, Tovah swiped at her eyes with the back of her hand. Then ran her fingers through her short blonde hair. She sat legs drawn up, chin on knees, refusing to meet Isolde's gaze.

Isolde sprawled in the chair opposite Tovah, using one toe to swivel the chair slowly back and forth. Isolde gave up trying to make eye contact and gazed out the viewport to her right.

Tovah glanced up, but could not see Isolde's face. The other woman's long dark hair had fallen to cover her profile. Tovah tried to remember how this one had started. Some small comment of hers, blown all out of proportion. This was happening a lot lately. But this was one argument that wasn't going to be easily dropped. Tovah knew Isolde was wrong. She was not trying to run away from anything. She had to work. Someone did. Poets don't earn much credit. Even

one as good as Isolde. Free drinks don't pay docking fees. Tovah wished Isolde would go back to piloting. It would be easier if they were working together again. She couldn't see why Isolde objected to her smuggling. The pay was enough to allow them long stretches between jobs. Maybe after this run they could spend some time on Isolde's home station.

Tovah reached out with her mind, searching for a way through Isolde's barriers.

"Get out of my mind!" Isolde thought. The anger in it was like a slap.

Tovah gasped. "Get off my ship," she said. Tovah stomped to the head, slamming the door behind her. She blew her nose and put the tissue in the disposal. Tovah splashed cold water on her face, then stood looking at herself in the mirror. She had to lean over slightly because the mirror was hung too low for someone her height. It suited Isolde's size better. Tovah noticed her black flight suit was dusty and sweat stained.

She went back into the cabin to change. The room was empty, of course. Tovah turned to the bunk, saw the locker standing open, her lover's blue duffel gone. "Shit!" Tovah hit the locker door with her fist. The spring latch kept it from clanging as it closed.

Her hand stung like hell.

Perhaps I do run from things. Tovah sighs. Is that really all we fought over? How much of it is my own resentment of Isolde's fame, of her choice to stop piloting? Why is she so angry about my falling in with the pirates? Serious smuggling isn't all that different from what we did before. Maybe she's just worried.

Tovah tries to recall a poem Isolde wrote six years ago, when they were first lovers. Only a fragment surfaces now.

you draw me like the moon
draws the tides
unbidden i come
lapping
at your soft muted fullness

Tovah conjures an image of Isolde. Her dark skin glistening against the white sheets. Her breasts rising and falling as she breathes. Tovah caressing the tattoo on Isolde's belly; the mythical creature spitting flames that mingle with the dark hair.

A light on the console interrupts Tovah's musing. Someone has entered the cargo lock. There is just time enough to get the passenger settled before departure.

Tovah spins her console chair to face the fugitive as the inner lock opens. A woman steps through the hatch. She is dressed in neon-blue

with hair to match. Tovah suppresses a shudder. She looks like a Company spacer. But it's obvious she's not a spacer at all. Tovah must put all her psy-training to work, blocking the woman's emotionally charged out-put. No spacer allows their aura to be so revealing. I'll have to work with her on that.

The woman passes a blue envelope to Tovah. It contains a credit voucher. I'll have to change this somewhere, Tovah thinks.

"I'm Captain I'shu. What should I call you?"

"Call me Mana." The woman bows.

Tovah rolls her eyes. "If you want to pass for crew, don't bow. Top bunk's yours, stow your gear in the locker above it. For now I suggest you strap into the co-pilot's chair as we'll jump to hyper-space as soon as we clear the station."

Tovah spins her console to face the bridge. Mana watches raptly as Tovah places the probes in the sockets at the base of her skull.

"Initialize Con-one and Con-two," Tovah says, glancing at the display to her left. The interface is operating perfectly. With a thought she gives Moondancer's computer the command to undock.

They hear the thumps and clangs of the linkage disengaging, the hum of the maneuvering engines. Tovah ignores the customary stomach drop as they lose the station's gravity. She looks at her passenger. Mana appears calm. Tovah gives the command to start primary engines.

Thrust pushes them gently back in their seats. Tovah gives their itinerary to comp, so it can begin programming for the jump to hyper-space. First they must make a brief jump to Central Station. Then it will be a rough jump to New Terra. A subjective seven days, hooked-in to ship's comp.

As the display indicates they're near jump-point, Tovah tells Mana to relax, then takes a few deep breaths herself. Mana looks at her expectantly. Then they are both dizzy. The stars on the view screen appear to move, blur together, slide off the screen and suddenly burst into rainbow jewels that pour past and through them as all other sight is obliterated. A soft crystalline chiming and the colors coalesce into an incandescent mist on the view screen.

"Goddess, you are beautiful," Tovah whispers.

"That was the most incredible thing I've ever experienced. We were drugged on the passenger ship. I can understand the allure of hyper-space now. Is that why so many pilots go mad?" Mana asks.

"So many of us go mad because of people who talk too much," Tovah snaps, her mind less on the feelings of her passenger than on the

business of piloting. Ground-folk always get it wrong. Just because all pilots are telepaths, and telepaths show a greater rate of mental difficulty. What seems like difficulty to them. Everyone has their own universe-view, it's always such a shock when different universes appear, burning holes in space where no one expected them. The Company, for whom most pilots work, tries to find a way around it. Rigid training, computers. But only telepaths can navigate in hyperspace. The best buy out their contracts and become independents. Like Tovah.

"We'll be returning to space time normal shortly, you may want to breakfast on the station," Tovah informs Mana.

Aside from the physical effects, the problem with coming out of hype is that you enter STN blind. The hype is communications-dead, so you don't know what kind of situation you may be jumping into. Moondancer's comp will not put them into a solid object, but that is the only guarantee. At Central Station the only thing likely to be waiting for them is Customs.

Tovah reminds Mana, "Visor down, hang on." Then shuts her eyes and slips into her own protective visor. Force slams them back into the console chairs. Tovah feels the familiar pounding in her head, the supra-audial shriek that makes her feel as though her internal organs are vibrating, followed by a retina-destroying explosion of light perceived even through the visor.

Calmly Tovah waits out the sensory jumble, and after a few moments is able to breathe again. Tovah looks over at Mana. She is pale and shaking but at least she hasn't puked all over herself. Mana smiles weakly.

Tovah turns to the com console and licks her dry lips. She i.d.s her ship and requests permission to dock.

"Moondancer this is CST, permission to orbit only granted at this time. Please state crew, passengers, and cargo." Tovah gives them the requested information, and is told there will be a delay before docking.

"Fuck," Tovah says. "They know I'm dead-heading it and they're bound to be suspicious." She gives comp the command to orbit, thus freeing herself from the interface.

"I'm going to get some sleep. Moondancer will wake me when we get permission to dock. There's the head, and there's the galley. Don't touch anything on the bridge, for any reason."

Tovah rises, stretching her arms above her body, first one and then the other. She bends forward and pushes her palms against the curve of

the ship's wall. Slowly she slides her right leg above her head, pushing her crotch flat against the wall, then bends head to right knee and grasps her ankle. She concentrates on using more tension and less force to control her movements in the near-zero gravity. She reaches back for a handhold and levers her body out along the 'ceiling.'

She drops, landing in a backwards roll, then comes up into a spin with one foot above her head. As she brings that foot down she pushes up and out into two forward walk-overs. Tovah barely pauses for breath before flip-flopping halfway up the wall, coming away in a somersault. She lands in a crouch.

As she slows her breathing, Tovah rises and begins an intricate pattern of arm movements. Subtle changes in hand gestures flow through the pattern and she moves her hips in decreasing circles, shifting her weight and the angle of her body. Finally, feet together and arms at her sides, she bows.

Tovah strips off her hypesuit, wipes her dripping face and falls into a chair.

"You dance well."

Tovah jumps, unaware Mana had been awake. "The movements are as deadly as they are graceful," Tovah replies.

"A martial art?"

Tovah nods.

"Where did you learn it?"

Tovah pushes aside her anger at all of Mana's questions. "My mother taught me. That last pattern is called little birds and before that I did falling water." Tovah looks up at Mana, watching her from the bunk, suddenly aware of the smallness of the ship's cabin. She gets up and dresses with her back to Mana.

After reporting their status to Customs, they are finally allowed to dock. Tovah prepares to go in search of a legal cargo.

Good thing I planned it this way. With hype so treacherous between Central and New Terra a small common cargo should not be difficult to find. And I know where to look for cover or anything on this station.

"Customs could spot you despite the blue hair," Tovah informs Mana. "I can't risk it, you'll have to remain on the ship."

"I've had cosmetisurgery, they don't have my retina prints, and I'm sure these papers are good," Mana pleads.

"Let me see those papers." Tovah glances at them. "All right. We'll take you to your first spacer's bar. Try not to look too flashy, and don't talk to anyone. And don't ask questions."

Tovah hopes Mana will not do anything to embarrass her, or attract attention to them. She remains in her black hypesuit and deck boots, adding only i.d. bracelet and a dagger in her boot. In case of Customs hassles. Mana follows her example and dresses in a gray hypesuit, sans jewelry or make-up. She might just learn yet, Tovah thinks.

"Call me Tovah."

"But I thought you said crew should call you Captain."

"On a small ship most of the crews don't have a very uh, formal relationship," Tovah replies.

"Oh yeah?"

"Let's go."

As they approach the Dragon Inn, Tovah slips her arm through Mana's and guides the other woman through the doorway. Tovah smiles her greetings to the woman behind the bar, and raises her palm to a few of the gamblers as they thread their way to the booths in the rear. Tovah orders drinks, and reminds Mana not to ask questions of anyone. Then ducks through a concealed door.

She spots one of Drew's ex-lovers, but she can't remember the man's name. She approaches him anyway. "I need legal cargo, destination New Terra."

"What's your cargo cap," he asks.

"Twenty-eight tons."

"Here's your contact number." He passes her a slip of paper as Tovah hands him the standard fee.

Tovah returns to find Mana rebuffering some spacer, who is obviously potted. She gestures for Mana to join her as she passes the table. They are almost through the crowd of gamblers when a woman's voice calls "I'shu."

Tovah turns with a smile already on her face. "Nica," she says, dropping her arm around the shoulders of a red-headed woman nearly as tall as she.

"I take it such haste means prosperity."

"I trust you are doing well also," Tovah replies.

"Only at the tables. A game, I'shu?"

"One." Tovah rolls the twelve-sided dice in three turns, winning one, and losing two. She places her credits on the table. "Bones were never my game, and the luck is always with you, Nica." Tovah bends to kiss the other woman's ear. "Till next time."

"Good trip." Nica raises her glass as Tovah and Mana depart.

"Who was that?" Mana asks.

"Old friend." Tovah recalls their days as dock hands, fifteen years before.

When they arrive at the ship Tovah instructs Mana in how to supervise the loading. "The grips will know what to do and will do most of the work, but try to look as though you know what you're about." She turns and begins readying the bridge.

At last Mana comes in, sweaty but smiling. "Done, Captain."
Tovah smiles back.

"This is gonna be rough sailing. You may be disoriented by the time compression factor. Take the bottom bunk near the head and strap in. Don't talk to me unless it's an emergency. Any questions?" Tovah turns to begin hooking her nervous system into Moondancer's computer.

"Um. . ."

"What?"

"I think I started my period," Mana stammers.

"There are tampons in the locker above the head. Or, you can strap into the co-pilot's chair. They're designed to take care of bodily functions in hype, when necessary."

"But I thought. . ." Mana blushes.

"Lots of spacers are sterilized. But I've got all the parts I was born with, honey."

"Why do they do that?" Mana asks.

"Radiation hazard. Space is no place for children. You have a kid, you're stuck on a station till they reach majority."

"The Company colonists are encouraged to have a lot of kids."

Stupid idea. Overpopulation drove humanity into space in the first place, Tovah thinks. "Well, if you strap into the chair, you have to stay there for the entire jump. And this one is subjectively much longer than the last one."

Mana decides to strap in for this jump too. This time Tovah must explain all the functions of the console chair and demonstrate their operations. As she finally finishes initiating her interface with Moondancer's comp, she is aware of the strangeness of someone besides Isolde occupying the co-pilot's chair.

Then she sits back, awaiting the slow dive into jeweled space, and clears her mind in preparation. Seven days of concentration, of flying the ship with her mind. Her nervous system and Moondancer's sensors melding in a complex process that makes her half machine, half human. Tovah persists in thinking of Moondancer as a machine and not as a being, though they know each other's thoughts, care for each other's needs. It's one of the things that she hopes will save her from the madness that eventually takes most pilots.

The deceleration engines slam them into STN. When Tovah's senses stop reeling as much as they are going to, she commands the ship to orbit. Then she unhooks and flings herself on her bunk. Mana has already done so.

The alarm that signals docking clearance wakes them ten hours later. Tovah rises and stretches the stiffness out of her muscles. She speaks to the Control on the moon, links ship's comp with theirs, and lets it guide Moondancer to dock.

Tovah supervises the off-loading, then leaves a message in the net for the owner of her legal cargo, along with the account number to credit. As they are packing she says, "We can eat some place with a view in the tourist section, then take a shuttle down to New Terra." She decides this as much to protect herself as to please Mana. The food there will be better, too.

Tovah and Mana wander through the tourist district toward the towering restaurant in the center of the moon's city. There is a dry cool breeze, and the silver film of the dome obscures the view beyond. Light-fountains play along the simulated marble walkway, while quartz statues flash prism colors in pallid imitation of the jeweled passage to hype. As they ascend in the glass elevator, the city falls away from them like a pool of reflected stars.

The view from the restaurant distracts Tovah; it reminds her of Isolde's early poetry, and why she wishes to avoid the spacer's strip.

She and Isolde knew each other briefly as cadets, in flight training. The first time Tovah saw Isolde they were seated, along with 20 other naked and shivering young women, on cold plastic chairs, awaiting their induction physical. Isolde seemed more self-possessed than the others. Her dark almond-shaped eyes, wide full mouth, and regal nose set against her golden skin and long black hair reminded Tovah of an Aztec Goddess. Despite her intimidating appearance, they became friends. However, separated by assignments, they made no attempt to continue the friendship.

Six years later they met again, in a spacer bar on New Terra's moon. It was a quiet, out of the way place that Isolde liked. Tovah went there to get drunk, in hopes she would not see anyone she knew. She'd lost her first cargo, been jacked on her first run in her own ship. When she met Isolde she became belligerent. Isolde made fun of her self-pity till Tovah finally laughed too. They made love that night for the first time.

"Excuse me, could you repeat that?"

"Isn't it about time we took a shuttle down?" Mana repeats.

"I'll see you off, but we'd best not leave together, nor meet once there. SouthPort's where you want to go, more traffic," Tovah replies.

Tovah stands on the view deck watching the shuttles land and lift off. As the one Mana is on departs, she raises her palm. She tries not to wonder what sent such a kid into space, illegally.

Tovah wanders aimlessly about the city, not thinking about what she will do when she gets planetside. She hears the raucous laughter of spacers in a bar and looks up. She has wandered near the bar where she and Isolde met. Willing herself not to go in, she turns and heads for the shuttle pad. Taking the long way around, she skirts the Russian Sector. Once in the shuttle, Tovah leans back into her seat and closes her eyes. The piped-in music was already starting to annoy her. After all the years in hype, travel in STN is unutterably dull. She plans to sleep most of the eight hour shuttle ride.

Tovah is plagued by nightmares and wakes sweaty and gasping. She gazes out the view port, watching the planet's horizon grow and appear to flatten. Features become distinct as they approach for landing. She chews the inside of her lip till it bleeds, and old nervous habit. It is all she can do to keep her mind on the lousy piloting and not on Isolde. But thinking about the landing means resisting the temptation to telepathically co-pilot. She hates to intrude in a stranger's mind as much as they fear intrusion. She forces her head back against the seat and begins relaxation breathing.

After landing Tovah takes a flat in the newer section of SouthPort's strip. It's about equidistant from The Dancer and two other bars she frequents for work rather than pleasure. She bathes, works out and bathes again, enjoying the abundance of hot water. Finally she begins to dress for the night. She wears her customary deck boots and a black hypesuit. She splashes iridescent purple make-up above her eyes and on her neck. Then bedecks herself with opal earrings, a moonstone necklace, and many chiming bracelets. She wants there to be no doubt this has been a good run for her. Lastly, Tovah slips two blades into concealed sheaths. Sauntering into the Mare's Nest, Tovah notes the sparse-ness of the early evening crowd. She drops into a bar stool. The woman behind the bar sets a mug of coffee in front of her.

"Looks like the Luck's with you, ay, Captain I'shu?"

Tovah smiles, raises the mug. "And with you Magda?"

"As always, nothing new here, unless Chaka or Petra show up. Been gone too long. No gossip, no fights, no one to talk to."

"Gossip is like the wind, whispers but no substance." Tovah says. They both laugh.

"Haven't seen Chaka in . . . damn her ass," Magda says, jabbing a finger in the direction of the doorway. Tovah turns to see the small, lithe, woman waltz into the room. They embrace.

"We must spar, Tovah, I have not lost in months, I will forget how."

"We will, soon. But now I must go, leave a message in the net. Luck." Tovah says and heads for the door.

She takes a meandering route to Lil's, giving the bar time to fill up. She peers at the lively crowd, sees few people she knows, though plenty whom she recognizes. Tovah slips into a game of dice, gets out before she loses more than she's won. She turns down an invitation to dance, then drifts toward the back room.

Scanning the smoky space she spots another of Drew's friends. Tovah sits down and orders a drink. When the man turns and sees her sitting there, he looks startled. He knows Isolde as well, so she must be on New Terra. Drew must not be or his friend would not be out cruising, for work or pleasure.

Tovah decides to go back to the flat tonight, to allow news of her arrival to reach Isolde before going to The Dancer. If Isolde goes there after hearing the news, then she's ready to talk.

Next morning, Tovah checks her messages in the net. There's one from Chaka, suggesting a time and space for sparing. After their workout, Tovah soothes her friend's injured pride by suggesting an Eduvian feast. The scales are balanced between them when Chaka, an Eduve native, wins the eating competition. They part as always, exchanging goodnatured threats for the next meeting.

Returning to her flat, Tovah naps to ease the waiting for night. When she rises it is still a few hours till actual nightfall, the bars won't be so crowded at this hour. She dresses again in a black body-suit, the opals her only adornment. The Dancer is no smugglers' dive. But she carries the blades as always. Tovah packs her small bag and sets it on the end of the bunk. She decides to skip dinner. Then stretches and slows her breathing, trying to relax.

Tovah ducks, as much from habit as necessity, through the doorway of The Dancer. She moves toward the bar without looking around, smiling if her name is called. She orders coffee. From the corner of her eye she catches the flash of Isolde's black hair and golden skin, in a haze of red cloth. Isolde is sitting alone in a booth near the aquarium wall. Tovah picks up her coffee and wends her way toward the other woman.

"Hello, Isolde. May I?"

"Of course." They sit silently sipping their coffee for a long time. Finally Isolde reaches for Tovah's hand. Tovah looks up.

"You cut your hair, it's nice." The dark spill of hair no longer runs down Isolde's back, but ends softly at her shoulders.

Isolde raises both her brows, a gesture of Tovah's. "How's Luck with you?"

"I needn't work for a while," Tovah answers. "Are you writing anything new?"

Isolde shakes her head, looks away from Tovah. "I haven't been writing in some time."

Tovah takes Isolde's other hand. "Want to talk about it?"

"What's to say? There was only pain for so long, and anger. The poems were too personal to publish. I quit writing till I have something else to say."

Tovah's mind reaches out to Isolde, private words in this public place. *If only you had seen more of us as private, not for public consumption. If only I were more slow to anger.*

They rise and head for the door, ignoring the eyes they know follow them. As Isolde takes the second left, Tovah realizes where they are going.

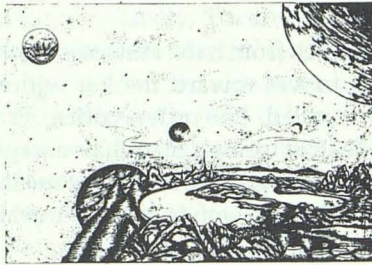
The first time they had been together six years ago, they had stayed in a little bungalow on the very edge of the oldest part of the spacer district. It was only two rooms, one nearly all windows, facing a garden, the other dark and cool. They had called it their honeymoon cottage.

Isolde pours wine and they watch the night creep up on the garden. They share fresh fruit and cheese. Finally Tovah breaks the silence.

"After my anger played itself out, I decided to come here and look for you. We need to talk our differences through."

Isolde's dark eyes flash. *Later, she thinks, as her mouth makes soft circles on Tovah's neck.*

End Chapter One

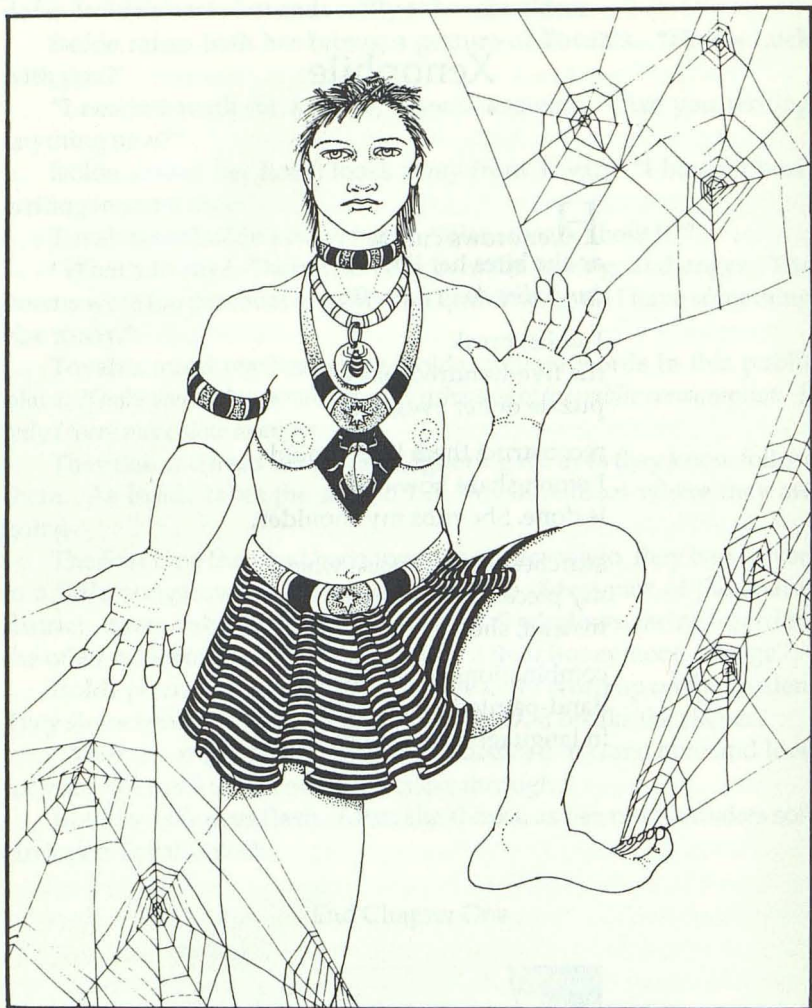


Moon City Drashan Redack

Xenophile

Her brows curl in
as she bites her lip,
our bodies don't quite fit.

I smile, break
the five-hundred-piece
puzzle of her eyes, then
reconstruct them in my mind.
I won't share how this
is done. She rubs my shoulder,
searches for the crease where
my pieces snap together.
Instead, she touches strange
combinations of characters,
hand-painted love letters written
in languages she cannot understand.



From *Goddesses and Amazons*
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Ayemu's Children

It was hard to remember how long she had been a spider. Certainly through the past four winters. Now the fifth winter was fast approaching. The cool breezes whipped through her hair, causing chills to run up and down her spindly body. She supposed that the movement of seasons was healthy but often longed for the warmth of the tropics. There she would have been able to bask in the sun. Instead she was freezing in the urban northeast, at the mercy of the chilling winds.

Angula was considered ordinary in her home colony of Controna. She was dark grey with slim legs supporting a round, plump body. Varying shades of blond hair lightly covered her body giving it the appearance of darkness with a pale frosting. She stood 3' 10" tall with a leg and body span of over five feet. Her sharp, gaunt facial features complemented the syrupy sweet body odor that was laced with insect musk.

As Angula paced back and forth, patrolling the stockade, she mentally ran through the change-back ritual. After all, she would be needing it soon to make her trip into the city.

During her reverie she occasionally heard the quiet movements of the caged men. They were almost dead now and their bodies would soon be useful. She shuddered whenever she looked at them. Their small hairless bodies moving on two fat limbs while two other limbs did what appeared to be nothing. Their sounds were horrible and she was amused when she thought of the days when she had been charmed by their voices.

Angula had become a member of Controna when her choices had been limited. It was either work/beg for meager earnings, looking forward to nothing but starvation in her old age, or join the colony. She was very happy with her choice now, although apprehension had reined at first.

The transition from human to spider had been difficult, but in the end she had been able to change to the spider body. Many wimmin her junior in years had failed the tests. Instead they became workers, taking care of necessary support tasks for the colony.

Controna was a section of the city that had been claimed by these wimmin many years ago. Their clean, modern buildings starkly contrasted the squalid run-down structures of the city outside Controna walls. Most of the outside dwellings were unoccupied, but a few still

held hungry, desperate occupants, who were glad to be in out of the wind even if it meant sleeping near the spider colony. This squalor and devastation extended around the colony for a twenty-five mile radius. However, outside of this circular ruin, life in the city appeared to go on as in any other city. There were skyscrapers, air pollution, male executives in colorless suits, young female secretaries, mothers with children, teenagers in twenty-year-old cars, older people eating in neighborhood luncheonettes, etc. No one talked about the spiders, and in fact many visitors came and went without ever suspecting that there was something as controversial as a spiders' colony near the city.

Most of the citizens rarely thought about the spiders. In fact, very few of them had ever seen them, and therefore regarded the tales about the colony as somewhat of a myth. However, very few city dwellers ventured near the colony, and of the few that did go near, even fewer returned to tell their tales.

The last adventurers were a group of young men from another part of the country. They had heard about the spiders and were determined to see them. Their excitement and enthusiasm was contagious. So much so, that a few of the locals decided to go along. They carried cloths of many different textures and colors, sweet foods, rare insects, radiant jewels and musical instruments. They had been gone now for about one month. No one expected to see or hear from them again.

Angula was relieved to see the sun bringing in the dawn. She had caught herself napping a couple of times and was worried that she would be discovered neglecting her post. In less than an hour someone will be here to relieve me. Then I can get some sleep. I need to think about my trip home. It begins tomorrow and I'm not sure that I'm ready, mused Angula. Oh well, I'll get some rest first, then I'll worry about the trip. In about half an hour Angula was relieved by another spider woman named Juney. They mumbled "good morning" to each other and Angula hurried away to her home.

Upon awaking several hours later, Angula was still tired, but her anxiety wouldn't allow her to continue sleeping. She laid in her web soundlessly watching a small insect struggle to loose himself. She thought about how small and insignificant the insect was but also what a pity it had to die so unexpectedly. But then is death ever expected? she wondered. I think not. It just moves in stealthily like the night, or suddenly like a storm taking everyone unawares. Even deliberate preparation doesn't seem to help in the end.

The insect tasted salty and somewhat dry. Angula figured that it was an aged being nearly on its last legs anyway. The taste of terror was bitter as it nearly always was, but the initial satiation was sweet.

After a few minutes more of silent meditation, Angula left her web in search of a real breakfast of grasses and vegetation. The fly had only whetted her appetite and she found that food was all she could concentrate on, right then.

Inside the cage, one of the men repeated in a sad slow monotone, "Help, please help us." The sentry didn't seem to hear this plea, not moving a muscle of her body to indicate any sound had been made. The man looked from huge staring eyes at the spider who seemed to be looking at nothing in particular. She had constructed a small web from the branches of the trees to the ground in front of the cage. Each spider had her own different way of patrolling the cage. Some built mini-webs from the branches of the surrounding trees and others simply crouched near the cage changing their positions several times during their duty.

The sun was high in the sky. Its rays covered the colony with colors and shapes that produced rounded images. Controna's sleek lines softened in the mid-afternoon light and the buildings shone pale and rigid against the lush vegetation. The colony was made up of small one-story dwellings suitable for building webs and attracting insects. The few multi-story buildings were used to house wimmin workers and as dormitories for novices.

Controna was well respected for its beautiful plants, shrubs and trees, not to mention the profitable gardens and orchards. The spiders had learned how to cultivate almost any and every kind of plant and vegetable. In fact, all of the food in the colony was provided by the many gardens and the excess was sold at handsome prices.

By now, Angula was making preparations for the ritual. She had called together four other spiders to assist her. All of the materials were ready and she was now meditating calmly so as to be able to complete the change-back swiftly and painlessly.

In order to return to a humon form, Angula first became aware of all parts of her body. She felt the life fluid flowing and sensed the pulse of its propulsion. Her mind became conscious of every function of her body. There was no room for outside distractions. Every movement of every cell was monitored and checked.

This did not mean that Angula concentrated on each cellular action as one concentrates on the words in a book or on listening to a friend. She became aware of all of it without becoming aware of any of it separately. If she had given any function or action more thought than another then the whole balance would have been disrupted. Her monitoring was as though she had thousands of eyes and each eye looked at one single cellular activity. Therefore, all activities were obvious without any one being more obvious. This centering exercise was paramount to her being

able to change back in a complete form.

Next, after all movement was registered and monitored by her pre-conscious, she began to focus on single parts of her body. She began to rearrange the cellular structure moving from one function to the next in a set rhythm. At this point her assistants started to mark the rhythm with their own body movements. They danced and swayed creating energy currents complementary to Angula's own rhythms. Their movements were constant and unchanging although the steps were essentially complex. The air began to flow in a certain way around the five spiders.

The change-back was successful. Angula did not get caught in-between, half spider, half woman. She was now a complete human woman with dark brown hair, even darker eyes, cocoa skin and full lips. It was always a surprise to find that she didn't age as a woman, although her spider body did. Her mentor had explained that the human form was like a costume, worn to create an illusion but not at all real. She was a real spider, so the human form would always be as a costume is, unchanging except for wear and tear.

An hour later Angula was speeding away from Controna in a colony jeep heading for the city limits. The setting sun created a horizon of orchid and orange beauty that spread out before her. Forty-five minutes later she had entered the outskirts. A wave of nostalgia swept over her as she passed the familiar structures and drove into the heart of the city. She was headed for a far corner of the city where her mother lived in a small stucco cottage.

Angula had been driving for over an hour when she reached the front of her mother's dwelling. The sun had disappeared and the night sounds were beginning to swell into a familiar chorus. The house was nestled among a throng of trees and shrubs that all but camouflaged its entrance. There was a small light burning on the porch and the bitter smells of winter made her feel relieved to have arrived at last.

Mrs. Cooper opened the door to Angula's insistent knock. Her face lit up when she saw her and she greeted Angula warmly with hugs and kisses. "You must have read my advertisement in the newspaper. I didn't know where or how to contact you so I just took out that ad. I'm so glad you got the message and came to see your mother," exclaimed Mrs. Cooper. "She's been very sick and the doctors don't seem to know what to do for her. They say it's cancer and none of the treatments will help. She's going to die very soon." At this last statement Mrs. Cooper wiped away a lone tear. She bent her head in momentary reflection then nobly straightened up. Her eyes met Angula's and for an instant mutual compassion passed between them. "You can sleep in your old room. The sheets are all clean and I just aired it out yesterday," said Mrs. Cooper.

"Georgia is asleep, but you can see her in the morning. She awakes early and is really no trouble, although she must be in a great deal of pain."

The next morning Angula went in to see her mother. She was watching cartoons on the television set and the sound muffled her footsteps on the bare floor. "Good morning," said Angula brightly. Georgia turned from the set almost in slow motion and looked at her through misted eyes. Her expression didn't change but she tried to boost herself up in the bed.

"Hi honey. I'm real glad to see you," she replied. Making these statements took a lot of effort and it was almost a full minute before she said anymore. "Where have you been? I hoped you would get in touch and let us know where you were but you never did." By this time she had been able to boost herself up a little higher in the bed and was looking slightly amused by this small achievement.

Angula sat down in a chair near the bed and began to tell her a fabricated story about the past five years. She told her of traveling all over the earth, creating funny stories to accompany the names of every port. She described the people she had met, weaving intricate personal pictures of each character. And she hinted at knowledge that she had gained in all of her travels. During her rendition, Angula was careful not to mention anything that remotely hinted at spiders.

Her mother nodded in approval at the conclusion of her story. She then drifted into a light sleep, leaving Angula alone with her thoughts. While she was sleeping Angula decided to examine her mother to find out just what was the extent of the cancer. Her brief examination showed that it was extensive but not terminal. As a healer in Controna, she could weave a web coated with certain essences that would kill the cells, drying the cancer up. The principle was the same as radiation therapy without harmful effects to other parts of the body. But in order to weave this web, Angula would have to return to the shape of a spider and this clearly presented its problems.

Oh well, thought Angula, I have a few more days before I decide what to do and how to do it. The most important thing for now is to comfort her and ease the pain as much as possible.

The next few days were spent thinking and meditating. Angula would read and talk to her mother at varying intervals during the day. Because the pain drug was potent her mother slept a great deal leaving Angula and Mrs. Cooper to entertain each other.

Angula had always liked Mrs. Cooper. When she and her mother first moved to the city, Mrs. Cooper helped them get settled in their new place of residence. She took Angula's mother under her wing and showered many gifts on Angula. Mrs. Cooper was a big woman, 5'10" tall,

weighing 220 pounds, with a majestic gait. Her complexion was the smooth color of night, her face was as proportioned as a delicate statue.

Angula's mother took immediately to Mrs. Cooper, eventually calling her by her first name, Doris. The two of them became good friends, each always knowing the other's schedule. They attended church together, went shopping together, took trips together and eventually started living together.

Angula couldn't quite remember when she suspected that her mother and Mrs. Cooper were lovers. It was a quiet reality that crept upon her only to be recognized at its full completion. She, therefore, wasn't sure when she started noticing the subtle signs and signals of blossoming love. She supposed now that they were always there, it was just a question of her maturing to the point of recognition.

When she finally did admit it to herself, she was fifteen years old and Mrs. Cooper had been living with them for over five years. Her mother and Mrs. Cooper had now been together for over thirty-five years and in all of that time it seemed that the love had just grown stronger.

Angula now perused Mrs. Cooper's figure preparing the evening meal. She was still a very handsome woman, rounded in all of the desirable places. Angula imagined her mother and Mrs. Cooper making love on their double bed in the back bedroom. The thought of these two beautiful brown wimmin moving to their own beat, feeling the pulsating rhythms of passion and reaching their orgasmic highs, produced a warm glow in Angula. She thought about how lucky they'd been to love each other over such a long period of time. And how sad it would be for that love to end so soon and in such a wretched manner.

That night, after a careful and long meditation, Angula decided to treat her mother for the cancer. She knew that there were many risks. The main concern was discovery, and perhaps an inability to return to a complete human form. If she was caught as a spider she would be feared, and from that fear, destroyed. If she was unable to complete her change-to or change-back rituals then a half-complete body would make her just as vulnerable as a whole spider body. The danger was great and it might mean her life. But on the other hand, it could mean the continued life of her mother and the completion of a rich mutual love. She resolved to draw on every ounce of her courage and expertise to heal her mother of the cancer, and do it the following night.

The next night Angula retired to her bedroom early. She and Mrs. Cooper had gotten in the habit of playing cards and talking after dinner. Angula excused herself from these activities, feigning an encroaching headache. She had rested as much as possible during the day so there would be enough strength to complete the change-to process. The sun

was slowly setting and the magical hues were encouraging to Angula. Her bedroom was now covered in a muted purple that aided the meditation segment of the process.

As she gradually became aware of all of her body processes, each given equal attention, she heard background sounds from Mrs. Cooper. A swift wave of panic filled her as she reminded herself about the risk and her own possible death. But she felt as though there was no choice. To turn back would be defeatist. She nestled back into the meditation that led her to the necessary form.

The change-to was relatively easy. Her rested body yielded easily to the necessary rhythms and the reemergence of the cozy spider body was comforting. She realized how much more she liked being a spider than a woman and that the body seemed to suit her consciousness much more than the straight, hairless body of a woman. The bedroom, however, seemed too small and much too warm, causing her to sweat and long for the night air. Fortunately, as a woman Angula had anticipated this and both windows in the room were open. She went to the window and looked out. There was no moon, and the stars seemed to have very dull lusters in the dark sky.

Angula listened at her door to hear if Mrs. Cooper was still up. According to her clock, Mrs. Cooper should have turned in about half an hour ago. But Angula wanted to make double sure that the coast was clear.

After she had assured herself of a reasonable amount of safety, Angula ventured out into the hall. It took her a little time to open the door of her room because her spider legs had no configurations on the base that could grab hold. She, therefore, ended up using her mouth. It was a little tedious trying to grasp the knob, but she was finally able to secure just the right leverage, and open it. Oh dear, Mom's door is going to be just as hard, maybe harder to open. This is one problem I hadn't given any consideration, sighed Angula to herself.

Out in the hall, the street lights shone through the cracks in the drawn curtains. It made dancing shadows in the room that unnerved Angula in her present body. What if Mrs. Cooper hasn't gone to bed but has stayed up to look at the night, thought Angula in alarm. Mrs. Cooper often did this, turning off all of the lights in the house and quietly staring out of the window. But the curtains were drawn, Mrs. Cooper couldn't be gazing at the night. Angula resolved that she must calm down and go about her task immediately before something really did happen.

The door to her mother's room was easier to manage than her own. Her mother was lying on her back in a deep sleep. Her body wasn't centered in the bed but was neatly placed on the right side of the bed as

though she were waiting for someone to join her. Angula quietly closed the door with one of her back legs and, moving into the room, found herself standing on the left side of the bed. Her mother's face looked peaceful, as though death had already taken her hold.

Angula climbed to the ceiling and proceeded to spin a web that ran from the ceiling to the floor covering three-quarters of the bed. The web was hinged on the ceiling, the floor, and the right bedpost. She had just finished weaving it, and was perched over her mother at just about the right angle, when she heard a noise. Angula froze in her position, not daring to move a muscle. She heard the steady footsteps of Mrs. Cooper coming down the hall. Her footfall was very quiet, being muffled by the soft pads of her slippers. As she turned the doorknob, Angula really began to panic. In split seconds her mind went through varying tactics for escape. She could overpower Mrs. Cooper, run out of the house and try to hide until the next night, when she would try to return to human form. Or, she could simply frighten Mrs. Cooper, maybe making her faint with fright, hurry to her room and try to change back to a human before Mrs. Cooper came around. Or she could knock Mrs. Cooper out, finish the treatment she was giving to her mother and then worry about change-back. Or, she could just sit very quietly not daring to breathe and hope not to be discovered. Angula wasn't given the opportunity to decide which action to take before Mrs. Cooper was in the room.

She was dressed in a blue nightgown with blue slippers that matched. The slippers were the type that look as though the feet have grown an immense head of thick fur. Her hair was in curlers, a scarf wrapped around it. Mrs. Cooper didn't appear to look up or around the room at all. She simply went straight to the bed and gazed at the sleeping form. She was standing on the left side of the bed and couldn't possibly see clearly in the dim light, but she made no motions towards the right.

Angula continued to watch Mrs. Cooper for what seemed to be an eternity. She began to muse to herself whether Mrs. Cooper was sleep-walking or something. It wasn't like her to come into a room and consume such a small, confined amount of space. She didn't make a move towards her mother, but simply stood there gazing at the dim form. If Mrs. Cooper moved six inches down the side of the bed towards its bottom, she would bump into Angula's web.

Angula imagined her touching the sticky silk, wiping it from her arm, then searching for the light to illuminate the situation. Mrs. Cooper had never been a timid woman, always bringing a grounded viewpoint to what seemed to be baffling circumstances. Yes, if Mrs. Cooper bumped into the web, Angula would be discovered for sure. The thought made her shudder and hold her body tighter.

At last Mrs. Cooper left the room. Angula let out a sigh that almost sent her gasping for air. She realized her fear had been enormous and it would take a little while for her to calm down enough to do the healing. That was really a close call. Now, all I need is for Mother to awaken, needing a drink of water or to relieve her bladder, thought Angula.

In about half an hour, Angula was calm enough to begin the treatment. The quiet was so thick she could almost taste it. It served as a salve to her nerves, and she found herself concentrating at an intensity level that she rarely achieved.

The necessary healing essences were created by the combination of minerals from within her own body, and the substances coated the web. She would send the liquid from her mouth down the strands, causing the friction needed to give the essences a strong potency. As the minerals and web juices mixed together, a strong glow would emanate from the web, giving it an iridescent look. This glow would increase, finally reaching a point when it gave off an immense amount of heat and light. The structure of the web directed the energy into the right place, sending floods of healing light in a given direction.

As the web began to glow, Angula felt the heat rising. She became empathetic with the web, making it possible for her to withstand the great heat without being burned or having to move. The glow increased, gradually becoming very bright and very hot. She could see that the energy was being directed to the right place, the origin of the cancer. She could also see the hideous cells drying up, one by one in rapid succession, as the light penetrated their substance, destroying the atomic makeup. The room was very hot by now, and the light from the web filled the room exposing every nook and cranny. Her mother began to moan and toss in her bed, but this only lasted for a few minutes as she finally drifted back into a sound sleep.

The healing took approximately fifteen minutes. Afterwards, Angula was exhausted and disoriented. Maintaining empathy with the web took a lot of energy and the treatment had been one of the longest she had ever given. The web was only a smoldering ash, self-destructing when its usefulness was over. After resting for a few minutes, Angula examined her mother to determine whether it had been complete and successful. She found no trace of the cancer in any part of her mother's body. She had succeeded in curing her mother and saving her life. Angula was calmly self-satisfied with the result. She scuttled back to her room, amused at the thought of the confusion the doctors would go through when they examined her mother.

Before she attempted the change-to ritual, Angula caught a few hours sleep. She was too tired to build a web, and also feared discovery

of its remnants in the morning, so she laid down on the floor and drifted off as best she could. Right before dawn she awoke, took herself through the change-back ritual and crawled back to sleep in her own little bed.

When Angula finally awoke the sun was high in the sky. She bounded out of bed, hurriedly dressed and proceeded towards the kitchen. She had planned to be up at her usual time, so as not to arouse Mrs. Cooper's suspicion. In fact, she wondered why Mrs. Cooper hadn't called her to come to breakfast earlier. As she entered the kitchen, she saw Mrs. Cooper bent over the table. She turned when she heard Angula come into the room.

"Well good morning, or should I say good afternoon sleepy head," Mrs. Cooper greeted with a laugh. "I thought you might have needed the rest so I just let you sleep. Georgia hasn't woken yet either and she is usually such an early riser. Oh well, sometimes the body needs a lot of sleep and sometimes it needs very little." With this small piece of wisdom Mrs. Cooper served Angula a cup of tea. "I'll have lunch ready in about half an hour. Do you want to wait for it or do you want something to eat right now?" asked Mrs. Cooper.

"Oh, I guess I can wait," answered Angula. "In fact, I think I will take a little walk around the block to build up my appetite."

As she was walking, Angula tried to get in touch with a hazy feeling of uneasiness. Although the actions of the previous night were strange in this particular setting, they were really very familiar to her. She was a healer in Controna and performed these or similar movements regularly. Maybe Mrs. Cooper is acting strange, thought Angula. After all, most mornings she wakes me up to have breakfast, insisting that I need a morning meal to fortify me for the day. When I was a little girl she was so insistent on this that I never got to sleep in on weekends, recalled Angula. Hey, hey, maybe the old girl is getting soft in her old age or my mother's illness has caused her to relax more. Oh well, I'm probably just worrying about nothing. I'll clear my mind of these uncomfortable feelings and get back to lunch.

Lunch consisted of roast chicken, fresh garden peas, scalloped potatoes, stewed tomatoes and cherry pie. A far cry from the usual soup and sandwich. "What's the occasion?" asked Angula.

"Oh, no occasion. I just felt like having a nice meal in the middle of the day instead of the usual soup and sandwich. We can have a light snack for dinner," Mrs. Cooper flatly answered. "Your mother still isn't awake. I called the doctor. She should be here in a little while. I hope this doesn't mean that something has gone wrong," Mrs. Cooper added thoughtfully.

Angula's mother was just waking up when the doctor arrived. She

had uttered a few moans and was raising her arms above her head to stretch when the three of them filed into her room. The doctor started her examination with routine calmness, pushing, poking and prying in a state of basic boredom. After a few minutes of checking the doctor seemed to feel something of interest in the abdominal region of her mother's body. She kept poking around in that region. Finally she raised her head and pondered for a minute. Then she said, "We better take her into the hospital for tests and X-rays. It looks as though something has changed in her condition."

An ambulance was called and Mrs. Cooper and Angula followed it to the city hospital. Neither of them spoke during the ride and the empty silence was somewhat haunting.

After about two hours, the doctor came to the waiting room to speak to Angula and Mrs. Cooper. Her face was grave and she looked puzzled. "We have done extensive tests and have made several X-rays and the results are somewhat baffling," stated the doctor. Then she turned away from them and took a few steps. "It seems that there is not a trace of the cancer in her body. Of course, we are checking, re-checking and conducting more tests but we can't seem to locate it anywhere. It's the damndest thing I ever saw. We just don't know what has happened."

A small triumphant smile slowly crept over Angula's face. She was so absorbed in her own joy that she didn't notice a quiet look of pleasure that also crept over Mrs. Cooper.

"Well, anyway, we may want to operate and we will need her approval. She doesn't seem to want to cooperate so I wondered if one of you could persuade her to be reasonable," asked the doctor.

"Why do you need to operate?" asked Mrs. Cooper. "You just said that you can't seem to find any cancer in her body. Why can't you just let well enough alone?"

"Well, this just seems so extraordinary that we wanted to go inside to check that everything is really alright. Just exploratory surgery. It's really quite routine," replied the doctor confidently.

"Well, that isn't a good enough reason to cut into someone's body, just looking to see what you can see. Georgia's right to refuse to consent to such nonsense," said Mrs. Cooper in her most matter-of-fact tone.

The doctor looked slightly surprised and annoyed. She started to approach Angula but changed her mind mid-motion. Then she walked towards the door to the waiting room, turning around briefly to say, "You might as well take her home then. There is nothing else we can do here." She hurried down the hall, never even turning to say good-bye.

When Angula and Mrs. Cooper got Georgia home, the three of them had a small celebration. They told Georgia of the diagnosis and toasted

the good fortune with tall glasses of sparkling lemonade. Angula's mother then slept for the rest of the day.

The next few days passed quickly. Georgia slept less and started talking more. Her appetite increased and her general spirits were high. The doctor called a couple of times to try to persuade them to have the operation, but the answer remained a firm no. By the time Angula was ready to return to Controna, her mother had made a marked improvement over her original condition. Angula had examined her and found the healing process progressing nicely. Everything seemed to be going just fine.

On the day that Angula was due to return to Controna, Mrs. Cooper pulled her aside with a clandestine air. "Where are you going after you leave us?" she asked.

"Oh, I don't know. I guess I'll just drift some more. That seems to suit me," answered Angula.

Mrs. Cooper then looked down for a moment as though trying to find the proper words to say. She searched Angula's eyes in a pleading way. "Well, honey, you take care of yourself, you hear? And remember your mother and I love you for yourself no matter what or who you are or have become." She completed this speech by giving Angula a big warm hug. They walked out onto the porch to catch the setting sun. Angula only had a few minutes, but she valued this intimate time with Mrs. Cooper.

As they watched the sunset, Mrs. Cooper noticed a small spider weaving a tiny web in a nearby bush. She wandered over to it, watching the busy creature weaving and spinning in rapid frantic movements. Some spiders can't see very well at night and need to complete their work before natural light is gone. Angula followed Mrs. Cooper, naturally fascinated by her tiny sister. Mrs. Cooper watched thoughtfully before she said, "Whenever the spider visits she always brings good luck."

They then walked back into the house. Angula kissed her mother good-bye, promising to write and come to see her often. These were two promises that she knew would be difficult, if not impossible, to keep, but they made this loved one happy. Mrs. Cooper helped her load up her car and watched affectionately as she started the motor to warm up the jeep. Then she kissed Angula again through the car window, gave her a big healthy hug and told her to take care of herself. Angula could still see Mrs. Cooper's form waving good-bye in her rearview mirror as she moved down the road, heading for Controna.

Stone Hands

for Dessie

It was happening more often. Too often. It must be the music. Or the food. Too many amino acids.

Arlo closed the door to her head as she dragged and battered the swollen wooden door back into its place so she could lock it. Before the final snap of the old fashioned bolt, Arlo hesitated. Maybe she would leave the door unlocked tonight. That gave her the courage to look at her hands.

If she could just get enough light. She always wished for more light; dreamed about it. The only brightness she'd ever really known was in school, in the films.

She knew a sunstick would work the best, make enough light, though she'd never actually seen one. Cost too much.

She tumbled the combination on a Firefly. It pointed its plastic antennae and spread its luminescent skirt like whitened wings in the wrong place. In the wrong place if this was a real firefly, Arlo thought. She'd never seen a real firefly. But she knew someone who'd heard old stories about fireflies. Fireflies as thick as helicopters that would light up the park at night, blinking like police eyes up and down the streets. Little insects that flew around and made lights in the dark.

Freedom From Insects was an inalienable right of Citizenship, Arlo repeated in rhythm to the voice in her head.

The film in her Citizenship Preparation class continued to play. The announcer's voice rang in her head: "Before The Rapture, the evil world was punished for its sins with plagues. The plague of insects, frogs and snakes was one of the worst. Diseases, and sickness. The noise of the woods and forests was a constant irritation."

Arlo shut the mental sound off. She watched the film in her mind while she thought about little bugs that blinked and glowed and strung lights all over the gloomy dusk. This far North it was always as dark as dusk. If there were still little fireflies maybe they would be able to glow and blink all day long.

She shook her head. The world is supposed to be better without bugs. That's what the film taught. But she wondered. She wondered even as the Video replayed the Truth of Citizenship in her mind. The

internal volume came back up. She found that it took her constant attention to keep it off: "The world is cleansed now. Free of the punishment of unrighteousness."

Serum Videos always stayed with her. She never needed the re-schooling, the booster-injections. Everyone else she knew did.

Whenever she went for a Citizenship bloodtest, the Congregation Psychiatrist smiled and laughed his toothless congratulations to Arlo on her serological ability to retain Citizenship. But she never told him or anyone else in her family that whatever the test said about her blood, it never helped. Sure she could remember each film, each injection, each lesson. She was graduate, a Citizen. But that didn't make her a Good Citizen. Unlike the people she worked with, her family, Arlo never felt better remembering the films.

Arlo never felt better about anything. She wondered what Better would feel like. Her worker-group-family knew. They felt better working. In fact they loved their work, her work. She hated it. Hate. Hate was done away. Being a Citizen of the United World Covenant meant being free of any evil feeling—like hate. And climax.

This was a cleansed world, now. She was a cleansed soul, free—free of the stain of Eve's sin. Free of climax after childhood.

Arlo remembered that film, too.

The World was One. The creation of life and the joy of creation belonged, like it had always belonged, to the Spirit. No one could create children. That was done by The Spirit, now. And the Spirit was housed in the World on an island surrounded by a beautiful blue ocean faraway from the path of mortals, until mortals were caught up in their righteousness and carried to the Island of the Spirit.

Arlo knew there must be a lot of righteousness. Many of her family were gone. When someone didn't show up any more, everyone nodded and prayed, and said, Praise the Spirit. And Amen. Not Arlo. The workers that disappear don't seem especially spiritual or righteous. To Arlo they just seem gone. It is too deep a mystery for Arlo to figure out what it takes to be caught up and transported in righteousness to The Island.

She didn't share with anyone that she didn't understand righteousness. Not even her family. But Arlo didn't understand families, either.

Everyone belonged to a family, but the children for each family were sent by The Spirit through the Congregation Psychiatrist. Parents were Father and Mother Workers called by The Spirit to take care of His children. Children were matched in personality and temperament and physical characteristics as much as possible, to the Parent Workers. Arlo's Mother Worker said The Spirit got mixed up on the paperwork for Arlo, since Arlo didn't match anyone.

Childhood was a preparation for Citizenship. Citizenship was preparation for being caught up in the Rapture of righteousness and taken to the Island. And The Spirit visited among the children, to prepare them for Citizenship and Righteousness.

A Visiting Spirit would come to a child and teach them about the evil of their bodies by touching them to climax. Visiting Spirits were always men. Arlo knew that. She remembered that. She seemed to be the only one who did know or remember. She mentioned once about Father Benson being a Visiting Spirit, and two of her worker-sisters brought her to him—he was also the Congregation Psychiatrist—for a bloodtest. She passed the test and pretended ever after that not to remember. She tried not to remember about climax or about how rough Visiting Spirits were. They all had too many fingers, poking and telling her all the while about how evil she was.

Thinking about Visiting Spirits made Arlo remember the first Serum Video, entitled "Relief From the Evil Body," and Arlo decided that Citizenship was about forgetting. At least about forgetting childhood. The injection, the video that first time, had made her sick. She was the only one got sick, too. Arlo thought about the beautiful golden serum that the needle sucked in and then poured into her blood and mind. the chemical must do something else, though. Arlo was almost sure of that.

Arlo didn't get to be a Mother Worker. The Spirit needed her as a Worker Example. But they hardly needed Mother Workers anymore. There were fewer families, fewer children so the Plague of Famine could cease.

Since there was no desire for sex after Citizenship, being a Mother Worker or a Worker Example didn't matter to Arlo. It just meant a name change—adaptation. Her pre-citizenship name, Charlotte, was reserved for Mother Workers. Worker Examples took the proper grammatical masculine form. Her reward for high bloodtest scores after school was that she could adapt her own name. She hated Charles. She knew that she would end up as Chuck. She had narrowed her letters down to 'Lot' or 'Arlo'.

During Pre-citizenship therapy she had let it be known she liked Lot so they gave her Arlo. And even with the memory of the film, the Lesson on Honesty to The Spirit coursing through her veins, Arlo had used the Psychiatrist's trick back on him, by lying. And she had almost known what Better felt like when the call came that her name was Arlo.

She didn't like lying. She didn't like doing anything she wasn't supposed to do, even though nothing in her bloodstream assisted her. She never got nauseous for lying. She never got a headache for pretending to be like the others. She never got a nosebleed from thinking about climax.

She never developed the bright red rash women Worker Examples got from being raped by men Worker Examples.

This had happened only once to Arlo. It was hard to understand how this could still happen in a cleansed world. She heard the Psychiatrist tell someone that 'rape' was a reaction some men had when the Serum Videos didn't work. But that's all Arlo had heard.

So the only thing Arlo understood for sure, was that she was different. Different from her family.

That's why she got to live alone for the whole month of Rapturebirth Holidays. She said she was studying ancient evil history and since no one was supposed to be able to lie, they believed her. So she got to live in the Leftover Building. No one else lived there. Arlo made an apartment in the back on the second floor. There were three floors and an old elevator and stairs that were too dangerous to use. Arlo used the fire escape on the outside.

The building came from the time of Lust, before the Rapture when the World of Sin was replaced by a World of Righteousness. The Leftover Building was the tallest building for miles. In the New World, everything was built on the ground. So with the height and without a sunstick, living there was a little scary, but it got Arlo away from her worker-family and their witless ritualized celebrating. She shuddered thinking about the endless days and nights of prayer meetings and confessing and caroling and fasting. She had had to buy them all a present and it would take her a millennium to get back out of debt.

She put a piece of broken glass in front of the Firefly, to make the light stronger, and looked at her hands. Transparent, just for a moment, then opaque. If she just had a sunstick. If it would ever quit raining so the sun would come out. If she had a bright enough light, then, then she could tell.

Then the reason, the truth about the shortage of sunsticks tapped on Arlo's consciousness. A piece of truth but not in words. Maybe, maybe even somebody with a serum memory would notice, if they saw it. If there was enough light, so there is never enough light.

Something was happening to her. And she wanted to stop it. If it was happening to anyone else that was their problem.

She pushed the Firefly to the edge of the rickety table and looked at her hands, again. She broke the Seventy-third commandment and slid her shirt sleeves up and looked at her bare arms tracked with the injection marks of school. Her arms seemed to hold the light. Not reflect the vague glow, but hold it. Her arms felt distant from her. Solid and cool to the touch. Like pillars. Her arms felt like the marble pillars in the prayer room next to her work space.

Something was wrong. And it wasn't in her head like the Congregation Psychiatrist was sure to say.

And Arlo got angry. Then she almost got sick. Her stomach knotted and her head tilted inside itself as sweat dripped across her face. The lesson on not getting angry rushed up through her veins. It made her angrier. Something was wrong, something with Arlo was wrong and it was wrong on purpose. Someone knew something was wrong and they were lying and hiding the truth of it from her, from everyone.

And the angrier Arlo got, the better she felt. Arlo felt Better. Relieved and sure of herself, purposeful and calm. Joy spilled onto the anger and Arlo felt Better and Better. She felt better for the first time in her life. For the first time in the ten thousand nine hundred fifty seven and—she looked at the time pulsar strapped on her survival belt along with the recordings of the Commandments—and five-tenths days of her life, she thought. And in her joy, she knew what to do.

They had made a big deal out of locking the door. Leftover building had ghosts, evil spirits, they had said. So Arlo would do as she had wanted to do for days, she would leave the door unlocked. Whatever she could think of that she had been told not to do, she was going to do.

She undid the combination on the Firefly and ran for her bed before the vague lit shadow it gave off was gone. She closed her eyes and started for sleep as the sound of Midnight Carols from services being held all over the city crept through the old walls of the Leftover Building.

The total darkness of night hadn't settled for longer than minutes when Arlo heard the door pushed open. The ancient wood screamed out, holding onto the floor. Since Arlo hated the night, the total darkness it brought, she practised getting around her apartment with her eyes closed in the gloomy daytime. She closed her eyes now, as she always did at night pretending it was really day, making the darkness her choice.

She moved towards the front room and its tiny couch. She moved cautiously and with the clear sense something, someone had come in and was waiting there.

Even with her eyes closed, Arlo could see the light, feel it. She covered her eyes with her hands because she would not, could not, willingly close her eyes to the wonderful brightness in front of her.

One finger at a time, she lifted the shades her hands had improvised. It seemed to take forever. And seeing didn't really help Arlo understand. She only understood she was breaking the Seventeenth commandment because she was looking at a naked woman. Face to face, body to body, Arlo looked at a completely and absolutely totally naked woman. The woman stood shining in the light of a sunstick that was planted in a pot of cactus Arlo couldn't get to grow.

Neither spoke. Both seemed as ready to run as they were ready to fight to stay exactly where they were.

Arlo couldn't help blushing. She had never dared to look at her own body even during shower time, though she had wanted to. A Visiting Spirit had described naked women to Arlo. Now, a woman, tall, without covering even her breasts as Arlo surely would have, filled Arlo's entire field of vision. Arlo stared. The woman let her.

Arlo dropped her eyes to the woman's feet. Perfect, curved just slightly on the inside. The toes were long and slender, dancers' feet, like Arlo's—that's what Arlo's Mother Worker had called them. But dancing was forbidden as was most music except hymns, unless a Visiting Spirit asked for either or both.

The woman's legs were straight and sallow from ankle to knee to thigh; smooth and lean. Each thigh came together making a 'v' outlined by dark hair. The thick and curling mound of hair circled around, hypnotizing Arlo. And what Arlo saw, she wanted to touch. She wanted to reach between the woman's legs and stroke the woman there. Arlo blushed deeper.

The woman did not blush. She did not move.

Her stomach was rounded like a Mother Worker's, shadowing and mystifying the mound of hair tucked under it. The light yellowed as it fell across the strong muscular hips that only roughly marked the waist. Looking from the navel upward, Arlo started to breathe deeper, slower, to counter the strange racing of her heart. The woman's skin took the light full on, driving attention to her two firm breasts, rounded like the golden dark sand that Arlo had cupped once with her hands when she had gone to the shore of the Eastern Ocean. The woman shifted her weight. Each breast lifted with each brown nipple, bobbing and holding still, making the light and shadow between the breasts rearrange and separate.

In what felt like an hour and could have only been a few seconds, Arlo looked at the woman's face. The strong chin, the almond eyes under severe black eyebrows, so dark blue they were nearly black, the high cheekbones and short forehead crowned by a hood of dark hair made a place far inside Arlo melt. No wonder they made the rule about naked women, Arlo thought. Without it everyone would have to be reschooled against wanting climax.

Arlo couldn't decide which to focus on, the woman or the sunstick. Each was a wish come alive.

The woman reached a finger out in an unexpectedly awkward motion, and pointed towards Arlo. Arlo looked down and in one terrible moment realized what the woman had pointed to and what she herself

had been dreading for the last three months.

Arlo fell to her squeaky couch, her hands outstretched in front of her, on fire in the light of the sunstick. Arlo cried as she tried touching one hand with the other. She had no sensation in either and noticed the lack of feeling went up past her wrists. And they weren't exactly hands anymore. They were crystalline sculptures of hands.

Arlo looked at the woman who had moved to the couch and was sitting by her. Then Arlo looked where the woman was looking. And Arlo gasped. The woman reached one of her topaz-carved hands to Arlo's lips, in a hushing gesture. Arlo caught her fear and the noise it was about to make. Tears rushed down both faces as each held with their eyes the other's stone hands.

The woman was named Zoe.

Zoe reached over and in a clunking procedure—Dresden hands to glass—got Arlo to lift her hands up. Then Zoe shifted her weight, slid closer and pushed her breasts to Arlo's hands. The warmth was immediate. So was the effect. Arlo's hands trembled and shook for a moment as blood surged, muscles moved and the skin on Arlo's hands became opaque. Her hands warm and alive, cupped and squeezed each firm breast.

Arlo was unwilling to notice the welcome change in her hands for fear the impending passion would never happen. Able to move her fingers, Arlo circled each of Zoe's brown hard nipples, drumming on them in a beat catching both women up in a motion that brought them eye to eye.

Zoe told Arlo as much as she knew. But Arlo was storing the information, saving it. She didn't want to waste even a millisecond of the electricity circling between them on something she could remember later.

Zoe tried to pull Arlo's oversized shirt up, tearing it at the collar with the clumsy movements the hand-statues at her wrists seemed capable of. So Arlo helped and for the first time in her life sat totally naked in front of another naked woman.

There wasn't time to think, or decide. Each woman wrapped the other with the warmth of her body until Arlo cried out in a faraway voice, her thighs gripping and letting go of Zoe's legs, faster and faster. Zoe spread her legs open after Arlo came and Arlo, stroking Zoe's cold rigid hands and placing them around her neck, bent down, slipping deep with her tongue until Zoe called out in a voice like Arlo's, shivering and pulling Arlo up so they could lie face to face in Zoe's sleep.

And Zoe was gone. Somewhere in their sleep, Zoe had slipped loose from Arlo's grip and was gone.

Nothing mattered, not now. Nothing Zoe had told Arlo, had taught her, mattered now.

Arlo, naked, gripping the potted sunstick, climbed through the entire building looking for Zoe before she let her anger rage out of control. The Serum Video, for all its intended control only served to enrage Arlo even more. She jammed the sunstick back onto the table and threw herself on the bed, kicking and flaying her body and pounding the pillow with her doubled-up fists until she had to stop from exhaustion.

The caroling seeped back through the walls. The city must have stayed up all night, Arlo thought, drugged from her outburst. She hated the Holidays and their chemical celebration. The joy of making love with Zoe made the ritual and circumscribed activities seem even more hollow to Arlo. All she wanted was Zoe. And she knew now what she had wanted and yearned for her entire life. All she could do was empty her sadness and anger into a deep and dreamless sleep.

She jerked awake thinking it was morning. Too bright. She noticed that it was too bright for morning before she remembered anything and then the flood of what had happened only hours earlier washed through her.

Arlo was sad. She felt betrayed, abandoned. But, she thought to herself over the video replaying of "The Evils of the Body," she felt a good many other things, wonderful things. Joyful things. A deep peace surged up through her stomach and chest and Arlo felt glad to be alive and in the feeling, knew she had never felt that way before. Hosanna! She shouted and did an impromptu dance of joy in front of the sunstick still growing in her cactus pot.

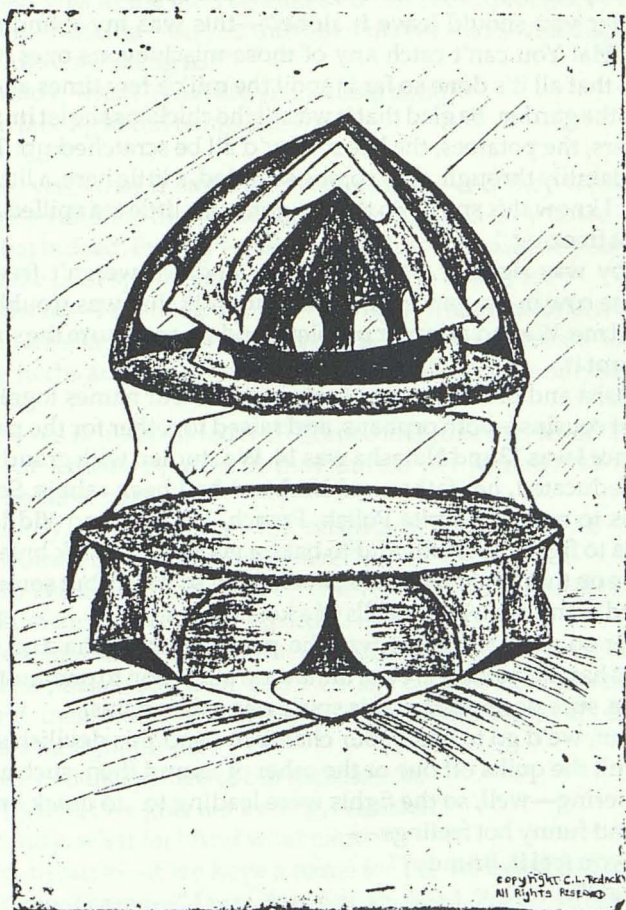
There were still five or six more hours until the grey shadow of morning lifted above its thicker cousin, night. Arlo welcomed the sleep. She set the pot with its wonderful holy light on the floor by her bed. She'd already drawn the curtains and hung a blanket over the boarded window, just in case The Spirit was patrolling on the Eve of Rapturebirth. She had no intention of getting caught breaking the Eleventh Commandment.

Arlo knew something for herself. She knew something she'd created that hadn't been created for her, put in her blood as though she had done it herself. She had done something herself. She had known love and found out that her body was not disgusting. And she had a sunstick. Everything Zoe had told her came back. Arlo would use the Holidays to run away. To run south. It wasn't too late. And it wasn't the food. Or protein. Or the music.

Arlo looked at her soft, supple hands, warm and strong, and touched them under the soft pillow. She slept on top of the covers. She

slept naked, snuggling against the coarse blanket. She slept naked to make sure she would hear the rebellion finally alive in her soul—to make sure when she awoke she could hear it call her south.

(From Chapter One)



Theater Dome Drashan Redack

Catching a Spirit

I remember well the day I spent in the Prague woods with Natasha, chasing a spirit. Why did we want to catch this spirit?

"Better you should leave it alone,"—this was my grandmother's advice. "Ha! You can't catch any of those mischievous ones. Only be thankful that all it's done so far is spoil the milk a few times and let the cow into the garden. Be glad that it wasn't the chickens she let in, then the cucumbers, the potatoes, the beets, they'd all be scratched up. The cow walked daintily through, only so, she sampled, a little here, a little there. And yes, I know this spirit. So the fire got, nu, a little tea spilled on it. So we're not freezing."

Bubby was right, it was late spring and we weren't freezing. It wasn't the cow in the garden, nor the spilt milk that was troubling Natasha and me. We had a deeper problem, and we were sure the spirit was the cause of it.

Natasha and Brundy—people always said our names together. We were first cousins—both orphans, and raised together for the past three years, since I was 13 and Natasha was 14. We studied with grandmother, she was educated, her father and husband had been rabbis. So Bubby taught us to read and write Polish, French, Hebrew and Yiddish. She taught us to figure accounts and to bake a good thick black bread—you could live on that bread and tea! And also, not so much, but some, to sew and mend—and well, other skills of a kosher home.

So far so good. So what was the problem? Natasha and I found ourselves having a strange, even unnatural attraction to one another. We were sure, sure positive, that this spirit was causing this!

I mean, we'd go to bed in our chamber—and this devilish schemer would pull the quilts off one or the other of us and then, such a fight—such nattering—well, so the fights were leading to...to quick intakes of breath, and funny hot feelings—

"Do you feel it, Brundy?"

"What?"

"You don't feel it?"

"What?"

"That—"

"Oh. That...that...heat here?"

"Yes, that!"

"It's a spirit, I know!"

So we were worried—I mean—what man is going to want to marry a girl who, takke, not only is so strange as to read but who has also been known to be familiar with spirits?!!

So Natasha and I decided to lure this spirit. That's why we took the cow and ourselves to the Prague woods.

It was positively hot, that day in the woods. Mushroomy smells. The earth itself was in the air. Natasha said she could practically taste it. I asked her, "Natasha—do you think that maybe that's what happened to the spirit that's chasing us?"

"Brundy, what? What are you talking about?"

"I'm talking about being buried—"

"Buried?"

"Yes, yes, what if someone were buried—and they weren't completely dead and the dirt got into their mouths and they tasted—"

"What indeed, Brundy—talk plain Yiddish, please. So you mean it's because the poor spirit tasted dirt she wants to bother us?"

"Natasha—I am talking plain—anyhow, what I mean is: if a woman was sick, let's say, or if she was sick of her husband and she took some sleeping herbs and they made her her sleep a long time only she wasn't dead—"

"Yes, yes Brundy—I too read Romeo and Juliet. So what? Why us?"

"What I mean is: what if they buried her somewhere in Bubby Sarah's fields or barnyard?"

"Brundy, vay iz mir, such a mishegoss you're talking—buried a Jewish woman in an unmarked grave?"

"But, Natasha," I answered, "Maybe she was, God forbid, murdered! Remember, her husband didn't like her—"

"Well, that could be true, but of course it could be that the sleeping potion was poison, and then, and then, she'd be considered a suicide—"

"And then she'd be buried in an unmarked grave!" I finished Natasha's thought for her.

So we had that settled to our satisfaction.

"Why don't we give her a name, Natasha?"

"Brundy, what for? And what name?"

"For, because—if we have a name for her we could call to her better—and what name—" I was, for once, shushed. What did I know from names?

We were quiet for awhile. The cow, Bella, was content to walk with us sampling every sort of ground growth that crossed her path and occasionally eating low hanging twigs and leaves. Bella—that's short for

Balabosta because she was always so dainty and clean in her ways—was not on any lead. She followed on her own. We wanted the spirit to be tricked. We wanted the spirit to think that Bella would follow her, just like she did into the garden. Only we'd be close by, and we'd be watching. Then we could follow Bella, who would be following the spirit, right to wherever it was the spirit stayed. So, why the woods—you may ask?

Well, I couldn't have told you then, but looking back on it now I think Natasha and I thought the woods spooky and well...full of atmosphere. A likely place to find a spirit.

That day might have been spent just wandering around, pleasant but not really accomplishing anything, if it hadn't been for Bella lying down—

"Natasha...Natasha...wait—Bella's not going—"

"Brundy, what do you mean, she's not going? You're watching her exact place? So maybe she went already."

Natasha was picking ripe, bursting berries and eating most of them, and, I hoped, saving some for me. I was always slower than Natasha—so I had to stay with Bella.

"No, Natasha, she's lying down—" So at that Natasha came quick enough.

We waited together in a small sunlit clearing. Bella had some sense. Why should she walk, takke, when here was what she dreamed her cowey dreams of: fresh deep grass, with flowers, even, shade or sun and a small seeping spring. So Natasha and I settled down to wait.

"Do you think the spirit is here, Brundy?"

I cuddled closer to Natasha, because I knew that even though she was the older of us two, and more practical, she was scared of the spirits much more than I. I guess that's because when you're a dreamy girl like I was, spirits of one kind or another are what you get to know a lot of.

We must have fallen asleep for awhile, because I remember waking and seeing Natasha dozing. Nu? Why not? The day was warm—I pulled off my apron, dress, shoes and stockings, and two of my three petticoats. I still had on a fitted bodice, long bloomers in addition to the third petticoat. Hashem forbid I should get cold! I felt new and charged—I could not remember ever having the sun on my bare arms before. We orthodox girls were never allowed to expose our toes, even.

So, there, in that clearing, I danced around a little bit. After all what was the harm? So who was even going to know? Only Bella—and she'd never tell. Suddenly, while I was dancing, I really felt someone was there with me. I knew that it was the spirit and when I knew that I also knew her name: Tamar, who in Bible times slept only with Judah for the sake of

having a child, and was wise, and kept to herself. A widow as a young girl and all the rest of her life.

I had wondered why she had chosen to keep to herself. She could have forced Judah to keep his promise and marry her to his son Shelah, but she seemed to prefer to stay alone all the rest of her days.

"Tamar, Tamar," I whispered, "are you here?" So I was not exactly shocked when, well, to tell the truth, I was shocked—when a wraithlike figure appeared near the spring—"Natasha, Natasha—wake up already—wake up—"

Natasha just muttered, "Shah, shah, gay shlofen." So I turned my attentions to Tamar.

"I am Tamar," she said. You could hardly tell that she was talking—such a flutey sound, like wind in the reeds. "I've come to help you and Natasha—and to tell you that nice Jewish girls and good Jewish mothers have lived in the company of one another for ages."

"What? What do you mean 'company'?"

"I mean, without marriage to a man—without the bed of a man in our houses."

"Who supports them? How do they live?"

"Oh, Brundeleh, look around you—the wimin always make the living." And at this voice I was shocked—such a nothing I felt. Because, answering so bold was Natasha, who had waked and crept close to me.

"That's true, Natasha," replied Tamar. "Even in my times, Biblical times, wimin owned flocks, gathered honey and made mead, spun, wove, created many beautiful jewelry pieces and raised grains, dates and fruits. Women kept spaces for travelers—tents for guests—just as wimin are innkeepers now, here, in Prague. Wimin invented cheese, and traded. Wimin discovered salting meat, drying and grinding all sorts of flours, brewing wine and beer—oh, the list is endless!"

I was, for once in my life, speechless. True, I was thinking of Bubby Sarah. Her husband, my grandpoppa Reuven, had been a rabbi, but rabbis didn't earn much in Prague unless they were very important. Rabbi Reuven was just one of ten or twelve rabbis at a large shul who taught Hebrew and Bible study. Bubby had always kept milch cows and sold milk, butter, cream and cheeses. And now Natasha and I helped her and we had started to sell eggs too. All kosher.

So—where was this leading? I looked to Natasha. She was talking with Tamar about what I'd been thinking. I waited until they were quiet for a moment and asked Tamar, "Nu—so why did you come to us? Why try to change us to your way of thinking? Even if it is right?" I knew that sounded a bit foolish—but I meant the idea could be right, but the feelings had to be our own.

"But, Brundy—Natasha—I only came to you after you had the feelings all on your own—"

"What? Didn't you let the cow into the garden?"

"What cow? Oh, Bella. No, it wasn't I, it was the delivery boy of the butcher. He opened the gate so he could pass there late in the evening without the gate squeaking, on his way to visit Shelia."

"But what about the milk? Its spoiling?"

"Natasha—look to yourself for that! When you sit thinking of Brundy's brown curls and red mouth and rush through the washing of the milk pails carelessly—the milk will sour."

Natasha blushed at this and I laughed. Little did I know that my turn was still to come. Foolishly I asked, "What about the tea putting out the fire?"

"Brundy—I'm surprised that you ask such a nebbish question. Wasn't it you that put the tea in a glass on the low shelf so that it should warm up a little? And then you forgot about the tea while you thought about Natasha's ankle and knee? And the glass got, takke, hot and burst, and the tea went, where else, on the fire."

And with that Tamar disappeared.

Natasha and I were very shy with each other for several days after that. We did our chores, just as always. Natasha was extra careful of the milk pails. I was careful of where I left my things. But we did not stop thinking of each other's mouths and curls and ankles and knees.

Then one Shabbes, we were in our chamber and Bubby Sarah was visiting an old friend, also a widow, when it happened.

Natasha reached over to me and said, "Brundeleh—did you really think of my ankle and knee?"

"Yes—"

"Do you want to touch them?"

"When?"

"Now?"

"Yes."

"Did you really think of my brown curls and my red mouth?"

"Yes."

"Do you want to touch them?"

"When?"

"Now?"

"Yes."

And so that's what happened. Natasha's lips on mine and in my hair, my hands on her knees and thighs and—well, you know where else.

And Tamar? We didn't hear from her too often. But when we adopted an orphaned baby girl, years later, Tamar is the name we gave her.

I was glad to see my poem, "Fathers/Daughters," in the fall '87 issue of *Sinister Wisdom* (p.60). The fourth stanza, however, contains a serious typographical error. The seventh line should read "But the word that would heal..." rather than "But the word that would hear..." Unfortunately, "hear" makes a certain awful sense, one that badly distorts the meaning of the poem.

"Fathers/Daughters" is about a painful dilemma that at some point faces many incest survivors: is it possible to forgive the perpetrator — when forgiveness may be necessary to self-healing — without jeopardizing one's own integrity and sense of self worth? The poem asks whether forgiveness, "the word that would heal," is affordable, will cost too much, whether we can speak that word — and whether we can afford not to. The poem, deliberately, does not answer the question.

The "word that would hear" suggests that the incest survivor has some obligation to speak a word of comfort to the perpetrator, perhaps because he is now old and lonely. In such a case one might, in fact, feel compassion, and even act, consciously, out of that feeling. But the line implies that healing depends upon making the victimizer feel better. The temptation to fall back into a posture of responsibility for the perpetrator does often exist, but if given into could be deeply self-destructive. Forgiveness, in the sense of freely giving up one's own embittering anger, for one's own sake, may need to be felt and experienced — but is not to be confused with easy sentimentality, often an avoidance of anger. For the sake of your readers, many of whom may be incest survivors, and for the sake of the poem, I hope you'll not only make a correction (ideally reprint the poem), but will print this letter as well. I don't think *Sinister Wisdom* would want to be saying what the poem, uncorrected, seems to say. #33 is otherwise a wonderful issue!

Sincerely,

Margaret Tongue

Editor's note: We absolutely agree, and apologize for the error. We don't have room to reprint the entire poem, but urge readers to reread it in #33 with this correction. The last four lines of the fourth stanza should read:

Tenderness in us is more than a word.
But the word that would heal? Is it
In us? Can we speak it? The word they
Cannot hear, is it a word we can spare?

Reviews

Magic Mommas, Trembling Sisters, Puritans and Perverts by Joanna Russ (The Crossing Press, 1985, \$6.95)

No one is better qualified to write about X-rated writing than Joanna Russ. Her half-page Lesbian sex scene in *The Female Man* remains an unequalled miracle of construction. Her one-sentence sex scene in "When It Changed" introduced at least one writer to a whole new way of and reason for writing erotica. There is no way her speculations on erotica/pornography could be other than fascinating. However, she aims to do more than speculate. This is a book of "feminist essays," attempts at feminist theory. As Russ herself says in the introduction, they are not very successful attempts. Each essay, while full of exciting ideas, is also irritatingly and frustratingly inconclusive.

The six essays, written over several years, diverge from and return to the theme of pornography/erotica/sexual fantasy, its personal meaning, its cultural function. Russ is at her best dissecting the meaning behind various fantasies that turn her (or other womyn) on: this one serves to make a grim situation tolerable by eroticizing it, that one to explore the possibilities of an equal relationship, another to conceptualize Lesbianism for a young girl who has never heard of it. Not only are the conclusions exciting, the process of reaching them is even more so. Russ takes seriously the cliché about the personal being political. She reaches her conclusions by analyzing her own experience, minutely and with a skeptical turn of mind that seeks the contradiction, the hidden clue. This book crystallizes a little of the excitement of consciousness raising. But unlike consciousness raising, none of the analysis leads to any useful conclusion.

Russ states in the introduction that these essays would all benefit from being rewritten in terms of a theoretical framework. At the time she wrote the introduction, she had one, stemming from a definition of exploitation that Marx never bettered: "... that women's resources be available, non-reciprocally and without pay, to men." (It's a quote from *Woman, Church and State* by Matilda Jocelyn Gage, first published 1873.) Developing political theory is always a worthwhile goal. But the area in which Russ concentrates her attention doesn't lend itself easily to political analysis.

The introduction scores a few successes. Using a materialist analysis, it puts the pornography industry squarely in its place in the patriarchal structure: "Men who can't or don't want to buy women's resources

... via marriage or ... prostitution, can nonetheless buy fantasies of having access to women's resources." Russ defines pornography (as "commercial sexual fantasy sold largely to heterosexual men") in a refreshingly verifiable way. She entertainingly and incisively criticizes as pointless any analysis of it that ignores its economic context. Then, when she should give some hint how her economic analyses make her reassess the issues considered in the body of the book, she instead passes off most of the essays as bad theory and drops the subject.

Her only word on how she would rewrite this book is the cryptic formula, "There is no such thing in male-dominated culture as 'acceptable pornography'." What is this supposed to mean? That since pornography (like everything else around and in us) is a product of patriarchal culture, there's no use discussing it? Enjoying it? Creating it? Having put the pornography industry into its rightful, minor slot in a system of economic exploitation, has she lost interest in the various meanings and possibilities that sexual fantasy has to womyn? Does she want to do away with the pornography industry, or is that too small and symbolic a target? Does she include commercial sex-writing by Lesbians for Lesbians in her definition of the pornography industry? Is it now against her politics (feminist for "religion") to write—or read—anything meant to be sexually stimulating? What program does her analysis indicate? Or is her theory only a parlor game after all?

Pursuing these questions, I tried to recast some of the essays in economic terms and found it impossible. The essays are about fantasy, not economics. The (unstated) theory of fantasy that emerges clearly in this book is that it serves different functions in different situations, being either propagandistic in reinforcing the status quo, or creative in undermining it, and possible both at once. The introduction states that the important question about pornography written by and for womyn is whether it reinforces patriarchal ideas. It would have been interesting to read her essay "Pornography by Women for Women" rewritten in terms of this question and the implications of her answer. The essay deals with a (heterosexual female) subculture of Star Trek fandom dedicated to imagining an equal sexual relationship between mutually respecting, powerful people, both male. Does she now think of this as a potentially revolutionary literature? Or does she dismiss it as giving energy to men or a distraction from serious political work?

Applying an economic analysis to the other essays turned out even less fruitful. This leads to several possible conclusions: (#1) That pornography/erotica isn't the central issue that the anti-porn movement makes it out to be; (#2) That a good definition of exploitation, including sexual exploitation, doesn't lead to a good theory of female or Lesbian

sexuality. (That is, you can know a lot about exploitation and nothing about what it is that's being exploited); (#3) That in the lack of a good theory explaining the what, the why, and the how of female sexuality, arguments about what is or isn't "good," "natural," "normal," "healthy," and the like are ungrounded and meaningless; (#4) That for these essays to work as theory, they would have to be rewritten in terms of a framework that relates fantasy to economics—and someone would have to create that framework; (#5) That a book of essays about what sorts of X-rated entertainment different womyn like could attempt to develop a theory not of exploitation but of female sexuality. Consciousness raising really was the right approach to the subject. Conclusions would have to be highly tentative, but that would improve on this book's lack of conclusions.

Whatever their faults, the essays are worth reading. Each contains some gems of thoughts on the Women's Liberation Movement devolving into the womyn's community. Anyone who lived through it felt the loss of hope, the turning inward, as a movement to change the world became a minority dedicated to its own survival. Russ describes the way criticism serves a different function in a closed club than in a political movement. The theory of a movement is a guide to action and criticism is a way to improve both. In a refuge criticism changes from a tool to a sin. How dare we (however defined) make each other uncomfortable in the only place we have? "The personal is political" ceases to be a basis for analysis and turns into an excuse for arbitrary standards disguised as political acts. "Can a feminist like the Rolling Stones?" "Can a feminist wear high heels?" "Can a feminist be a prostitute?" "Can a feminist be into S/M?"

No one would ask such ridiculous questions if there were an effective feminist movement. "The personal is political" would mean, as it originally did, that individual lives can be examined for clues to social power dynamics. A womyn would be judged as a feminist according to how much she is involved in group action for group power.

An interesting question Russ doesn't address, since she doesn't write as a Lesbian in this book, is how much Lesbian feminism confused at least one generation of Lesbians as to what defines a Lesbian, or what defines Lesbian solidarity. Another is to what extent straight feminists, devolving from a movement into a lifestyle, adopted or failed to adopt Lesbian ways of recognizing and dealing with each other. Another is to what extent various womyn assumed Lesbianism and feminism to be the same thing, and the consequences of that for both. A Lesbian perspective would greatly enrich any book about the collapse of the women's movement, which this book, perhaps unintentionally, is.

The essay "Power and Helplessness in the Women's Movement" deals most explicitly with this depressing reality, but the reality permeates the book, and may in fact explain the curious lack of conclusion. How can anyone write theory for a nonexistent movement? Whose actions would one write to guide? No theoretical framework could have saved Joanna Russ from living through the collapse of a dream. The essays could be read as attempts to write something that would hold it all together and give it direction. The introduction's calling them bad theory could mean that they didn't analyze far enough, deep enough, wide enough, to keep the movement from becoming a lifestyle. But no essay on any subject could have done that. These are still entertaining and thought-provoking, and may inspire others to continue the many tasks Joanna Russ started in them.

—Rebecca Ripley

Dreams of the Woman Who Loved Sex by Tee Corinne (Banned Books, P.O. Box 33280, Austin, Texas, 78764, 1987, \$7.95)

Yes. Yes, that's the way it is. The first tickle of want, the inexorable rise of desire, the rise of new awareness in every cell—fingers, tongue, labia, clitoris, fingers and toes, the roots of the hair. That's the way it is, really good sex with women; and now Tee has re-made it for us with words, as over the last years she has made it with graphics and film and photographs.

This is love she writes about, no relation to the slick male-made concepts of *Penthouse* and *Cosmo*, or the smug self-justifying of the pious. There is no limit on the number of women a woman can love, and every one different, a universe in herself. Love invents love, like the widening circles of orgasm. A woman fulfilled in good sex finds herself becoming all-encompassing. Her own juices and smells are wonderful—and so is the taste of food, springing grass, sunrise and the way words look on paper.

This is a book for sharing. The young coming into their inheritance as woman-loving women can learn from it; the old find their memories springing alive as they read. Goddess knows we need it.

The daughters of the Goddess live through three stages, as she does. We met Tee as Maiden, waking to joy. Now she is coming into full bloom as Mother, teaching us what we need to know. I'd like to be around in forty years' time when her work reaches its full splendor—what a Crone she will make!

—Valerie Taylor

Wingwomen of Hera (Book One of the *Cosmic Botanists Trilogy*)
by Sandi Hall (Spinsters/aunt lute, 1987, \$8.95)

I'm not a science fiction reader by nature. In fact, before I read *Wingwomen of Hera* my past experience of off-planet fiction was a couple of Ray Bradbury short stories. I expected sci-fi to be hard to read, full of technological terminology and emotionless characters. *Wingwomen of Hera* proved all my assumptions wrong.

Hall's first book of the *Cosmic Botanists Trilogy* is a compelling story of life on two planets, Hera and Maladar. The planets were split apart by the tail of a mighty comet, and developed very different civilizations.

On Hera, lush and beautiful, live the *Wingwomen* and the *Finners* (a water species). This community of space explorers and botanists live together in peaceful, creative harmony. Decisions are made by the elders while each inhabitant is left to decide her own path of creativity and lifestyle. Both the *Wingwomen* and *Finners* reproduce parthenogenetically, no males being needed on Hera. As the book begins, Hera's elders are besieged by a deadly disease of unknown origin and the women are intent on finding its cure (this echo of AIDS is an interesting dash of reality).

In counterpoint, nearby Maladar is covered with deadly ice and its inhabitants must live in carefully guarded underground shelters. The lives of the *Maladarans* are strictly monitored by chosen "Thinkers." The caste system, reproduction and day to day life are directed by the Machine. On this planet the story revolves around the charming, sympathetic character of Naj, who has been chosen to bear the *Newchild* of Maladar, a future *Guider* of the planet. She has a daughter and the problems this creates (the *Newchild* had always been male) carry the plot through the social structure of the ice-bound planet and eventually cause a meeting between the peoples of the two planets.

The novel crisscrosses chapters about Hera and Maladar, and both threads weave together to create a marvelously fast paced work. Hall's language, precise and clear, creates specific pictures of life on the two planets without the need of a cumbersome glossary.

Hall has written for a variety of media, for the stage, television and magazine industries, and has published *The Godmothers*, a future fiction novel put out by the Women's Press in England. But science fiction is her medium, she says. "I started writing in science fiction because I found it gave me freedom to move. I felt a great deal of fiction about life as we know it is really depressing and I didn't want to add to that. I wanted to create fiction that is exciting, and woman-focused, and to look at life with

vision. For women, science fiction is a perfect medium because you can break all the rules and show why the structure of our society as it is today is silly. You can dare to be visionary, show new ways of being, and create hopeful societies."

Hall's novel is rooted in scientific fact. This sets her writing apart from future fantasy and makes it widely accessible. Speckled throughout her book are various guideposts for living. The strict laws that rule Maladar seem oppressive to us today, but parallel the law we live under now. And the harmonious rules for living to which the Herans subscribe give insight to our own lives. Far from being a book which only talked about peoples and places I could never imagine, I found myself examining my own social structure, society and way of life. I await *The Newchild of Maladar*, the next book of the trilogy, with anticipation.

—Louise Rafkin

Books Received

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

A Restricted Country, prose and essays on lesbian life from the 50's to the present, a wonderful, radical collection by Joan Nestle which every dyke owes herself the favor of reading, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

The Monarchs Are Flying, a lesbian murder mystery by Canadian Marion Foster, \$8.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

Politics of the Heart, A Lesbian Parenting Anthology, ed. by Sandra Pollack and Jeanne Vaughn, \$11.95, Firebrand Books.

Words to the Wise, a writer's guide to feminist and lesbian periodicals & publishing, by Andrea Fleck Clardy, \$3.95, Firebrand Books.

Making It, A Woman's Guide to Sex in the Age of Aids, by Cindy Patton and Janis Kelly, Spanish translation by Papusa Molina, \$3.95, Firebrand.

Compañeras: Latina Lesbians, a bi-lingual anthology, ed. by Juanita Ramos, \$8, Latina Women's Ed. Resources, PO Box 627 Stuyvesant Sta., NYC NY 10009.

Two Willow Chairs, well-wrought lesbian short stories by Jess Wells, \$8.95, Library B Books, 584 Castro #224, SF, CA 94114.

The Dress/The Sharda Stories, Jess Wells' earlier short stories in a new, combined edition, \$7.95, Library B Books.

Past, Present & Future Passions: Poems by Barbara Ruth, from a multi-cultural lesbian perspective, \$8, W.A.T.R., 5825 Telegraph #90, Oakland, CA, 94609, to be sold and shared with women only.

- Abenaki Ghosts*, Native-American poetry by Cathy Czapla, \$1.50, chapbook from *The Blue Cloud Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 4, PO Box 98, Marvin, SD 57251.
- Ultimate Conspiracy*, lesbian-feminist poetry by Jacqueline Lapidus, Lynx Publications, \$7.95, PO Box 902, Provincetown, MA 02657.
- Lesbian Passion: Loving Ourselves and Each Other*, essays by JoAnn Loulan, \$10.95, Spinsters/aunt lute Book Company, P.O. Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.
- Child of Her People*, a Western with the Indians as heroes by Anne Cameron (author of *Daughters of Copper Woman*), \$8.95, Spinsters/aunt lute.
- Tight Spaces*, a weave of short prose pieces by Black writers Kesho Scott, Cherry Muhanji and Egyirba High, \$8.95, Spinsters/aunt lute.
- Rivers Running Free: Stories of Adventurous Women, from 1900 to present*, ed. Judith Niemi & Barbara Wieser, \$12.50, dist. by Spinsters/aunt lute.
- Making A Way: Lesbians Out Front*, over 100 beautiful photographs of lesbians by JEB (Joan E. Biren), \$11.95, dist. by Spinsters/aunt lute.
- A Lesbian Photo Album: The Lives of Seven Lesbian Feminists*, by Cathy Cade, \$14.95, Waterwomen Books 3022 Ashbrook Ct., Oakland, Ca 94601.
- Love Me Like You Mean It*, lesbian-feminist poetry by Lesléa Newman, \$6, HerBooks, PO Box 7467 Santa Cruz, CA 95061.
- Love, Politics and "Rescue" In Lesbian Relationships*, an essay by Radical Therapist Diana Rabenold, \$3.50, HerBooks.
- Between the Lines: An Anthology* by Pacific/Asian Lesbians of Santa Cruz, CA, ed. by C. Chung, A. Kim, A.K. Lemesheksy, dis. by HerBooks.
- All Good Women*, a feminist novel set on the home front during WWII by Valerie Miner, \$20.95 (hardcover), Crossing Press, Freedom, CA 95019.
- Gray Magic*, the 3rd Stoner McTavish lesbian mystery, set in the Navajo & Hopi lands, by Sarah Dreher, \$8.95, New Victoria, Box 27, Norwich VT 05055.
- Morgan Calabresé: The Movie*, lesbian and gay cartoon collection by N. Leigh Dunlap, \$5.95, New Victoria Publishers.
- Parents Matter*, relationships with Lesbian Daughters and Gay Sons, by Ann Muller, \$9.95, The Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.
- The Women's Book of Healing*, essays and charts on specific practise, by Diane Stein, \$12.95, Lewellyn Pub., PO Box 64383, St. Paul, MN 55164.
- The House With the Blind Glass Windows*, a feminist novel by award-winning Herbjørg Wassmo, \$9.99, Seal Press, PO Box 13, Seattle, WA 98111.
- Alyson Press (40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118) has reprinted: *The Law of Return*, a novel of an Israeli journey and coming out by Alice Bloch, \$8.95; *Coming to Power: Writings and Graphics on Lesbian S/M* (updated), ed. by Samois, \$8.95; *Rocking the Cradle*, Lesbian Mothers: A Challenge in Family Living, by Gillian E. Hanscombe and Jackie Forster, \$6.95.
- Lesbian Philosophy: Explorations*, radical essays towards the development of lesbian consciousness by Jeffner Allen, \$9.95, Institute of Lesbian Studies, P.O. Box 60242, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

Contributors' Notes

Donna Allegra: Writing is my basic path in life with dance running a close second, but I need it all, even my job as an electrician with those fucked-up stupid asshole males. All that I do makes for my life's lessons and human nurture. I've been in the Jemima, Naps and Gap Tooth Girlfriends writing groups. I live in New York City.

Tara Danaan, Hypnotherapist From Hell, lives in Seattle. Her stories, poems and reviews appear now and then, here and there. She's currently working on a novel, *Coffee, Death and the Immortal Cinnamon Roll*, and is co-author of a guide to meditative self-transformation called *Personal Revolutions*.

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

Cheryl Elaine Davis is a teacher who most loves teach students how read literature, and a poet who's "I Can Still Hear My Grandmother's Visions" won the Eliza R. Snow Poetry contest. She recently resettled in Chicago claiming her life desire as a womyn and a writer. She just finished a novel, *Dreamtakers*, that chronicles the healing path of an adult incest survivor and the difficulties of getting well in the patriarchal context of the Mormon church and the male psychiatric system.

Laura Hershey's poems and articles have appeared in *Plainswoman*, *Arvada Center* magazine, the *Rocky Mountain News*, *Accent on Living*, and *Voice of Independence*. She has traveled in England and Kenya, writing on the impact of disability in different cultures. She lives in Denver, where she is an active advocate around the issues of home health care, access to transportation, and violence against women.

Sarah Lucia Hoagland is a Chicago separatist and radical lesbian. In addition to co-editing *For Lesbians Only*, she has completed a manuscript entitled *Lesbian Ethics: Towards New Value* which is *not* a rule-book of right behavior, but a challenge to our use of patriarchal ethics together with suggestions for new value. *Lesbian Ethics* will be published by the Institute of Lesbian Studies and is due to be released on Halloween.

Jano is an union organizer, writer and graphic artist. She lives in Oakland with her son Jonah.

Judith Katz was born in Worcester, Mass. in 1951. Her plays have been produced by the Washington Area Feminist Theatre, the Omaha Magic Theatre, Chrysalis Theatre Eclectic, and At the Foot of the Mountain. She was also part of the team that wrote *Toklas, MN.*, a lesbian soap opera. Her fiction appears in *The Coming Out Stories*, *Sinister Wisdom 19*, *Fight*

Back! Feminist Resistance to Male Violence, and *The Evergreen Chronicles*. "The Amazing Disappearing Girl" is an excerpt from her novel-in-progress.

Amy Klitsner is a Jewish lesbian who lives in SF, CA. She says that friends who are brave enough call her "Amy Klit" or "Klit" for short. She enjoys black light photography and does theatre production for a living.

Anna Livia is 31, a lesbian radical feminist, lives in London, is a member of the Onlywomen Press Collective and co-editor of GOSSIP, a journal of lesbian feminist ethics. She is the author of RELATIVELY NORMA, ACCOMMODATION OFFERED and INCIDENTS INVOLVING WARMTH. She is finding it harder and harder to write the end of BULL-DOZER RISING as happy endings get scarcer and scarcer.

Vivienne Louise is an African-American lesbian separatist who has resided in Oakland since 1978. She is originally from Washington, D.C., and is forever grateful for her move to sunny California.

Jasmine Marah, enigmatic, eclectic eccentric.

Christian McEwen: Born London, 1956. Live in the Lower East Side of New York and commute daily to Coney Island where I work in Adult Literacy. Read and write letters on the subway, type poems in the lunch-hour, and spend most evenings and weekends juggling Virago business (I've been editing two lesbian anthologies, including *Naming the Waves*, an anthology of contemporary lesbian poetry, which appears in March 1988) with my ongoing projects: essays, poems, the occasional review, and one day, I hope, a novel.

Bernice Mennis: I live in the Southern Adirondacks building a home and sharing land with close women friends. I teach in the prisons and for Vermont College's Advanced Degree Program.

Nicky Morris teaches Feminist Studies, Writing and Literature at Goddard College. She lives in the country and dreams of traveling.

Sawnie Morris lives in an old (as in centuries), slightly renovated, adobe barn outside of Taos, New Mexico, where she chops wood, hauls water, and writes poetry and fiction. She job-shares the directorship of Taos Arts Celebrations, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Taos Battered Women's Project. She also participates in a thirteen member, lesbian, eclectic ritual and meditation group in its third year of weekly gatherings.

Marjory Nelson is a fat 59-year old lesbian writer and hypnotherapist who lives in S.F. This piece is from a book in process, *Dora's Aura*.

Beth Povinelli is a graduate student in anthropology at Yale. She is one of the founders of The Lesbian and Gay Studies Center at Yale and has written several articles on some cross-cultural comparisons between Australian aboriginal and Lesbian separatism.

Louise Rafkin is an Oakland writer currently editing *Unholy Alliances*, a collection of short fiction by women to be published by Cleis Press in 1988, and edited *Different Daughters: A Book by Mothers of Lesbians*, also from Cleis.

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

Drashan Redack is a writer, composer, graphic artist and videot; politically left with metaphysical interests. She sees the need for a major facility which can promote and support the work of unknown community artists. She lives and works in S.F., professionally in the field of electronics.

Catalina Ríos lives and writes in Philadelphia.

Rebecca Ripley is one of her own minor characters.

Martha R. Serpas is a recent transplant from southeastern Louisiana to Manhattan, where she is beginning graduate study as a fellow at NYU.

Sheila Ortiz Taylor has written two novels, *Faultline* (1982) and *Spring Foreward/Fall Back* (1985), both published by Naiad Press. A native Californian, she now lives in the part of Florida that is most like Georgia and is writing poetry and a sequel to *Faultline*.

Valerie Taylor: I am 74, still reading and writing with the aid of plastic eyes (implanted lenses), a peacenik, gay activist for many years, 11 novels published, half a book of verse (the other half is Jeannette Foster's), many poems in magazines, help with Sanctuary in small ways. Naiad has just taken a book of mine called *Rice and Beans*, which is about living and loving within the welfare system in Tucson.

Michelle D. Williams: I'm a feminist/socialist, dealing with the contradictions of being the mother of a son; a life-long story teller, recently "come-out" as a science fiction fan; and I collect tattoos (on my body).

zana: 40, disabled jewish separatist, in my seventh year on lesbian land. my dreams are strong and i look to realize them through replacing my patriarchal conditioning with womon-values, bit by bit. *herb womon*, a collection of my poetry and art, is available for \$7 from me at 12150 w. calle seneca, tucson, az 85743.

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/artists' guidelines and subscription information to: Rose Romano, P.O. Box 411223, SF, CA 94141-1223.

Jewish Lesbian Daughters of Holocaust Survivors meet for support & networking semi-annually. Write or call PO Box 6194, Boston, MA 02114, (617) 321-4252 for information, as well as info on a partners group, for lesbians who are in relationships with JLDHS.

Cleis Press is seeking submissions for an **anthology of personal writings by progressive women journalists**, in both mainstream and alternative media. Send mss. or queries to Elayne Rapping and Felice Newman, c/o Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221, no later than April 1, 1988.

Finding The Lesbians—an anthology on the subject of how Lesbians find each other in a society that wants us to believe we don't exist, that each of us is "the only one." Send mss. to: Julia Penelope and Sarah Valentine, POB 606, Westford, MA 01886, with SASE. Deadline: July 1, 1988.

The *Gallerie Annual* is a new women's publication devoted to women's art and women artists. First issue: June, 1988. For more information, or to submit work for the 1989 issue, write: Gallerie Publications, 2901 Panorama Drive, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7G 2A4.

Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies, aims to bridge the gap between university and community women. They are looking for papers on **Women and Worth**, covering all aspects of women's economic activities, paid and unpaid. Send 2 copies to Frontiers, Women's Studies Program CB 325, Univ. of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309. Deadline: March 15, 1988.

WIM Publications, woman- and Black-owned small press, is expanding its product lines to further honor its commitment to poets. Publishing women, African-Americans, lesbian and gay writers, WIM welcomes manuscripts April-Aug. Send SASE (39¢ stamp) for more information and free catalogue to SDiane Bogus, WIM, 2215-R Market Dept PCP, SF, CA 94114.

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) 1988 Annual Conference: Leadership and Power: Women's Alliance for Social Change, Minneapolis, MN, June 22-26. For information and registration: NWSA, Univ. of Minn, 217 Nolte Center, 315 Pillsbury Dr. S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55455

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: 4060, boul. St-Laurent, Suite 204, Montréal, Québec, Canada, H2W 1Y9.

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Mount Holyoke College Lesbian Alumnae Network! Send long SASE, ideas do D. Albino, 32 Elm Street, Cambridge, MA 02139

Mountain Mama Packing & Riding Co. Horse & burrow pack trips into the spectacular mountains of N.M. Group & individual trips. For information, write Harpy, Rt. 1 Box 23, Chimayo, NM 87522 (505) 351-4047.

Women Make Movies announces its 15th Anniversary catalogue, with more than 100 titles. Exciting new additions include Michelle Parkerson's "Storme: The Lady of the Jewel Box," Sue Friedrich's "Damned if You Don't," and a series of films by Latinas, "Punto de Vista: Latina." Write: WMM, 225 Lafayette St., Suite 211, NYC, NY 10012.

Two in Twenty is a five-episode video soap opera by and for the lesbian community. Closed captioned for the hearing impaired. To organize screenings, or for more information: *Two in Twenty*, PO Box 105, Somerville, MA 02144.

Canadian Women's Directory, bi-lingual (French & English) directory of nearly 2,000 names, addresses and numbers of women's groups and associations. Order from Les Éditions Communiqu'Elles, 3585 St. Urbain, Montréal, Québec, Canada H2X 2N6, \$8.95.

The Elizabeth Stone House is a feminist alternative to traditional mental health services, serving women in emotional distress and their children. They are in need of funding to support the new Transitional Housing Program which will serve up to 50 women and children. All Elizabeth Stone House programs are self-help. To make donations, or for more information: PO Box 15, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Flight of the Mind announces its fifth annual summer writing workshop for women, July 24th-31st. \$420, three scholarships available. Send SASE for brochure to: 622 SE 28th, Portland, OR 97214.

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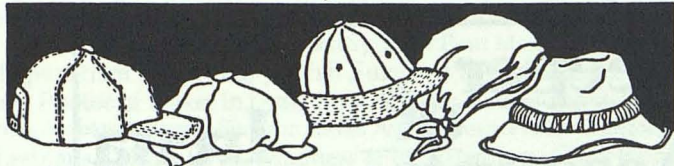
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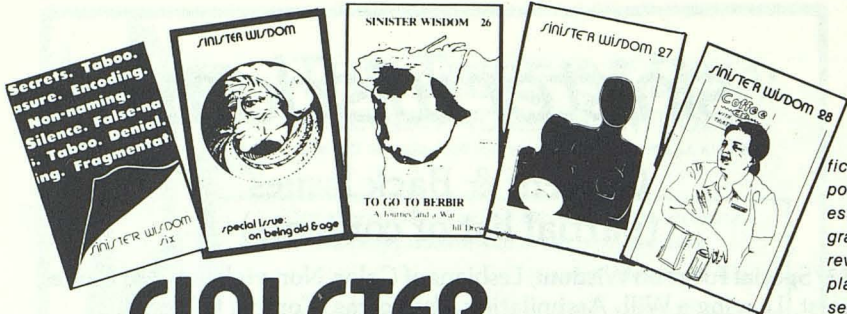
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