

sinister wisdom 38



With an emphasis on
Lesbian Relationships



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Did you say love?*

The emphasis of this “open” issue is on relationships and personal writing (personal as opposed to expository or theoretical). The work we’ve included covers a wide range of relationships — lover (at various stages), political, friendship, familial, adversarial, social. We’re a couple weeks late getting to you because I fell in love, and it always takes time to get up again and incorporate new love into daily life. But since I’m inclined to give “falling in love” as a reason why it was hard to sit at my computer and edit; and since the issue is about relationships, it seems an appropriate moment to talk about love.

My friends ask me if I still believe what I wrote in the introduction to issue #36, “that womyn will never begin to be free until we give up on romantic love ...” Absolutely. By romantic love I meant then, as now, the belief — wish — obsession — that individual love will save us or cure us, will give us a central purpose around which to build our lives. The fear that as one we are almost invisible, powerless, particularly as womyn, but as two, it’s me and you, babe, against the world and we can *do* it. The desire to have a fixed set of rules for how to relate that are covered under “being in love” — rules like: my lover always comes first, I always sit next to my lover, my lover will take care of me if I’m sick, I have a permanent date for Saturday night, my friends will understand if I don’t call them for a month. While sometimes we want, or depend, on those (and other) “certainties,” one of the great things about being a lesbian is that the ambiguous nature of many of our relationships pushes us to keep questioning the rules. We need order and regularity in our lives, and we need constant examination as well.

I know we’ve all been brainwashed — it’s on the radio every day, the songs, advertisements, TV shows selling “love.” Of

*This is a line from one of Willie Tyson’s early songs. *Sinister Wisdom* will give a one year subscription to the first reader who sends in the full name of the song, lyrics, album and year the album was released.

course they're selling heterosexual love, and I'm fond of the observation that if it were so natural for women and men to be together it wouldn't need all this hype. But as lesbians, we often take that same hype and rewrite the scripts just enough to accommodate us. We all do it, we have no idea what "love" would look like among lesbians who had never been subject to this coercive mass conditioning.

But we keep trying to imagine — and reinvent it. We all live here, doing the best we can with what we've got. It's not simply that we're all duped. We live with honest conflicts about our priorities, our personal, social and political needs. We struggle with the contradictions between the ways we love and the ways we think we ought to. That's why it's important to talk about it — to do what we have been accused of doing for centuries — gossip. Analyze, discuss, dissect — talk and read about each other's relationships, question each other, demand the best, want the most, not let each other disappear from the interactions which make up lesbian community by virtue of coupling.

We don't need romantic love, love that we can use as an excuse for inertia, love that becomes our entire emotional/intellectual focus. Love that isolates and privatizes experience. But of course we need love — to care and be cared about, to rub and be rubbed, to feel met, challenged and encouraged. Having lovers and intimate pairings is a continual source of learning and wonder. And we also need romance — the sensation that we are on incredible adventures together, a desire for gentle, thoughtful gestures, fresh flowers, poetry, blue herons watching us from the river. Being able to embrace "romance" is opening to the vibrancy of the moment*, feeling a depth of contact that gives us joy in all the small acts that make up our days.

But we tend to romanticize only certain kinds of relationships, primarily sexual. We have little cultural history for other kinds of romance, from the romance of the self (the ability to claim ourselves as the heroes of our lives without needing another woman to validate us), to the romance of working in groups. For instance, I was at a performance of Mothertongue Readers Theater, a

* This phrase is Susanjill Kahn's, whose critical reading and enduring friendship were invaluable in writing these notes.

loosely-knit association of over 90 women who come together in small groups to work on particular scripts. In the discussion, the performers described a “Mothertongue experience,” where after six months of meeting to eat and talk, talk and eat, suddenly womyn will come in with ten new pieces for a script. Clearly the womyn in that group (as in many groups) have a fluid experience of pleasure and creativity within the group process — yet we rarely hold that up as “true love.” I’d like to live in a community where it would be as meaningful to say “I’m in love with my writers group,” “I fell in love with myself this month,” “I’m in love with *Sinister Wisdom*,” “I’m in love with the redwoods,” as it is to say “I fell in love with a womon.”

One-on-one experience is crucial to our sense of self, but it’s not the only place where we form our selves. We don’t need to be paired in order to experience love, share strength and affection with each other. It’s that driven, desperate quest for the “perfect mate” that wastes our energy and minds, makes us overlook or discount the love we get in our friendships, our political and social relations.

We need all possible relationships. Much of who we are is the quality and kind of our interactions. The work in this issue examines a host of intimate questions: what is recognition, what’s honesty, what’s need, what’s compassion, what’s self-reliance, how does the damage done show, how do we work through incest and abuse in intimacies, what’s grief, what’s attraction, what’s sex, when is it lust, whose memory and history do we bring forward, how do we deal with how we look to each other, how do we cope with fear of death, of losing our beloved, how do we maintain our sense of self under threat, how do we grapple with our silences, with rejection, casual connection, what lasts through time, how do we shape each other, affect each other’s mobility, what is the nature of our resilience, how do we find the tools, pass them to each other, with which we will change everything?



We get a lot of responses to SW — many at the bottom of renewal forms (if there’s a renewal form with your issue, please send it back as soon as you can). Several womyn wrote to say that

issue #36 changed or saved their lives. We don't usually print these letters, and often don't have time to respond to them, but they mean a lot to us. We take your feedback and criticism to heart; when you let us know how *Sinister Wisdom* touched you, you become part of the energy that makes the next issue possible. Thanks.

Some dykes have asked why there has been work by straight women in some of the issues. The simplest answer is because they submit it, the editorial group likes it and feels it offers something to lesbians. Since *Sinister Wisdom* is a lesbian space, we want our readers to assume that all work is by lesbians unless otherwise stated, but it's often not until a woman sends us her contributor's note that we know she's not a lesbian. Material by straight women has been included in *Sinister Wisdom* from the first issue when Harriet (Des Moines) Ellenberger wrote "Each woman represented in the magazine is moving outside patriarchal culture. All are boundary dwellers..." We will continue to publish work by non-lesbian women when appropriate to an issue or theme, while we continue to intensify our lesbian focus.

We need more artwork! We know there are lots of lesbian artists out there, and that getting a photo or stat of your work is sometimes difficult. But find a way to send your work in — b&w photos, high-quality xeroxes or stats. Submission guidelines are on the back cover. We welcome any suggestions on incorporating more artwork in *Sinister Wisdom*.

Project in the works: we keep meaning to have a couple pages of photos and bios of the *Sinister Wisdom* workers — the editorial readers, mailing crews, proofreaders, kibitzers. While we're working on it, remember all those dykes on the inside front cover make this possible. It wouldn't happen without them.

Notes on the Themes

#39. An issue on Physical Disability. Work from/about womyn whose lives are seriously disrupted by long-term conditions. Available December, 1989.

#40. **On Friendship.** "Just" friends? "Best" friends? "Old" friends? "Life-long" friends? How *do* we befriend each other? What do we expect from our friendships? What do we put into them? How do we understand the complex differences (and similarities) between friend and lover? What about betrayals? Is friendship part of political movement? Are political movements possible without friendship? What's the difference between a "clique" and a "network?" What kind of friendships do we make across race, class, cultural, ability, size, age differences? How do we sustain and nurture our friendships through time? We could ask these questions for pages — we hope you have some answers. (Deadline: October 15, 1989)

41. **The Italian-American Issue:** *Sinister Wisdom* is currently soliciting manuscripts and artwork from all women of Italian descent, with a strong emphasis on work by Italian-American lesbians. Issue #41 will be guest-edited by Janet Capone and Denise Leto. Some themes will include *La Famiglia*: What does family mean to us? With each generation, how is our culture being maintained or diluted? *Lesbiche Italo-americane*: What does it mean to be an Italian-American lesbian? What factors have contributed to a delayed understanding of our ethnic and cultural identity? *Etnicità*: Do we see ourselves as Italian, American, or Italian-American? What does it mean to be olive-skinned? *La Storia*: What are the historical and economic differences between Northern and Southern Italy? How were the wave of immigrants from the South and Sicily pressured to assimilate once in America? *Stereotipie Culturali*: How has the image of the Italian as criminal or Mafioso influenced actual historical events such as the execution of Sacco and Vanzetti in 1927 and the mass lynching of Italians in New Orleans in 1891? *La Spiritualità*: What is our spirituality? Was it Catholic? What is it now?

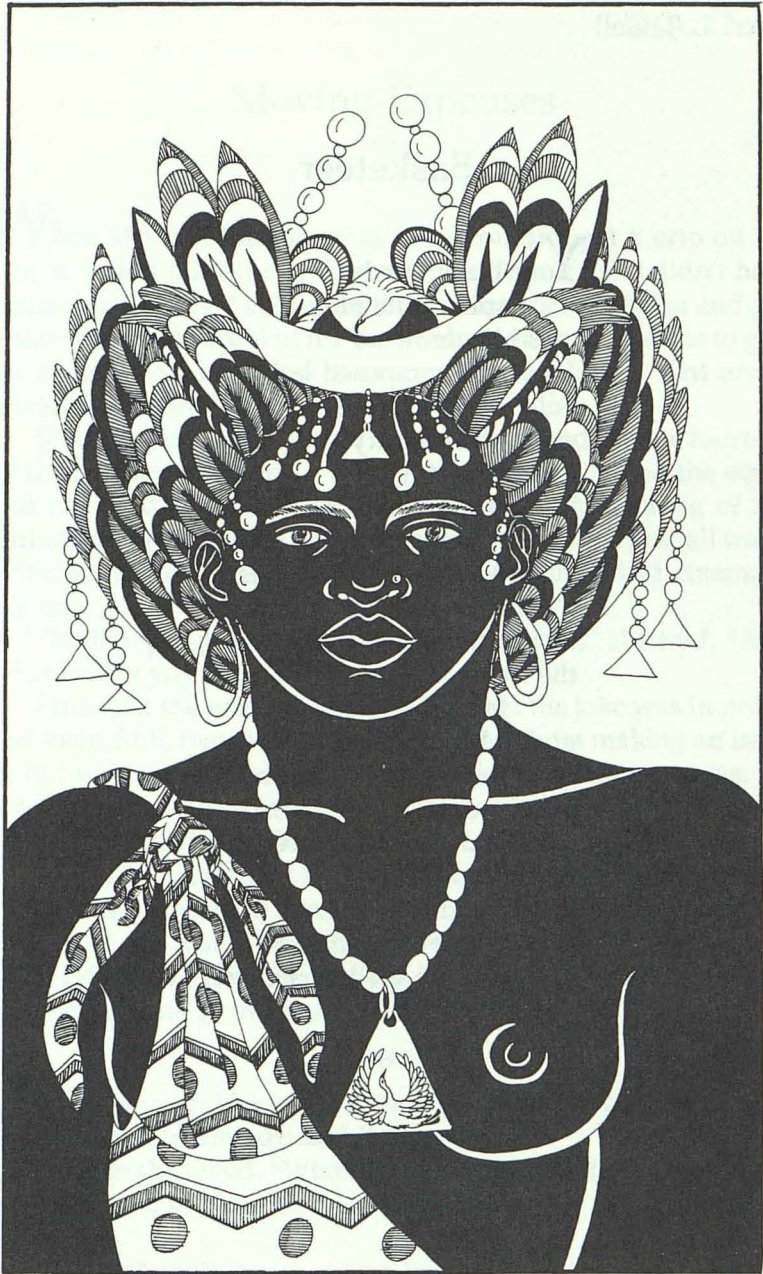
Deadline: February 15, 1990. Send submissions or requests for further information and guidelines with SASE to Janet Capone & Denise Leto, Italian-American issue c/o *Sinister Wisdom*.

Remember to check out the submission guidelines on the inside back cover before sending us your work. Thanks!

Face of Africa

The land spans broad as your nose
its loam soft skin from which sun rises
carrying sweet juice and stroked pulp.
Your earlobes arch into precious ores,
ivory penetrates lips full as blossom trees,
dark eyes gaze wise to the ways of rivers
and your language is open-throated thunder,
promise and cassava root,
sooted pot and aimed assagai.

Your face is woman
is Africa is
half the world is
seed in strong wind.



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Basketeer

Your black hands
split white pine
sass blonde fibers
into composed laths.
Fold one, pull tight,
each splice a ditty
in a banjo chair.
Tuck there, weave fast
the baby's sleep,
her candied inquiries.
Cakewalk over the lattice
unfettered and full of hickory,
the fragrant slats
burned to bend
giving breath to vessels
for eggs and glass beads
spools of blue thread
and dandelion greens,
jars of pinto beans
and thoughts in silence
while ginger-root fingers
cast the spellwork down.

Moving Expenses

When she first told me, you see, I couldn't get a grip on the words; I didn't like them, they sort of rolled off me. I didn't have a comeback ready; I called the three in the corner pocket and put it there. It was a nice shot if-I-do-say-so; it emboldened me to grin up at her: "Ah come off it, you know people like that aren't allowed to retire."

She twinkled at me behind the steel-rims and put the fourteen off the cushion, *in the side*, and left the cue ball behind the eight; and she made it look easy. Then she took a good swig of her Guinness; when it came to looking cool, she had me beat all ways. Principle aside, I had to admit my fruit soda lacked cinematic impact.

"It all depends on who — whom you know," she said. "And what favors you can call in."

I thought she was joking, and I thought the joke was in pretty bad taste. Still, two circumstances kept me from making an issue of it: I was a guest in her house, and she was twice my age. I'd already put my foot in it about the beer besides. I shut up and thought about that eight ball.

It was probably that night that I told Francie about my new friend with the weird fantasy life; no doubt I made a comedy routine of it. I would do a lot to hear her laugh.

If I'd believed it then, you see, I'd have kept my damn mouth shut. And none of this would have happened.



"You never told me about them — about that." That was all I could say; I'd already said it three times.

Francie shrugged. "What the hell could you have done about it? You'd just have eaten your heart out over it to no purpose. I know you."

"But — I don't know — a confrontation — I would've helped . . ." Offering my pitiful resources. How could I compete?

This was a new Francie; under the dark tangles of her hair her eyes were flat and distant. "Confront? I didn't want to confront the fuckers. I wanted them dead."



She was trying to quit, and the smoke made me asthmatic and irritable; but where else can a dyke play pool? I never had quarters for the laundry in those days, they all went for the table. I'd get in early, right after dinner, and clean the table off once or twice to warm up. Then it was me against the world until closing.

I never held the table long: there are some sharp players in town. But I came back with my quarters again and again, and you know every game you lose teaches you twice as much as the one you win.

It was sometime in December that she first showed up, and I figured her for a school-teacher. She had that air of authority, and that peculiar anonymity of middle-aged school-teachers. She had the navy polyester pantsuit, the sensible shoes, the tightly-permed gray hair, the whole well-groomed undecorated respectability of your fourth-grade homeroom teacher. (Well, my fifth actually, old Miss Adams, the one we used to call 'Matron' behind her back. But anyway.) When she came up to the table I expected her to tell me to take that gum out.

She put down her quarter and proceeded to blow me away. I think I got in one shot before she ran the table, whistling between her teeth. I spent the rest of the night trying to restore my wounded pride; and the Wednesday night after that, and the Saturday after that. It was February that she gave me a ride home; it was a tan Volvo station wagon, what else? I raved about bars, smoke, and demon drink.

In late April she was regularly dropping me off at home, long after I had the bike going again. I got in the habit of taking the bus downtown. In May, I guess it was, she told me she'd bought a pool table.



She was — pleasant. Relaxing. She made no demands and burdened you with no intimacies; her conversation was sparse and humorous, impersonal. I thought of her as 'my buddy that

plays pool,' and all my friends at Our Place called her 'that old schoolteacher.' I got to like her in the way I do tend to like older people, with an aspiring friendliness. I get tired of my own generation; I don't think much of our manners, what can I say? It's nice to be polite to someone and be called 'kid' now and then.

I was beginning to wonder about that old Miss Adams too. Did *she* shoot pool like a pro in some hole-and-corner sleaze-joint that my parents had never (thank god) seen or imagined? Did she drive with that subtle flashiness that marks the recovered road-racer (I should know)? Did old Miss Adams, debonair in burgundy knit, say "Allow me young lady" as she gave her chair to a nineteen-year-old femme on a crowded night? Did old Miss Adams twinkle? I don't recall.

Funny, how an old schoolteacher in navy polyester turns into an older butch that you admire. I talked a lot on those drives home. Now and then she would say, "Sleepy?", and (was I going to say yes? are you kidding?) off we would go for a spin in the foothills. I would roll the window down and hang my head out, watching the treetops stencil themselves crazily against the dusty sky. She never seemed to ask a lot of questions, but I did end up talking.

The anonymity, the pleasantness, the way I talked a lot; professional assets I guess.



I had my head out the window, blowing the smoke out of my hair. "Fresh air?" she said, and I groaned.

"I don't see why women put up with the —"

"To be together," she said quietly, stopping my nineteenth why-are-there-bars lament. She took the next hairpin viciously, which was uncharacteristic; except for that little touch of flash she was usually steady as a bus driver. She handled the car and the road with that detached, trancelike concentration that you see in professional drivers — well, there it is again.

Professional.

I coughed and let a mile go by. "Being together is hardly worth getting lung cancer."

"That's all *you* know, young lady." *Young lady* was a deliberate cut; when she liked me I was just 'kid.'

I let another mile go by, thinking about *The Well of Loneliness* and tragic lives lived in fear and deceit and all like that. I just about had her cast as the hero of a melodrama when she said, "It's the damn noise I can't stand. Can't hear yourself think, let alone carry on a conversation. What's the point?" We were heading back to town.

"Tell you what, kid," she said as she pulled into my driveway, "I'll get my own table and we'll play in peace and quiet."

"Yeah right," I said. "and when I get a limousine I'll pay you back for all these rides."

You see? I always thought she was joking.



"So if you don't like being stared at," she said, "why the crewcut?" She waved her beer in my general direction. "Look at you. And you complain that they stare at you."

I was stung past politeness for once. "Well, it beats being a closet case," I muttered, à la sulky adolescent. Then I laid down my cue and faced her. "It beats playing along with the boys. For every woman who passes for straight, it's harder for the rest of us. Every woman who plays by the rules just strengthens the patriarchal —"

"Oh can it," she snapped; no twinkle, just blue coldness behind the big lenses. "I've done more damage to your old patriarchy in my time — in these clothes or others just like 'em — than you'll do if you live to be a hundred."

I stared. "Damage?" I said slowly. "What do you call damage?"

She set down her beer thoughtfully. "Killing men," she said. "I call that damage. Call your shot already."



"Don't get me wrong, kid," she said one evening. I had helped her with the yardwork all day: oh yes, you got it, proud to fetch and carry and grunt and show off those muscles. She was easy to work with, easy to work for.

"Don't get me wrong," she said, resting her elbows on the yellow formica tabletop. There was a smudge of dirt across her forehead, rubbed into the wrinkles. "Don't get me wrong. I think

it's a fine thing you're doing, the visibility, being right out there — I think it takes courage. I like your courage, kid."

It was, perhaps, just the sad sweet fatigue of a late summer evening after hard work. Or perhaps the natural dramatic instinct of my youth. But I felt tragedy under her matter-of-factness. Being me, I started loving her then.

Now you're going to get all confused and think I mean I had a crush on her or wanted to be her lover. I know my 'friends' were on my case whenever they remembered: "I hear she drives you home after the bar, JJ." "You mean JJ lets someone else drive?" "Whooee, JJ, must be *some* schoolteacher!" "Turning over a new leaf, JJ?" "Getting into older gals?" It gets old fast, and it's hardly to the point.

The point is romantic love, all right, but it's that other kind, the kind I had for rock stars and Captain Kirk and D'Artagnan. It's hero-worship I guess, but that's going to confuse you again; I didn't even approve of her. It's that sharp hurtful liking for someone you're never going to know. It's that so-tenuous friendship with someone who has secrets and sorrows, and all of them right outside your whole domain and understanding. It's when you always go away sad, because you're liking her and you can't give her anything and you know you can't get close to her; it's the love for someone who's always going to be a step beyond you. For a teacher.

When someone like that says she likes your courage, you go home happy for a change.



"Killing men," I said, leaning on my cue. I was stalling, the way you do when the lady on the bus bench starts telling you about her private conversations with Jesus. "With the Women's Army, I suppose." But I guess she hadn't seen that movie.

"No," she said calmly. "With the Company. The CIA. But I'm retired now. Call your shot, kid."



"Maybe it's true," said Francie.

"Oh come on, they look into your past with a microscope. And I *know* she's been queer forever."

"So?"

"So she'd never have passed the first security check. And if she managed that, how long would she have lasted?"

"So how do you keep *your* job, honey? Do the men there *like* lesbians?" She made a disgust-mouth at my blank look.

"We don't have clearances. And besides, I'm good, so they just have to put up with it."

"Right," said Francie softly. She rolled out of my arms and looked out the window for a while.

"You know what they say: all you have to do is be twice as good as a man and you can get the job despite being a mere woman."

"Yeah," she said to the window. "And if you're twice as good again, you can come to work with a crewcut." She watched the guy across the street take four tries to parallel-park his VW van; that's all the excitement you get in my neighborhood on a Friday night. "So you see," she said in that contented I-win voice.

"See what?" I watched the orange streetlight on her profile.

"She really could be one — an agent. All she has to be is four times better than the equivalent male — "

I sighed, or huffed rather, in exasperation.

"— which, if *you* are any indication, might be real common."

She rolled back next to me before I realized it was a compliment; I was frowning into her flirting face, and she sighed (Francie never huffed). "You are really slow sometimes, JJ. *Really* slow."

It's true. I was.



"She's got a *pool table* at her house?"

Why did I have to mention it?

"Now wait a minute, you have to have a whole room —"

"It's a big house," I said.

"Must be nice to have rich friends," said Jade, with the audible footnote that she herself would never dream of extending the hand of friendship to anyone polluted by Money. See, Jade's folks were rolling in it, but when they found out about her, she was out on the street just like that. So she has her opinions about rich people; and the bitterness of knowing she'll never again be one, that too.

Sandy just looked at me, puzzled. "She has a whole room just for a pool table?"

"Hey, get her to ask us all over!" But nobody laughed.

So we had one of those hurtful discussions, that no one really seems to want but that no one seems to be able to stop. Shouldn't we be glad a dyke has some money? Not if she only spends it on spiffy upholstery for her closet. Wouldn't you rather a woman had it? Well, it all comes from men in the end. And so on.

"You don't buy a house like that on a teacher's savings, not unless she was married she couldn't, and —"

"She's never been married," I said quickly.

"— then it's probably inheritance, or a lucky investment," said Jill — tidying it up.

"South African gold?" said Jade, deliberately mean. "B of A gilt-edged securities? Stock in GE and IBM?" *Playing pool over the bodies of South African children*, said her sideways look. She's never liked me.

"Folks, we have a newsletter to put out," said Mary. "All this is interesting gossip for sure, but it isn't getting the pages together." And as we collated and stapled and yelped over what we missed in the proofreading session, I wondered. It hadn't occurred to me before, to wonder how she bought that house.

"How do we know she's a schoolteacher?" said Sandy doggedly (Jill sighed), "did she ever say she was?" I looked blank.

"We don't," said Jade, struck by a new idea. "For all you know she's a retired executive from the board of Bell Tel. Or Bechtel."

There was a chill in the room.



"I only killed men." she said softly.

I should have left half an hour ago, but I saw the newspaper on the table and got to telling her about Maria Gorton. You remember (I hope); she shot her husband after twenty-five years of abuse, and the trial was hot news for a week or two.

"So we took up a collection for her legal expenses," I said. After I went through the whole court case, I found myself thumping on the table and running on about men and the things they get away with. "If they convict her, we'll picket the damn courthouse all summer!"

By “we,” of course, I didn’t mean the crowd I hung out with at Our Place, nor yet the “we” that I worked with forty hours a week, but that other “we” of the interminable meetings.

“Sometimes,” I said, “I think we should just kill them all.” Meaning which *we*, I wonder.

She lined the third bottle up with the first two, carefully, and shrugged. That’s when she said it. “I never took a job on a woman. I only killed men.”

She’s serious, I thought. Now I’m sure. She may be crazy, but she’s not kidding. “You can’t expect me to believe that!” I said suddenly. The silent spacious house, the lateness, it was getting to me. “You’re not the kind of person who would take money to kill people.”

“Men,” she corrected me gently. “Men.”



“Why don’t you just believe her?” Francie, sprawled on her ratty black couch in a patch of evening sun: all gold, brown, warm white shirt, wild dark hair, stunning. Sometimes I have a hard time turning my eyes off so my ears will work.

“It’s too bizarre,” I began. She waved a hand at me.

“JJ, your dad was a boring engineer and your mom stayed home and did the dishes; and your brother gave up the literary career after one hungry summer, and now he’s in real estate —”

“And I’m a boring engineer too, why don’t you finish off the family?” I knew it sounded stupid, but I was hurt.

“No, wait. You’re all nice people, sure, but JJ — if you weren’t a dyke, if you weren’t a girl in the boys’ club, you’d be so ordinary you’d hardly leave a dent, you know?”

“I’m not getting it,” I said stubbornly. *And I’m not sure I want to.*

“Take Sandy now, her dad was a stunt pilot. Right? Jade’s mom owns six houses and wears diamonds every damn day of her life, right? JoAnn’s mom trains riding horses for a living. Your buddy Jackie, her roommate what’s-her-face turned out to be running cocaine. And remember that guy you found on the porch one morning, that had his bike stolen and got beat up by a gang. What I’m saying, JJ, the world isn’t just made of nine-to-five and dinner at six.” She looked at me meaningfully, and I considered

my toes. "And that's just people you personally happen to know. I mean, what's bizarre? Owning six houses without ever working a stroke? Flying loop-de-loops for fun and profit? Working for the CIA?"

"I don't want to believe it," I said, and sat down on the floor. All I did was make a joke, and look where it got me. I didn't want to argue; I wanted a hug and to hear her laugh. "I don't want to think that she worked for the enemy."

"The enemy." Francie pulled my hair gently. "Who pays you, sweet thing?"

"Well, yeah, but —"

"Well yeah, but, your boss pays you, and his company is a 'wholly owned subsidiary of' International Something or Other, and hell, who pays them? And besides, how much do you know about your boss? Did he rape his kid sister? Does he beat his girlfriend? Are you working for the enemy, JJ?"

"You're a Jesuit," I protested. "It's different, there's degrees of compromise. You don't have to deliberately be the agent of the police state."

She had been idly fooling with my hair; now she took her hand away. "I get so damn tired of your rhetoric, JJ." This very quietly. It was one of those bad moments; you feel the warmth drain out of the room, and the words hang there like neon. She sighed. "Let's say you design a — I don't know — a —"

"An improved gate array," I suggested.

"And it gets used in a — a disk controller or something. And then someone buys that card and uses it in —"

"Yeah, OK, they build a disk, and another OEM picks it up and makes it Tempest and mil-spec, and they put in a bid and get a DOD contract, and the disk assembly goes into a guidance subsystem, and my poor old gate array ends up on a submarine menacing Russian civilians somewhere near Minsk. I mean, I get it. But all Gutenberg did was make the press. It was someone else who used it to print the *Malleus Maleficarum*." I leaned my head back hopefully.

She tugged on my hair again. "But you *know*. Gutenberg didn't. So, are you the agent of the police state, JJ?"

"Damn it," I said, trying to laugh it off. "It's still different: killing people, in person, for money. You've got to see that."

She let it drop. But an hour or so later, after a long silence, she murmured into my shoulder, "How many men do you suppose there are, JJ, who don't deserve to die?"



"Twelve in the side," she said, chalking the cue. "How's that girlfriend of yours?"

"Oh, pretty good. She got promoted. Now she's in charge of the whole buying end."

"And she started out as a counter girl you said?"

"Five in the corner. — Yeah, she was a sales clerk. I guess that would be ten years ago." Ten years ago I was suffering through high school; Francie was selling ladies' underwear nine hours a day.

She rested her cue on the edge of the table and smiled at me: that sudden surprising gold-flecked grin. "I like to see a gal work hard and get ahead."

"Yeah." I wasn't going to get into my reservations about Francie's living: selling the clothes that men make their wives and girlfriends wear, buying from the men who design them.

"Family business? Or is she just a hard worker?"

Family business, ha ha. I made a production out of the chalk, inspected my soda carefully before taking a sip, studied the layout on the table with a deep frown (as well I might). I didn't want to talk about Francie's family's business; it was her story, and not mine to go telling people. "Nah," I said, and made a shaky shot. "Damn. She works real hard."

"Worked her way through college?"

"She never made it to college," I said.

She could have, though. If she'd kept to the family business.



"I don't like that song," I said. "That bit about not calling the cops on her poppa."

"Well, I can see it," she said. "You don't bring in the enemy on a private fight. Remember who she's talking about. And when."

"No, I still don't like it. There's too damn much of that. They just put up with it — stand by your man and all that crap."

Francie shrugged. "Not everyone has the same options."

"But it's what the cops are there for," I said. "Hell, it's what they're paid for."



"You can see whoever you want to," I said tightly, "you know that. But when it happens to be a friend of mine, I think you could at least tell me."

Francie shook her head, gave me that you're-awful-young-JJ look, and cast her eyes heavenwards. "Sweet Mama," she muttered. "Look, I'm not trying to seduce your schoolmarm. It was a business lunch, OK?"

"Right," I said. "I bet she has a *whole* lot of use for this Fall's designer fashions."

She stared at me and burst into that long delightful laugh that first made me walk up and ask her to dance. I never knew what the hell all those lady-novelist types meant by a 'musical laugh,' until I met Francie. I had to laugh myself, and the whole thing blew over.

You're slow sometimes, JJ, real slow.



"So, JJ tells me you used to be a spy," said Francie brightly. I choked on my root beer.

She looked at me for one split second like I imagine Jesus must have looked at Judas when he saw those plumed helmets coming closer through the trees. Right then was when I believed it all. No one could look like that without the fear of death upon her. Then she looked at Francie like she was setting up a flashy cushion shot, but faster; I could hear the wheels screaming around, she had X-ray eyes.

Francie leaned forward. "It's all right," she said, laying a hand on my buddy's navy polyester knee. "Believe me, I'm not on *that* payroll."

She took off the steel-rims and rubbed her eyes with the other hand. I saw that it trembled a little. Without the glasses her face was suddenly unfamiliar; her moment of mortal weariness frightened me. She snapped the glasses back on her nose, picked up her beer, and looked like she was going to send me to sixth period detention for a week. "Congratulations, young lady," she said. "You have just given me the scare of my recent life."

"Hey," said Francie — still with the sweet sisterly hand on the knee. "Don't get her wrong. She didn't believe a word of it, or she'd never have mentioned it. She's led a sheltered life."

They both smiled at the same moment; two women of the world. Francie turned the conversation smoothly to perennial borders and drip irrigation systems. I thought about becoming a liquid and dripping away through the couch quietly. I tried to imagine a schoolteacher with a gun. A rifle? A night-scope? Or one of those little things James Bond always had, with the Italian name?

At the door she twinkled at me, and my heart rose. "'Night, kid," she said. "'Night, Francie." She paused a moment in the act of shaking Francie's hand. "Not a spy, really," she said softly. "Just a humble assassin. Retired."

Francie smiled politely and retrieved her hand. "'Night, it's been nice meeting you."

But in the car: "See, JJ, I told you."



"But if you do it after the original attack, it's vengeance and not self defense. That's the law."

"What's the law got to do with it? We're talking right and wrong here. And I think she's got every right — we've all got every right to *deal with* any man that rapes or batters or kills a woman."

"It's justice."

"It's retribution."

"It's common sense. It's the only way to make sure he never does it again."

"And you might not have a gun or whatever at the time."

"But the point is, she waited till he was asleep and then shot him; the prosecution says that's vengeance."

"So what the hell do you want her to do, ask him outside to settle it like gentlemen? He deserves to die, what does it matter when it happens?"

"But handguns, you know. I mean, the non-violence people are barely speaking to me 'cause my name was on that article—"

"To walk up and blow somebody away in cold blood —"

"They sit around with their buddies and plan rapes in cold

blood; they make their fucking snuff films in cold blood, and they sit down and watch them in cold blood. We're talking warfare here. You have to do it however you can. Do you trash the Sandinistas for guerrilla tactics? Nope, you wish them the best of luck; they have to do whatever works."

"Still, to walk up to someone asleep and just —"

"I suppose you think she should have let him go on for another twenty years, is that it?"

"Look, JJ, I know you hate men and all that, but they're victims of the same system, and to go around saying 'just kill the bastards' is —"

"Look, folks, we *do* have a newsletter to produce . . ."



"She should never have used a gun. That was her big mistake."

I was drying out and reporting in; I doubt my blue fingers could have held a cue that night, after the long muddy vigil on the Courthouse lawn. Picket signs don't stand up real well to steady rain, and the candles go out, and people don't stop and listen. Maria Gorton was in jail for life, and I was about ready to cry. "He kept a gun in the house. It was what she had access to."

"Guns are for soldiers," she said with judicious scorn. "And for amateurs."

"You've got to use what comes to hand," I said mechanically. I was beginning to feel my toes again, and rather wishing I couldn't.

"That's just what she *didn't* do," she said, with that measured enthusiasm that Miss Adams used to display when she told us about geometry. "That's *just* what she didn't do. Every house is full of weapons, and most of them look like accidents. Or can be made to do so."

Now she was leaning forward and starting to sound like me when I get onto new substrate technologies and superconductors. I started shivering again. She didn't seem to notice.

"A sharpened pencil now," she said, "in the solar plexus, or through the eye into the brain. He's known to drink, he stumbles and has a nasty accident with a common object; it happens all the time. She screams for the neighbors and calls the cops, and every-

one thinks what a merciful delivery. People die of household accidents a lot, you know. Mixed cleaning products. Carelessness with cigarettes and candles. Mixed prescriptions. Electric shock."

I was so tired I was half-dreaming. I saw a crowded bus station, an anonymous man in a discreet three-piece suit hurrying through the crowd; a slip, a stumble, a fall. A shriek, a horrified elderly schoolteacher: "Oh dear, there's blood, there's blood, he's hurt himself! Somebody get help!" Sympathetic officials leading her away: "There's nothing you can do, ma'am, just go home."

"A simple hypodermic," she was saying. "You don't need anything fancy in it, air will do the job if you know where to put it. A cigarette and an open carburetor. Late-night carelessness with a circuit breaker. People have the stupidest accidents; you should spend a night at the emergency room sometime. It would give you ideas."

"I should be going," I said.



"Sure," I said. "What for?"

There was a long pause. Too long.

"You don't have to tell me. How much?"

Another long pause, then: "A couple of grand?"

I dropped the fork into the eggs. She wouldn't look up at me; I went over behind her chair and put my hands on her shoulders, but she shook them off. "Look, Francie, are you in trouble?" She had health insurance, and her car was fine last time I looked at it. "Did your landlord kick you out?"

"I need to buy something," she said. "I can pay you back about two hundred a month, I think."

"You — this is big bucks, France. Is it legal?"

She drew a pattern in the condensation on her glass of OJ. "Not exactly."

"Is it drugs?"

She stood up suddenly. "JJ, I'll get it some other way. I can always make some quick money if I need to."

I grabbed her by both arms. "If you mean you're going to go back to — Francie, you can't do that!"

"Hey, I did it for five years and I'm still alive," she said. "If you want something badly enough, you'll do what you have to. Let go."

So I lent her two grand. She's still paying me back.

"It's not drugs," she said. "You know I wouldn't use your money for that."



"I'm giving it to the Y," she said. It was dusk; the electricity was off, and the gloom was getting thick. I was trying not to let on how sad I really was. The big house was twice as cold and cavernous now, with the heat off and everything in boxes. I patted the corner pocket, and my eyes stung.

"So, why Minneapolis?" I called.

"Oh, no reason. I've never been there." She came back to offer me the last beer out of the empty fridge. "They say there are some nice women there."

I started to remind her how I felt about drinking, but then I saw the twinkle. "You know, kid, you're the only guest I've ever had who'd rather come over for an argument about a beer than come over for a beer." She reached out and mussed up my hair: the first time she ever touched me. "I'll miss you, kid."

I turned away and watched the view out the window get blurry.

"You go to the Y now and then and keep this table company, kid," she said lightly. "Don't forget what I taught you."

"I'll do that," I said, and blew my nose. "All this packing sure raises the dust."

She had a few boxes that she didn't want the movers to handle; I helped her carry them to the Volvo. There was something different about the Volvo, but I was too preoccupied to think about it.

I dropped one of the boxes. Murphy's Law: the tape burst and all these papers were all over the sidewalk. She was beside me in no time, scooping them up, stuffing them back in. Thank goodness there was no wind. Made stupid by embarrassment, I found myself staring idly at a driver's license. Your friends' old licenses are like school pictures: fascinating. It was her all right, but her hair was dark brown then, so it was pretty old; it was a Michigan license. I was about to ask when she had lived in Michigan (my folks lived there for a while before I was born), but the words stuck in my throat: the license was current. It expired two years from now.

And the name was wrong. It was the wrong name.

She took it out of my hand. "Careful with that, kid," she said gently. "I don't have a lot of those left, and you wouldn't believe what they cost. Your tax dollars at work." She put it back in the box.

She shook hands with me, there on the damp sidewalk, mussed up my hair again, gave me her best pool cue, and was gone. Like that.

I watched the Volvo's tail lights until they turned the corner, and they were pretty blurry. A while later I was warming up the bike, and something came in late: her license was 116 ZAB, I noticed it almost a year ago. But now it was something else. And it wasn't a California plate any more.

Even if I would tell somebody, who the hell would I tell? She knew I wouldn't. It was starting to drizzle; that suited me fine. I drove dangerously all the way home.



In mid-paragraph I lost all momentum; the words lost all meaning; I was staring, or glazing if you like, at a tangle of 'patriarchy' and 'radical feminist' and 'systematic oppression' and 'human dignity' and 'violence against women' and none of it made sense. I covered my face with both hands and groaned.

Trudy looked up from the light-table. "Major typo?" she said sympathetically, and stretched as she walked towards me. "Let's see; maybe we can strip it in, or fake it out with Kroy-type, or something."

"It's not that." I glanced at the desk clock and winced. Another groggy day tomorrow on coffee and six hours' sleep. "It's crap, it's trash, it's drivel." I waved the proof sheet at her.

I've always liked Trudy, who has about twenty-five years on the rest of us. She seems to have spent them consistently: printing flyers, getting arrested, printing posters, getting arrested, and so forth. I liked her from the day I overheard her describe Jade as "a Young Trotskyite born too late." I can't get away with that kind of crack, but Trudy has white hair and the magic touch: she can get people to laugh at themselves.

She skimmed over the text. "Nothing wrong with that. It's clear and to the point. That's why they make you write this stuff,

JJ, you're good at it. It's informative and concise, and even convincing."

"It doesn't *mean* anything. It doesn't *do* anything." I couldn't begin to tell her: the grief, the rage, the howling tragedy of all those centuries of women, bought and sold as livestock, beaten, burnt, murdered; the accumulated terror and shame and pain that ought to crack the earth open. And me with these three paragraphs of platitudes and generalities — ! Me with my crummy three paragraphs, fully justified in fifteen-point Times Roman with a thirty-point banner — when it needs to be written in fire across the sky: MEN HATE LIFE.

"I can't do this," I muttered. "I can't do this, I've got a job to go to in the morning. I can't stay up past midnight playing revolutionaries and writing this, this ineffectual boring crap that no one will ever read." I started to fidget around with my coat and carryall and keys.

Trudy laid the sheet carefully back on the table. "JJ," she said softly, "were you born a feminist? Did they teach it in grade school?"

I kicked my chair into place and scowled at her across the scarred table. "You know damn well they didn't and they never will."

"You learned it from books, JJ — from magazines and posters and flyers. If you go back and read them now you'll get a shock: you'll find timid wafflings and dry pontifications and starry-eyed stupidities; and you'll find a lot of awful hack propaganda and lousy journalism. But you read it and it changed you."

A ridiculous occasion for a speech, in an old print shop at midnight to a sulky audience of one; but I might as well have been a packed auditorium. Even the straggle of white whiskers on her chin seemed to bristle with the effort of getting me to *get it*. "It changed you, JJ. It brought you right here. All that hasty and often mediocre writing, it changed the world.

"And some poor soul read proofs and moaned because it was so much less satisfactory than going out and Dying for the Truth —" she grinned at me — "and all the time she was doing it, she was changing the world."

"I'd like to believe you," I said. "The speeches, the pickets, the whole trip. You think it stops anything? You think it saves anyone?"

The desk clock hit midnight and all the little stencilled flaps flipped over to 00:00. She sighed. I tried to imagine twenty-five years of this. "I think it does. Very slowly, and with a staggering amount of work, but I really think it does, I don't think an hour of your time has been wasted. It's the only way we've got.

"Oh, there's the other path: guns and high explosives. I can't see it. I can't see that more violence is going to solve anything in the end. I know you want to run out and *shake* the truth into them; we all do. But you have to take the long view: we've just got to change their hearts, all their hearts, our hearts too. That's what we're after."

"Well, it won't be in my lifetime," I said bitterly. "It seems like a hell of a lot of work for no visible result."

Trudy leaned on the table. I was embarrassed to see a tear building in one of her eyes. "It costs a lot," she said slowly, "to change the world."



I'd never seen her cry; her honey-brown eyes were red and swollen, and she twisted her fingers together over and over. I felt like throwing up. Suddenly she shouted at me: "You goddamn hypocrite, JJ! You're out there collecting money and getting pneumonia to support your Mrs. Perfect Victim Maria Gorton — your feminist hero of the hour. You're writing little speeches about *Maria's case is every woman's cause*. And now you look like you'd just as soon spit on me because I was smart enough not to get busted.

"You think — because you don't see any marks on me — you think I don't see them? You believed me when I said I never dream, JJ? Did it ever occur to you for a minute I might not *want* to tell you my dreams?" She grabbed her jacket off the chair, and for a second I thought she was going to throw it at me. I don't think I would have ducked. "The law says she waited ten hours to waste him, and that's illegal, and they put her away. You say they're full of shit. You said he deserved to die — I heard you say that. I was there, remember? You said he — he deserves to die, what does it matter when. I *heard* you, JJ. Now you sit there looking like god almighty on the throne of fucking judgment — I waited fifteen years, girl. Fifteen years, ten hours. What the hell *difference?*"

I sat there long after the door slammed. I just sat there.



I've always been a newspaper freak; I like the big ones, the Chronicle and the New York Times. They're as addictive as TV: I read everything but the Sports section. Sometimes I even read the Births and Deaths, and squint my way through half of the Classifieds.

I was reading the papers very thoroughly about that time, so the name jumped out at me even from a back-page filler article; but let's leave last names out of it. Francie's father and older brother had both died in a freak fire at their nightclub in the City.

The reporter noted that "the owners have been cited and fined more than once for health and safety violations," and listed the five or six names under which they had operated the place. A local Police Captain was quoted as "not sorry to see it out of business at last," and a grocer down the street said it had "a bad reputation and attracted the wrong kind of people."

I don't know how she did it. I know Francie had about six thousand in the bank, and she might have got a loan from the credit union as well as the two grand from me; I doubt she had any other friends who could have put up anything significant. So it might have cost ten grand, at the most. It doesn't seem much does it — not enough to buy a new Volvo. But it would cover the moving expenses.

I get a check from Francie once a month.

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Private Transportation

Two women are traveling together without a destination. This is the most important fact. Everything else depends on it.

Your eyelids were that pale, elusive shade of purple that means you haven't been sleeping. There is no name for it. Not violet, lavender or mauve, not amethyst, not heather, lilac or periwinkle. It slips between words. It won't be identified. It's almost the color of seashell fragments worn smooth by the ocean, not quite like the delicately veined petals of a wild iris, not exactly the shade of the winter sky at twilight. A secret color, in the open, but unfathomable. It's the color that makes me long to take you somewhere safe and quiet so I can watch over you while you rest. A color so tender it hurts. Someday I will wake up and know its name.

Two women are walking together. Their stride is nearly synchronized. The place is New York. The time is now.

We stepped into the subway car, and found a vacant seat for two in the corner. In spite of the filth, the nearly empty car had a certain splendor. All the graffiti seemed to be by one hand, or one group of hands. Not a mark appeared random. Splashes and squiggles covered every surface, forming arcane symbols, unreadable names. The interior of the car was spray-painted in every shade of blue and purple; even the background had a light wash of pinkish lavender, as though done in watercolor. It was lovely like a bruise, a mysterious blotch of color so intricately beautiful that you have to touch it, over and over, no matter how shocking the pain. Here and there the paint had dripped in teary trails, marking a path as familiar and as untraveled as the veins in the back of your hand. The train left the station, isolating us on separate islands of noise, drowning out conversation.

Two women are talking together. There is no topic. It is the continuous drone of daily living.

When the train emerged from underground, its dirty windows framed the lingering colors of the sky after sunset. All possible shades of atmospheric blue, pink and purple blended seamlessly together. Wisps of smoky clouds curled around the tops of city buildings, made delicate by the distance and the growing dusk. I imagined I was about to cross a border into another land.

Two women are sleeping together. They are not touching. They are breathing softly and steadily, side by side.

In the midst of the clatter, surrounded by the cityscape, you closed your eyes and, leaning back into the corner, let the movement of the train rock you lightly, gently to sleep. It was neither safe nor quiet, but I kept watch over you as you rested. I yearned to curl up against you, to let myself be transported to the land where you lay sleeping. Instead, I stayed awake and watched you, memorizing the trusting color of your eyelids, the innocent curve of your lashes, storing up images against the journey's end.

Two women are dreaming together. This is a private land. It is the point of departure.

*"Writing which addresses the root assumptions...
the very ground on which we're standing..."*

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Taking Rachel Home

We began in dangerously deep grief
like swimming in mud; and, in ecstasy
sitting in restaurants our hands
and mouths finding each other
over and over. Then again tears
then laughter smiles and hands
sleeping tangled, never moving
all night and back to our bodies
time and again resting from grief
in love, protected by Rachel
her quiet face gesturing response
hands barely letting go
joining even our work. Rachel and work
were all the life in my life, her colors
embracing my dusk, with sunsets
holding us like people like friends.
No one but Rachel could hold me
the tears a drink she could swallow
a fountain of deep waters binding us
as sensuously as the salt warmth in which
I buried my face over and over.

And now, I haven't told you this,
Rachel is crying out among the white rocks
and my hands don't comfort her.

The Fox

The sharp coldness of the night solidifies my breath as soon as I exhale it. My nostrils pinch on the inhale. I remember Marty's line, "You can tell how many degrees below zero it is by how long your nose freezes shut." I wonder what her calculations would be tonight. Snow squeaks under my boots, a squeak that shivers low along the ground, held down by the cold and the tall spruces. The noise holds me down, too, so I stop to listen. A warmth comes up my collar from under the layers of shirt and sweaters, a warmth that should keep me separated from the slice of these bitter blasts.

I lean against a tree and look down towards the sea, trying to imagine the cold that must be there, when a fox starts up the path heading towards me. It's a friend coming to visit. It's another living being in this frozen air. The wind is behind it, so it doesn't smell me. It doesn't see me because I am as dark as the tree and I haven't moved. But suddenly it senses me, for it stops, does a slow 180, and disappears. Gone. This crazy wishful thinking; it's another dream I've created to deny loneliness, keeping myself busy concentrating on a fleeting red fantasy rather than looking at the accusations that have started to come at me from inside: Drifter. Aimless wanderer. Isn't it time you settled on or with something? Someone?

To prove another something to myself, I walk down to where I'm sure there was a fox, and I can see the tracks. It walked up from the shore . . . and there the tracks end.

In the morning, I'm not sure just where I was in the night. Sleep has me as much as waking; I'm somewhere in between, even though it might appear that I'm sitting in the chair and looking out the window. I remember seeing a fox, and watching it disappear. But foxes are like that. Their reputation for being magicians goes back generations. Centuries. No sooner does that fit together when, through the window, I see the fox again. It has reappeared, right where it left off. I wonder if it took that long to figure out how to undo the trick. I want to run up the road and tell

Marty. I want to yell out to Ethel next door. I want to go out and follow the fox. Instead, I wait and watch, ready to be caught again.

I'm glad these days for the wind and bitter cold. As long as the blowing keeps up, Marty and I can't continue with our great woodcutting venture: it's too dangerous to drop trees in gale force winds. We can't do much of anything but put wood in the stoves and move around enough to keep the blood circulating. I see the fox again, maybe five days after I first saw it. This time it runs right by my house, by Ethel's house, and on down the road towards Marty's. It's moving so fast, its tail flat out behind it, that it looks like a red-brown pencil line, a streak slowly erasing itself.

I hear Pacer barking in the house next door. I make a note to tell Ethel what went by, so she'll know why Pacer was excited. I try to store the note near the front of my skull, so it won't get lost in the ping-pong disorganization of shifting thoughts.

Another day I see it when I'm walking along the beach, the top layer of skin on my face being roughed up by the ice in the winds. The fox comes around the bluff, its nose following the high tide mark, searching for something to eat. This time I get a better look at it, the small pointed ears, the thick brush of tail, the black stockings. I watch the wind rippling its fur, little shimmers slipping down its sides. I'm surprised that here, in the strong midday sun, it looks so small. By night light it looks ever so much bigger and infinitely more important.

I settle into being in this close little house that Marty convinced me to rent. Meeting her was a fortunate thing; somehow she sensed that a building this manageable was just what I was needing — as well as a structure with walls thick enough to ward off the coming frosts. And right off we both decided that despite our thirty year age difference we have a lot in common. We've built on that foundation of sameness ever since I arrived.

I think a current of air gets trapped on my path to the shore, and is funnelled from the water towards my house. When it hits this barrier it whirls skyward, creating a spiral of wind. On these violent days there's a percussion against the side of the house, small hard sounds that must be gravel off the beach, sea remnants being scattered over the island. Too, there are the gulls. They let the wind fling them back from the water and into the narrow funnel of air. Their shadows hit the window like projectiles and

when I'm sitting here but somewhere else in my head, the spot contacts glass and I'm back, sure the window's going to smash, and then the spot's gone and there's just blue sky and more gulls in the distance lining up for the next assault.

The suddenness scares me but I like the sound of the large birds' voices, talking it over, comparing flights. I like their noise as much as I like the smell of chainsaw oil that seems to have soaked all my clothes. And I like thinking about this close world, trees, gulls, Ethel in her house, Marty and Joan in theirs, and all of us with fires in our homes.

Which brings me to my relations with these neighbors. Just by knowing them, I'm getting involved. It started at christmas when we made each other family for a while. I gave Joan a bracelet I carved out of a piece of lilac wood. I gave Marty a new chain for her saw, and I gave Ethel a box I made, a wooden base with slices of deer antler embedded in the wooden sides. It took a long time to make because the grooves had to be exact, but I was real pleased with it when it was done. They gave me a blue plaid wool shirt that has some cotton in it and doesn't feel too itchy against my bare skin. But I'm so desperate for a feeling of belonging that I'll include deer or gulls in the count of recognizable, familial faces. And now it's foxes.

From this chair, my attention centers ever more around the window. A noise, and I look for the fox. A dog barks, and I watch, and wait. What else is worth waiting for besides an interruption to the ever-present sameness? Even the color matters, signifying something different amongst the grays and greens and blacks. It's reaching the point of distortion so that I can barely remember a time that I wasn't poised in waiting when Marty knocks at the door.

"So what are you doing?" Somehow my waiting hadn't prepared me for her appearance.

"Joan and I've got to do some errands up in Bangor today," she says stomping snow off her boots, stomping in time with her words. Her broad shoulders, beer belly and skinny hips are even more accentuated in her going-to-town hunter's jacket. "You want to come?"

"No." Not to do errands; and especially not as part of this arrangement. If there were just two of us, yes. Three, no. I pause,

and then expose myself: "I thought you'd come to watch the foxes with me."

Marty turns, her "are-you-kidding?" look coming at me lengthwise. She taps out a cigarette and lights it, then she offers me one as though to bridge a gap. I decline as always and settle back into my chair. Whatever happens, happens. She opens the stove door a crack so the cigarette smoke will get sucked out of the room. "What's this about foxes?"

"Marty, did you ever see a fox disappear? And then reappear in the same place, only maybe about six hours later?"

She shakes her head no, watching to see if I'm joking. "I wouldn't put anything past them, though," she says, finally. "They're quite the tricksters. Haven't you ever heard of the fox that hypnotized a farmer by smiling at him every morning? And then the fox would steal a chicken and run off, laughing?" She's laughing now at me.

"Marty, this isn't an every-day-tricking fox. This one is different. You wait. You'll probably see it."

"Listen, Kid, I do believe you." I don't want to hear the rest; I just want to hang onto the endearment in the name she has taken to calling me. "I don't want to think about it now, you know what I mean? We just bought all those rabbits, and they'll be multiplying soon, and I don't want to have to be defending them against any foxes." That sounds final; I won't argue.

"Can we get you anything in the big city, if you're not going to come?" she asks, continuing with business. Probably it's good we're not going to be together today. Our sentences are completely missing. According to the rules of geometry, that must mean they're running on parallel courses so they'll never ever intersect. A little like lives.

"No." And a point stands alone but can serve as the intersection for an infinite number of lines, or something like that.

She tosses the rest of her cigarette into the stove, slowly exhales at the flames and then closes the door. "Well, would you mind checking on my mother this afternoon? I don't think we'll be back until late, and the way this wind is, she's going through the wood pretty fast. You may not have to bring in any, just check to make sure she has enough for the evening. And tell her I'll be down around ten."

"Sure." So that's why she came down. I wonder what she would've done if I'd said yes, I'd like to go. "Did you already load the woodboxes this morning?"

She nods and heads out the door, grinning. "If you see any more foxes, tell them they'd be smarter to stay away. I'm probably a better shot than you know." Her grin stays for a long while after she leaves.

I go to town for milk and eggs and on the way back pick up the man in the fluorescent orange hat and jacket who regularly hitchhikes up and down the road, mostly going and coming from the small store that sells beer and Coke and chips. He's got a good hold on his brown paper bag, but it looks like he's waiting to get home to open it. When he's walking fairly straight, it's a sign that he's sober; that's when I don't mind giving him a ride. His nose is running almost faster than his sleeve can keep up and we make comments about the wind and the bitter cold. Then he tells me about his friend "Sparky" — Ed Spears I think his name is — and his trap line. So far this winter, and it's still early yet, he says he's taken about ten fox and several beaver. I nod to say I've heard but my stomach tightens. He better not try for this fox; I just don't have much else right now.

It's late in the afternoon when I carry an armload of wood into Ethel's. She looks so little — especially when she doesn't know someone is looking. The white of her abundant hair cascades down her thin body. She's sitting with her eyes closed, ensconced in the white, and slipped way down inside her favorite armchair. She's listening to an opera on the radio, but she shuts it off when she finally hears me calling her name. Despite the abruptness of my appearance, she looks like she not only recognizes me but she's glad to see me. She asks if I'll stay for tea. She always calls me "Dear" because she can't ever remember my name, or why it is that I keep coming to her house — except that it has something to do with an arrangement of Marty's. She seemed to make all the connections at Christmas, when I gave her the box, but that was at Marty and Joan's house, and the context was different. Now, here in her house, it's the first time she has offered to serve me anything, so I accept and say, "Sure."

It takes a long while for her to go through all the little steps, finding tea bags, boiling the water, putting Pepperidge Farm

cookies in a careful arrangement on a small plate. She doesn't want me to help, so I stay out of the way and talk some more about the wind and the cold. She's having to use all her attention to concentrate, so it's a one way conversation at first. When we're finally sitting down again, I tell her about the fox, and how it's the same fox, I'm sure, and how it seems to live right around here somewhere. As I'm talking, I start imagining myself wandering through the woods following its tracks, outsmarting its maze of decoys and finding out where it lives.

Ethel laughs, at my seriousness, I think. Then she stands up. "Did you ever see my book about foxes?"

"No."

She spends a lot of time in her studio, and then in a bookcase in the front hall. I'm beginning to succumb to sleep in the heat when finally she comes back with a children's book. She hands it to me, and drops with a whoosh down into her chair.

There's a photograph of her on the back flap but she looks much different than in her present wispy thinness; I might not have recognized her if her name wasn't in print underneath it. I go slowly through the illustrations, savoring this part of her famous past. The fox looks identical to the one I've been watching. The drawings show it stalking a mouse, and walking around a chicken barn, and standing outside a hole in the ground with several kits in a tangle of ears and paws next to it.

I read the pictures instead of the story, thinking about the influences that reside in an area, and whether foxes have always made an impression on whomever happened to be living here. I wonder if it's just another stroke of belligerence on Marty's part that she's refused to be impressed. And then I remember the other influences operating here: shoot them, trap them, skin them.

I stroke the cover of the book. "Ethel, this is wonderful," I say.

"It was a wonderful assignment." She echoes the tone of my voice. "My husband found a den that summer, and we spent hours watching them. We'd take chairs, and binoculars, and sit and sketch them from a respectful distance. I think they grew quite accustomed to our being there."

When I'm in the presence of Ethel's elegance — when I hear words like "respectful" — I want to be more careful. I want to hold my teacup firmly and deliberately between my thumb and

forefinger, my baby finger curving a small arc out of the air. I want my sentences to have proper beginnings and endings, and to contain words that shape specific feelings. She brings it out in me. She expects it.

For her, I'd help put on an elegant tea party. For her, I'd take off my scarred boots, find some appropriate shoes and borrow a skirt to wear; I'd scrub my fingernails and pass around delicate china tea cups all afternoon. We'd use this same silver cream pitcher, only I'd polish it first. And we'd offer sugar cubes just like these, with little violets on their sides. Maybe the cucumber and watercress sandwiches that she once told me about. We would tell sweet little stories and ask careful questions, and it would appear that we did this every afternoon. I'd willingly do that with her.

And Marty would laugh over it for weeks — about how I suckered for her Mom's game. They're so different, it's hard to believe they're related.

Ethel looks happy wherever it is she's landed in her memories, and somewhat tired from all this activity. I clear up the dishes and thank her for showing me the book. She looks like she's close to sleep so I load up her stove and open the damper before I leave. I want her to nap in comfort and not wake up because she's cold.

Later, I wake from a dream, sweaty and uncomfortable.

The fox was running up a far hill. I pointed it out to a man who was walking down the road. He was blind and felt the way with his hands. The fox loped like a long white wolf. Then I was holding the fox in my arms and it felt so vulnerable, so little. I cradled it in my elbow like a baby. Then I saw it had mange and I got worried about its health, until I suddenly remembered that it could be rabid. I hurried to put it down and it bit my hand. I tried to back away from what was now this snarling, ferocious animal lunging at my neck and face. I almost fell trying to escape the attacks, and then I turned and raced down a hill. I found a driveway and ran on the frozen road until I came to a huge house. They let me in with the words, "We don't need any help here. We've already hired several people."

"But I didn't come looking for work," I told them. I need a lift to the hospital." Someone who looked like Joan offered to drive me and I was enormously relieved because I'd just gotten a

glimpse of the Greta I'd loved, there in the room, sitting in the middle of a circle of people, and she was just about to raise a finger to point me out, accusingly.

In a panic, I went next door to my house, to look for a clean shirt to wear. I was horrified by this pervasive putrid smell, and then I discovered the source: it was a body, rotting. I was shocked that it had just been left there for me to deal with. I woke in terror, convinced that somehow I'm still responsible for the hurting, and knowing I'm probably going to get hurt again, and right now I only want to escape and go outside.

I remember what Joan has said about the dreamer being everything in the dream. I wonder if that means I'm the blind man and the fox and the rotting body. This thought brings up too much of my own past: the Greta-scenes I haven't been able to escape. I was in love and she panicked at having me so close. She pushed me away, said it was like reliving the abuse, pushed me and told me I was a bad person to want to be sexual with her. I began to believe her. I felt bad. I acted bad; God, I acted bad. Grovelingly bad. And then I scraped what little self respect I could get up off the floor and fled and found myself near here. And then, a few months later, there we were at the garage; I was trying to get my truck inspected, Marty was buying tires.

I work to calm myself with thoughts of the safety of being here. And why it is that I want to be by Marty's side. She radiates a strong safety and together, running our chainsaws, hauling brush, stacking up the cordwood that will see us all through another winter and provide a good source of cash as well, we've become a kind of invincible that I had forgotten it was possible to be. So why is a fox still going for my throat?

I decide to wait until sunrise to walk.

Marty is just leaving her regular morning visit with her mother when I wander back from the shore. "Hey, Kid," she calls out. When I go over, she gives it to me straight off: "Your fox got one of the rabbits last night."

"My fox." She's right, I feel protective of this fox. I also feel like I have a connection to it. After all, it bit me. Maybe I'm rabid, too. Or maybe I'm just going to get more wild. I wait to hear what she plans to do next.

"I've been trying to figure out how to trap it, you know, rig a

string with a trap inside the bunny hutch. So when the fox goes in, which I think it's doing through the small space under the door, it trips the string, and this metal cage drops on it from up above."

I know the small space she's referring to. It's too small for a fox to get through. What's really happening is that this fox knows a trick that Marty will never catch on to. It dissolves itself outside of the bunny hutch, and then rematerializes once it passes to the inside. It'll never trip a snare because that's not how it travels. But Marty is still scheming.

"And then what?" I want to know.

"Well, that probably won't work." She lights a cigarette by pulling out a handful of jacket as a screen against the wind. "I may have to shoot it." Through the side of my face I can feel her scrutinizing my reaction.

"From my den I can see the entrance to the bunny hutch. I'll put a chair by the window, and I'll rig a string to the outside spotlight. That way, I can turn on the light, paralyze the fox with the beam, and then put a bullet into its head before it ever knows what's happening."

She could be saying this to shock me: Don't assume you've got me figured out. Don't think that because I'm who you've got, that I'm going to show any warmth or humanity.

Or she could be saying this because it's falling on her to be the protective one. I bet she's wanted this role ever since her father died, her brother left, and she divorced the husband she never loved and "sent him skidding off on his ear." And now with Joan too busy, and her mother starting to fade, and me often close to tears . . .

She seems to be puffing up even as I imagine it. She sees potential danger and she's going to arm herself and her charges against it. After all, this fox might appear inside one of our houses. Or in a bedroom, at night, when it's so dark we can't even see it. Or it might succeed in turning our trust into suspicion, so that we're always looking around with suspecting eyes, making us ever more jumpy and ready to suspect each other.

Foxes can do that; they hang around the edges so that they're weighted presences in the background. We can feel them, even when we can't see them. They're patient until the right moment

comes, and then they strike. And the chicken house has been raided. Or the favorite cat is gone. Or some other insult is left hanging in the air for everyone to see in the morning light.

But she's taking it on. I don't have to. "Good luck," I say, keeping my voice noncommittal and bowing myself out of any more involvement with her plot.

Within two weeks, the fox has gotten three more rabbits and Marty has gotten more serious about doing it in. I don't argue with her. I don't try any statements like, "yes, but . . ." I don't feel like I have the strength or the wisdom to interfere on behalf of an animal, or even of a person, for that matter. After all, who knows what's best, or right? Besides, I've gotten used to watching.

And now more than ever it seems like everywhere I go, I see foxes. Driving home from a friend's one night, a new friend who doesn't ask me many questions so it's easy to be with her, I see a fox tearing across a field. Then I see another fox in the headlights. It feels like a challenge. A curse. It's suddenly a big thing that's even got a name: Molehill Mountain. Do something, it says, or stop noticing. And now I don't know how not to get involved.

When it seems the most complicated, I go out into the night and for a while it all smooths out. The world seems to be resting again in the simple balance of stars and cold and the moon. If I just had the stamina to keep walking.

I hear a tree pop as the sap freezes in it, and then I hear another sound as well. Between where I stand and the water, somewhere there in the woods, I hear the fox. Only it's not the usual high-pitched yipping that is pretty common, that we nod at and say, "yup, a fox." This is distinctly different; it's impatient, a widening spiral coming from deep inside the fox's chest. Again it cries, and again. It sounds demanding. It sounds lonely. It sounds like a vixen in heat. And it's too close to being of and in me.

I strain for more clues but now it's just the wind sifting through the stiff spruces. In the relief of silence, I think about living in the woods again. Come spring, maybe I'll move back to the tent I occupied before meeting Marty. Go and see how the deer are doing; get a part-time job that pays more than woodcutting and have the time to cook over a campfire again. Then I hear another fox, closer than the first. They call back and forth; it's insistent, ceaseless. It's a spiral that they share, this sound; it's a force that's

speeding up, it's speeding into me, it's catching at me in my head, my chest, my fists. I have to get out of here, out of this night that now feels like somebody else's. I never know quite what will get me until it does, and then usually it's too late. I stomp down with a loud resistance of sound, marking a noisy path as I hurry back to my small house.

In the morning, I've decided to make one attempt. I'll do one thing with the fox in mind, and then I'm going to go on to other thoughts. I decide to begin collecting pee. Every day for about a week, I empty my chamber pot into a plastic milk jug. It's not such a pleasant process, but I breathe through my mouth. I cut up another jug to make a funnel, and I take my chamber pot outside and use the funnel to pour it into the whole jug.

One evening, when the container's finally full, I carry it down to the bunny hutch. No one is around and, very slowly, I walk around the old building, carefully pouring out the liquid. I make certain sure that I don't leave any spaces that would interrupt the circle and leave an opening for the fox to slip through. "I did my part, now it's up to you."

I throw away the jug and wash my hands of all responsibility.

The days move on at an easy, enjoyable pace. Marty and I cut wood when the weather's good, which it mostly is now that the January blasts are over. We keep working away at the clearing, burning all the tops as we go, and it's warm and sunny in the opening. The new height of the sun in the sky is like an invisible layer of clothing. But the best part is that the sun is on the tops of our heads and no longer slicing sideways through the treetops; the low angle of early winter had us forever squinting, always with the sun in our eyes. We grimaced at each other even when we were in total agreement.

Except we did have one disagreement, though it was brief. Marty had her sights on an old dead elm that she wanted to take down. I was surprised. I thought everyone knew that an elm is the most graceful dead thing that exists, except perhaps for a deer antler. And this particular elm, without its bark, and all its secondary branches gone, had five long curving limbs reaching skywards. I thought we should leave it, and then I had a hard time explaining why. Because it was so perfect, I said; it was a kind of landmark, it was a form that could be anything we wanted

it to be. My reasons didn't impress her. But I'd intervened once, and that seemed enough for now. I let go and Marty took it down.

And then we're heading to the woods in the old Chevy, and Marty begins laughing. It's a laugh I recognize as one of a good friend. I think I've stopped clinging so tight, stopped thinking that being lovers always comes next. It's she and Joan, good and solid. And I'm on the edge, getting better.

"Do you know how many nights I spent watching for your goddamned fox?" She looks sideways at me, her face getting redder as she smiles. "I'd sit with my drink, and wait, my gun all loaded and ready. I was sure I was going to kill it. I even planned to skin it and let you have the pelt. What do you think about that?"

I don't know. I might've liked a fox fur, though I'd really rather not think about it. "I'm sure I could've thought of something to do with it," I say with a shrug, knowing how tentative my voice sounds.

"But your damned fox never showed up," she tries to sound accusing, "and I think you probably had something to do with it. I haven't seen its tracks for weeks. You ever going to tell me how you did it? Did you scare it away? Use a little magic that you haven't told me about?"

I have to laugh with her now. I hope it doesn't sound too much like relief. Could it have been that simple? If that's true, well, too bad for the elm, but now there's no telling what I might do. I'm definitely getting better.

"Marty," I allow, "if I knew for one minute that you were sitting with a gun, waiting for me, you can be sure I'd have found a new neighborhood to live in."

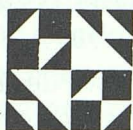
She backs the Chevy into the spot where she always parks. Laughs that feel like they could be mine roll up easily from her belly as she climbs out. "You little weasel. You're the one who told the fox, aren't you?"

Preparations For The Life Ahead

from *An Honest Account*

Because the girl wants to remember the outline of her face, the way her brown curls fall across her neck, she plays the piano with a mirror on the stand. Almost summer, 1923, and today her parents told her she'll go blind before spring, before she's eighteen, blinded from her love of a girl down the block. Watching her fingers reach for the keys, she thinks of their bodies developing the way she expects their lives will develop together toward the future. But the girl believes her parents and decides to prepare for the life ahead, begins to teach herself to type and play the piano blindfolded, not to watch the laces as she ties her shoes, and vaguely wonders if anyone prints music in braille. She's been playing for an hour. Already this section's subtle and graceful, the same motions she imagines her body might make if she were to dance and not practice these notes. She pauses at the explosion of tulips by the window, then looks past the garden to her lover's house, to the yellow kitchen curtains that snap in the breeze. The girl wonders when the world will begin to fade and fall away like a photo that first turns brown and curls at the edges before it finally

dissolves into nothing or dust, and she tries to imagine the day her eyes open to a world flat and black as a note. She doesn't yet know why she's comforted by looking at the exterior of a room she's never seen or that she'll become a novelist and tell this story, that her life will contain no more darkness than any other life. She sees only the walk they took all afternoon in the park, the way the sun sliced a tree in half and the buckles on their shoes gleamed in the deep grass. It will be enough, the girl thinks, to remember the leaves, and she begins to play her favorite waltz and sings.



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Dye

Mother came rushing in, hands full of bags, calling out my name. "Natalie! Natalie, come here! I have something for you." It was Saturday, her shopping day. Though I hadn't expected anything from this week's expedition, a part of me was curious about what she could possibly have purchased for me. I put down my book and magnifying glass and ran up the stairs to greet her.

There were bags all over the kitchen. Mother had been grocery shopping and from the look of it she'd stopped at Pay N' Save, Macy's and Liberty House as well. I watched as she began pulling things out of the more interesting bags while I put away the groceries. By now my sister and younger brother had arrived on the scene.

"Mama, did you get anything for me?" Clinton asked.

"Mother, what's in this bag?" Felecia asked while already peeking into it.

"Give me that bag. No, put it in my room. After the food is put away then I'll show all of you what I bought." Mother followed after Felecia to make certain that she didn't look into the bags further, which of course she tried to do.

Felecia returned to the kitchen visibly disappointed, her mouth forming into a pout. I could hear Mother pulling things out of bags in her bedroom. She was singing. I took that as a good sign.

"Okay you guys, we're done." No sooner had I said those words than Felecia and Clinton ran from the kitchen, through the dining room, into Mother's bedroom. I felt too old, too sophisticated to admit to such excitement. For all I knew, Mother had bought me underwear, appreciated of course, but not excitement material. At thirteen, I was only impressed with new books, clothes or shoes. None of which I was expecting.

I stood in the door frame watching as Mother carefully gave Felecia and Clinton their new things. Everything was laid out in piles, according to whom it was to be given.

"Thank you Mother for my new dress," Felecia said. The dress was blue with little flowers sewn into it.

"Clinton, come here so mama can help you. Let's see if these new shoes fit."

"Mama, is this for something special?"

"Well actually it is." She was smiling down at him. My ears perked. What event were we going to? Did I have a new dress as well? Despite myself I was getting interested in the goings on. "These are for your birthdays," she told them. My sister and brother were born five years and one day apart.

Oh, I thought. There probably won't be much for me then. Birthdays in our home were important, especially for the one or in this case ones having the birthday. For the rest of us, my older brother and myself, we were expected to be "adult" about it all. So what *did* Mother have for me?

I watched my sister and brother model their new outfits, both of which fit perfectly. They hugged and kissed Mother and hurried off to find Gregory to show him. He wasn't home, but I did not bother to tell them that. At sixteen, he was rarely home anymore.

"Come here and sit next to me. I have something special for you." I walked from the doorway to the bed, all the while looking, taking inventory. I did not see a new dress or shoes. My heart sank. She couldn't see this though — I wouldn't let her.

"When I was in Pay N' Save today I saw this mother and her daughter. They were both albino." I could tell that there was more to this story. Mother opened the white bag with blue and green stripes. She pulled out a box of q-tips and some Ultra Sheen and paused, waiting for my response.

"Oh really, what did they look like?" I was curious because I'd never met any other albinos. I thought that I was the only one, even though I'd heard that there were others like me in the world.

"Oh they were very pretty," she continued. Her voice betrayed the smile on her face. There was an implication that I was not as pretty as the mother and daughter she'd seen. "They color their hair."

"They do what?"

"They were buying hair color. The woman explained to me that by coloring their hair people couldn't tell that she and her

daughter were anything other than white.”

“Oh.” I managed to say. The words repeated themselves inside my head. “People couldn’t tell that they were anything other than white.” I began shifting my weight on the bed. I felt uncomfortable.”

I watched as Mother continued to pull items out of the Pay N’ Save bag: a hair pick, a box with a picture of a woman with blond hair, cotton balls, makeup of some sort, rubber gloves. In the back of my mind I thought, oh, she’s really serious.

I picked up the box of hair color and examined it. Unsure of what I was supposed to say, I said nothing. Disagreeing with Mother was not an option. I had to say something though. My silence was even making me uncomfortable.

“But Mother, I’m not white. I don’t think it’s going to work the way it did for that woman and her daughter.” I was hoping for an out.

“Oh honey, I think that you’re wrong. You may not be white but I think that people will accept you more because you’ll look more like everyone else. You might even get a date or two.”

“I’ll look strange. My friends already accept me for who I am. I won’t look like me.” I felt my heart sinking. I did not believe her and yet there was no way I could get Mother to understand that I was afraid.

“Of course you will look like you. In fact you will look even better, prettier.” There was no persuading Mother. Her mind was made up. “Besides, there is something else.” She looked a little sheepish. I knew that she was withholding information. She wanted to be asked. I sat there quietly, watching her, waiting. “You also get to wear makeup.”

“Makeup! I thought you said that I had to be fifteen before I could wear any makeup?” This part excited me. Makeup. That magic word. The thing that separated the “in crowd” from other crowds by my interpretation. Suddenly the idea of dying my hair became more appealing. As I sat thinking about how thrilling it would be for me to wear makeup, Mother continued talking.

“We’ll do your hair today. Take these things into the kitchen and get a chair to sit in, a big towel, one of the old ones and a comb.” She rose to change her clothes. I sat there for a moment, still shocked. I was going to get to wear makeup.

I gathered all of the things that were needed and put them in the kitchen. I began to feel excited about coloring my hair. Maybe it would make me look better, prettier.

I sat in the chair, towel draped around my neck waiting for mother to begin. She read the directions twice before mixing the two solutions, dye and peroxide, together. She parted my hair and squirted the solution into my hair making sure that the roots were sufficiently dyed first. Then she worked the rest of it into my hair.

"We have to make sure the roots are blond or else it won't look good."

I tried not to think of what the end result would be, of how I would look. Yet that is exactly what my thoughts were filled with. Am I going to look weird? Will my friends tease me even more? How am I going to walk down the hall?

After Mother finished applying all the dye I had to let it sit for fifteen minutes. I was tired of the smell and my head had begun to burn. I told her this and she insisted that I only need to wait a little longer.

I rose from my chair to stretch. I was afraid to look into the mirror. I was worried that my sister and brothers would walk in. How would I ever explain my new hair to them?

"Honey, let's go wash out the dye now," Mother said, breaking into my thoughts. What was she being so nice? What if I really did look stupid? What if...

The what ifs continued as Mother washed the excess dye from my hair. I couldn't think of looking at myself. With the last of the shampoo rinsed out Mother wrapped a clean towel around my head.

"It doesn't look like much now but it will look great after it's dried, straightened and curled," she told me smiling.

What did she mean? I walked from the sink to the mirror. A strand of brown hair met me face to face. Slowly I removed the towel. My hair definitely was not white. It was, I thought, somewhere between mousy blond and light brown. I wasn't sure. I did not look like the me I'd awakened with that morning. I stood there combing the tangles out of my hair telling myself that what I'd done was irreparable.

I sat on the floor on a pillow while Mother pressed my hair.

She was going on and on about how nice my hair looked. I did not believe her and tried not to listen to her monologue.

"You are going to look spectacular with your hair curled and you all made up. Your friends will not recognize you on Monday," Her cheery attitude was getting to me.

"That's true, they won't know what to say," I mumbled.

"What did you say?"

"I said that my friends won't know what to say. How do you think they will respond anyway?"

"Oh, they'll probably be jealous because their mothers won't allow them to do the same to their hair."

They don't need to do anything to their hair or their skin. None of them are albino, Mother! Thoughts unsaid. She had the hot comb in her hand I didn't want to get burned. Even if it appeared accidental, it always seemed to happen.

"What happened to Natalie's hair mama?" Felecia approached us, curious but unsure.

"I dyed it," I told her smiling. "I even get to wear makeup now. Mother said so." I knew that she'd be envious and I wanted her to be.

"Oh Mama, I mean, Mother, does that mean that I get to wear makeup when I turn thirteen too?" She would want to, I thought to myself. Fast.

"No, it does not. Your sister is special. She can't have light ash blond hair and not wear cosmetics to make the look complete. Now go away. Did you hang up your new dress? If I know you it's laying on your bed." She dismissed my sister with one hand while holding my head with the other.

She wasn't going to be the only cute one any more, I told myself. I too was going to be pretty. Yes, finally I was going to be pretty.

After Mother finished curling my hair, I couldn't wait to go gaze at myself in the mirror. I looked different, somehow older, I told myself.

"Mother, can we put the makeup on now? I want to see what all of me looks like. Please." I stood in front of the mirror primping. I liked my new look. I would be even more stunning with blush, mascara, eyebrow pencil and lipstick.

Mother and I sat in front of her mirrored dresser. She showed

me how to apply everything from foundation to lipstick. It seemed so much easier when other women did it. It was hardly easy for me. I couldn't see to get all the lines equal.

"You'll be able to do this in no time. All it takes is practice."

"But how am I going to do it on Monday when I go to school? I can't do it by myself yet." There was panic in my voice. School. How am I going to walk in there in two days without feeling even more visible? I couldn't even see well enough to put on my own makeup.

"We'll do it before I leave for work and you will be able to practice the rest of this weekend. We'll go visit grandmother tomorrow so that she can see how new and different you look."

We both looked at Mother's finished product. Me. I was beautiful. I looked like, like someone out of *Seventeen*. I had light ash blond hair that was pressed and curled and hung down to my shoulders and my face. I was gorgeous. Mother had applied everything, the foundation, which was a shade or so darker than my skin, the mascara and eyebrow pencil. For the first time I could really tell that I had these things, eyelashes and eyebrows. I liked being able to see my face. There was a little blush on my cheeks and lipstick of the same color, pale pink.

I sat taking inventory. I was seeing myself it seemed, for the first time. I had features. I wasn't just a white blob, bland in every sense of the word. I was my Mother's image. Even though she had honey brown skin, I really did look like her. That meant that I must look like the others as well, that I really belonged in this family. I wasn't the adopted stray my older brother Gregory often teased me of being.

I thanked Mother and ran off to show my sister and brothers. Now I could prove once and for all I was one of them.

As Love Is A House

You seduce me with the clarity of your mind
as twilight fades into the rocking
steady curve and lift of chair on floor
there is a window of joy that has your face in it

draw the blind
you say, in honest appraisal, not mocking
and my heart singing its quiet yeses
shuts fast sash against pane

we came together to this place:
a home without fixed address
the evening's chill a restlessness
until what was begun in thanks
in anger heats this dwelling

this love is like a house
that has too little possibility for investment
the foundation gone, pipes burst, garden overrun
and yet what drew me here remains compelling

I return to you as to a ruin
bury the bones of loss in your yard, confident
that the seed in darkness would know to bloom and ripen
that the door of love would one day creak and open



there is a window of joy that has your face in it
from "As Love Is A House" by Lisa Carlin

Jasmine Marah

Nightvoice

When we met I fell
into her eyes
like falling into warm rock
blurting

everything how my cousins
took turns at night
when I was five eight ten

her eyes asked for nothing
but I turned myself inside
out plucked my heart
and offered it to her.
She looked away

I hated the coaxing in my voice
that bitch whine
and then she said *bueno* just
this once

It rained hard that day and afterwards
she sat up and stretched
arms and bare back glistening.
The sounds of the *ranas*
entered the room with the night
both were drowning her.

I stood at the door
of the heaven I thought out of reach
When I touched her I could barely
breathe and the smell of her:
toasted almonds and yeast.
I could never get near it enough

the wanting making my arms weak
the taste of her
even now if I bring my fingers up to my nose
I get a whiff of her.

Lightning scored the windowpanes
a brutal light hit my eyes
filling the room surprising
the shun in her face
she slid it back behind her eyes
but I'd seen it
and by the time thunder
shook the mirror
something else had entered the room
and I knew she would leave me
parts of her were walking out
into the *llovisna*
toward the lightning piercing the horizon

She lay beached
on the white sand
and before the sweat dried on her body
I knew she needn't
have done anything
one stroke
of her hand on my belly
and I would have gone off again
but I lay on the white sheet
mouth full of sand
my face shut like a door.

Somehow the thunder had gotten inside me
and I wanted to say I'm not your *perra*
a cheap shot but it would have
softened her mouth
by then I wanted nothing from her
had turned away and lay listening
to the rain and the frogs.
The birds had stopped singing.

When her hand touched me
I almost screamed.
I pulled back into my self
made myself numb
but the cat her hand found me
and I the mouse had no more
holes to hide in
I came to lose myself
and for that I never
forgave her.

bueno: all right

ranas: frogs

llovizna: rain

perra: bitch as in female dog

Lisa Morphey

The Moth

For Marilyn

For months she lay in my bed watching moths fly into the light, cringing for each that did not, could not, fly out. Each night I would reach for her, and she would turn as if my hands were weapons. It was foreign war for me. Sleeping under my pillow to block out her need for a night-light. I could only imagine her still so full of her father's breath, his hands still riding her hips, his face a mask I am forced to wear. He took her night after night while her mother pretended sleep. He held her hips as he slipped his tongue between her legs and sucked every ounce of trust from her, replacing it with his hot breath. When she could not stand to see another moth die, she turned off the light and said I trust you, I want you. I heard her father laugh, felt his hands grip like claws as I lay my hands on her pelvis and slipped my tongue between her legs to suck him from her. She held my hair and screamed into the night no, no, but she did not turn. I knew I had her father in me when I could not sleep.

I went to the window and blew the air from my lungs — my hands curled like claws. He had entered me in a desperate attempt to keep her his.

I sat on the edge of the bed, traced her spine with my fingers, kissed her shoulder, put my head to her back and listened to her heart. She had her ear to the bed as if it were telling her a story. I did not sleep that night but watched the moths flying the light, counted 20 that did not return before she turned to find me awake. "Make love to me," she said, and she cupped my face in her hand, pulled me to her. I heard her father cry, saw him walk through the bedroom door into his own night alone.



Untitled

Myra Fourwinds

Carolyn Gage

Confessions of a Lesbian Groupie

I went backstage immediately after her number. I couldn't wait for the rest of the show. Who wants to see a bunch of drag queens anyway? But this woman ... well ... she had been something else. When a woman wears male drag it's an entirely different thing. It's not an impersonation of a man. Why would any lesbian want to do that? It's a celebration of a third species, as Wittig calls us.

And I mean, she was another form of life. She wore ripped jeans, which looked like they'd been painted on. And she sang this song, "I Want Your Sex," like no man could every sing to women. I mean, when a man says that to a woman, you know what he means. If he's old-fashioned, it means he wants to stick it in. If he's up on all the latest discoveries about women's bodies, it means he wants to show off what he's learned. But when this woman looked at me and sang, "I want your sex," I knew what she meant and it had to do with celebrating me, and it didn't have anything to do with that other shit.

And that's why I got up and went backstage so quick. I didn't want to let the moment pass.

I had to wade through a lineup of drag queens backstage. This was a lesbian/gay prom night, and most of the entertainers were the queens. In fact, Rusty was the only woman who had the nerve to appear in male drag and do a number.

I found her dressing room. She was in it, flushed with excitement and covered with sweat. She looked pleased to see me. I told her that I loved her act. She kept being flushed and distracted, and thanking me. She was taking off her makeup. I don't think she was getting the message.

I kicked the door closed, and stood up. I decided to take a blunt approach. "Look, Rusty, did you mean what you said when you sang, 'I want your sex,' because I sure as hell want yours."

She stopped what she was doing. Maybe that was a little too blunt, I thought. Now, I'm embarrassed. She's considering the offer. Fortunately, she didn't have to think long. I mean, I'm older

than she is, but not bad looking. In fact, there's days when I think I'm kind of too skinny, or a little too intense, but that's only when it's rained all day.

"You wanna go somewhere?" she asks me.

"Yeah."

"I've got my truck."

"I just live a few blocks from here."

"Okay, let's do that."

"Can you leave now?"

"Well, I'm on again in an hour and a half, if that's enough time for you."

"Sure." I smile. I'll probably come when she takes my clothes off. Or when I take hers off.

Well, I won't bore you with the details. We go to my studio apartment. I draw all the drapes. I mean, an hour and a half and we've already lost fifteen minutes of it. Not a time to be coy. I don't have a real bed, so I fold down the foam sofa.

"After you." I gesture to the foam. Rusty ignores the gesture. Instead she moves close to me and positions one of her legs between mine. Not aggressively. Just efficiently. And then she unbuttons the one button on my jacket and slides it off my shoulders. I realize the light's still on. I reach out a hand to turn it off.

"Don't. I like to see," she says.

"Believe it or not," I tell her, "I'm shy."

She laughs. I turn out the light. She's pressing her thigh into my clit. It reminds me of when I was a little girl and I would straddle the arms of the sofa to play horsey, and ride back and forth on my magic spot. Rusty's hands are gently stroking the skin on my upper arms, almost thoughtfully. I appreciate that she doesn't just go for my breasts right off.

And then very slowly she leans in and kisses me. Her hands are touching my upper arms so lightly I can barely feel them. But she's holding me just the same. And she kisses as slow and as light as she touches. I think my heart's going to stop. I feel her lips on my neck.

Catching my breath, I reach my hands around her waist, touching her as gently as she touches me. I feel the folds of her tee shirt above the jeans. I caress the fabric so lightly, I'm not even

touching her body, but I can feel her respond. Her thigh is telegraphing to my clit. And we stand like that for a minute. And then she begins to take off my shirt. It comes off over my head, so she pushes it gently up over my breasts, careful not to touch them. I raise my arms and she pulls it off over my head.

Now I feel very vulnerable. I'm glad it's dark. She reaches a hand towards my breast. I catch it. "Take yours off, too." She hesitates for just a second, and then strips off her tee shirt. She waits for me to touch her. I appreciate that. She must understand some things. Maybe they were done to her too.

I take my hand and center the palm over her nipple. Then very slowly I press it towards her breast until my hand is cradling her tender breast, as if it were a baby bird. I can feel her moan. She lets me stroke her breast, until I lower my face to lick her breast, to pull on the nipple with my lips, to brush my cheek against her lovely skin.

As I bend to her, she spreads her fingers across my back, gently feeling and holding at the same time. I kiss my way softly to her mouth. We kiss a little deeper now. And she touches my breasts while we kiss.

"Let's lie down," she says pulling back from me, but taking my hands.

I don't say anything. I can't. We sink to the bed. Rusty lies to the side and looks at me. It's dark, but I can feel her looking at me, and I like it. The bed is always a hard part for me.

"We can just do this if you want to," she says. "I'm happy."

I take her hand and hold it to me face. I'm happy too.

With her other hand, she reaches over to stroke my arm. She talks about the sky. It's a clear night, and the stars are out. I move very close to her. I feel her turn towards me. I can feel her breasts against my arm.

"Would you like to kiss again?" she asks. I'm smiling in the dark. I turn and kiss her. She keeps it very slow. I'm the one who pushes for more. I move my face over her. She's lying back looking at me now. I look at her too, for a long time. And then we kiss again.

"May I kiss your breasts?" she asks. I move over her so that her mouth can reach them. Rusty's tongue is like some tender brush, painting love on my nipples. I feel her passion, but I feel

her restraining it. Because she knows I'm scared. Because there's nothing more important than being there for your partner. I like this woman. I'm impressed. I take her hands while she sucks my breasts. I pull her hands over her head and then I kiss her again. I kiss her with all the passion I can see she's trying to control. She lets me set the pace for us.

I sit back and put my hands on her jeans. She settles her hips and folds her arms behind her head. I smile again and unbutton her jeans. She lifts her hips so I can slide her clothes down. Her public hair is red. It's a quality you can almost see in the dark. When I get her jeans down to the middle of her thigh I stop and look at her. And then lightly, I brush my fingers through her public hair. Getting acquainted. I smile at her. She's watching me.

My finger finds her clit and I trace around it so lightly she has to press her hips up to meet my finger. I bend over and kiss her hair lightly. I nuzzle my nose up against her clit, and I hear her take a breath, her body tense. She tries to open her legs for me, but she can't because her pants are still around her thighs. I press my tongue between her thighs, and I taste how wet and salty she is. I feel her hands touching my head. She runs her fingers through my hair as she raises her pubis to my tongue.

Suddenly she's sitting up. She says, "I have to take my clothes off. I want you to really eat me." I'm flattered. She strips off her pants and wraps her legs around my body. We hold each other in a tight embrace. "Take off your pants," she whispers. "Or let me take them off."

"You can undo them, but I want to take them off," I tell her. She says all the right things.

Rusty rolls me gently over. She looks at me again. We smile. She moves her hand over my clit. I can feel the warmth of her hand even through the denim. And then suddenly she slides herself down between my legs. She's licking me and nudging me through my jeans. I laugh. "Oh, did I forget something?" she asks. I like this woman. I really like this woman.

With her cheek lying against my hip, to the side of the zipper, she opens the top snap and begins to pull the zipper down so slowly it moves over one set of metal teeth at a time. She acts like this is the most exciting part of the evening, like we have all night. I'm self-conscious. I laugh and I reach down to unzip them

myself. She brushes my hand away and continues to undo the pants one millimeter at a time. I give up and lie back, smiling at the ceiling. This woman is taking me somewhere I don't even understand, but I want to go. Oh, do I want to go. Finally the zipper reaches the bottom. "You got any more zippers anywhere?"

"No. That's it." I sit up and she rolls to my side again. I take off my pants quickly, self-consciously. I sit self-consciously, cross-legged. Rusty rolls away from me. She hooks her arms behind her head again, letting me know they're not going anywhere in my direction. She starts to talk about constellations. She wants to rename them. It doesn't help. I'm sitting cross-legged. Scared.

"You know, this is just fine," Rusty says. I start to cry. Fortunately she can't see that's what I'm doing. "You're here and I'm here and we're lying here and we can see the stars, and I can't think of anything I'd like to do more."

"I thought you wanted me to eat you," I say, trying to sound funny about it.

"That was before I got to play with your zipper. Now, my life is complete. I've known perfect bliss."

"You're a liar."

"Well, actually, you're right. I'd like to hold your hand. I know we just met, but could I?"

I laugh and I give her my hand. I appreciate what she's doing.

She holds it just for a minute. Then she holds it against her face, the way I held hers earlier. And I can feel her pressing her lips against it. I get scared, and at that very second she stops.

"Carolyn, if you want to talk about anything, I'm here, you know."

"No. There's nothing to talk about. I just get scared."

"So do I."

"Guess we ought to go find other people who aren't then."

"No," she says. "No." And she takes my hand up to her face again and holds it very still. I can feel her breath on the back of my hand. I feel frozen in time.

"Guess you need to be getting back to do the second set."

"Not yet."

"I don't think I can do anything else."

"That was plenty for me."

"Oh, sure."

There's nothing more to say. I feel miserable. And older and skinny, and it hasn't even rained all day. In a minute she's going to get up and put her clothes back on, and I'll look somewhere else while she does, and then we'll say some stupid things and then she'll leave, and then as soon as she gets out the door, she's going to shake her head and start thinking of how she's going to describe me so that people will laugh when she tells this story about her big groupie.

She lets go of my hand. I look away. I can hear her putting her pants on. I wish I knew what I was doing, or who I was. At least I don't fake it anymore.

She hands me my shirt. I reach out for it, not looking at her.

"Wait." She takes it back. "Let me dress you."

"That's stupid. It's easier for me."

"No, I mean it. I want to."

I'm still looking away from her. I shrug. She takes my hand and threads it through one sleeve, and then she repeats it with the other. She's so careful and so serious about this, I start to smile. And then she lifts my arms and pulls the shirt down over my head.

"May I put your pants back on, too?" I turn my face away again, but I'm smiling. This woman is really something else.

She's taken the underwear out of the mashed up jeans. She threads my feet through as if they were made out of something that would break. And then she begins to slide my underwear up my legs. She has a look of concentration like she was figuring out the wiring on the back of a stereo or something. I start to laugh. She adjusts them over my hips.

"You know, you're really beautiful." She says it offhand, the way she made the remark about renaming the constellations.

I don't have to say anything, because she's already back at the end of the bed straightening out my jeans.

"Those are going to be harder," I tell her.

"Not harder," she says. "Just slower." She pauses for a second. "There's a big difference." She throws that one away, too, so I don't have to react to it. I don't know what to say. This woman is walking me through my nightmares.

She's right. The jeans are slower. But not harder. I begin to relax. She gets them up over my thighs.

"Would you mind if I kissed your clit good night before I tuck her in?" I laugh. She's so serious. "It's okay?"

"Yeah. I guess."

Rusty bends over me. She traces some light patterns with her nose on my thighs. And then she opens her mouth wide and moves it close up against my whole vulva, underwear and all, and she starts breathing out gently into the fabric. I feel a rush of warm air spreading all over my genitals. It just keeps getting warmer and warmer. I laugh. And then she kisses me on the clit, real quick, the way a kid would kiss her great aunt's cheek, if her mother told her she had to. And then she pulls my jeans up. And she zips them up and snaps them together.

"A job well done," I say.

"Anytime," she says.

"You mean that?" I ask.

"Yeah, I mean that. I'll even take them off if you want me to. But putting them on is really my thing. Not too many people specialize in that."

"Rusty, thank you."

"Thank you."

I put my arms around her. She holds me tight, but with all that gentleness. I don't know how she does that, but it's perfect. I tell her.

She takes my face in her hands and kisses me again. It's very different from the kiss a half hour ago. It's light years different. It's the kind of a kiss when you've been on a dangerous mission together, and you didn't know if you'd both make it back again, but here you are, and you did make it together, and you're both so glad.

She stands up and pulls me up with her. "Let's go." She's holding my hand and opening the door. I hadn't been planning on going back with her, but it suddenly seems like the most natural thing in the world. I grab my jacket and we're on our way.

Lisa Marie Bronson

Untitled

To Vetti and Maria

I wanna meet some witch women
funky with braids and dreads
smelling of patchouli and pussy
and not afraid to sweat

I want to meet some glittering jewel-women
shining fine-like and warm with precious oils
scented woods are the walls of their chambers

I wanna meet some pretty women
wrapped in silk and many trinkets
bells on their ankles and toes

I need to meet some nappy-haired musicloving women
bending knee-deep, howling the blues out from their soul
I wanna meet some women like the woman
I need to be.

Dangerous Dancing

When all my friends were taking evening classes in plumbing, electrics or karate, I decided to learn bellydancing.

I needed the exercise. Felt like my body was just some excess baggage I dragged behind me. But I refused to do anything boring, butch and respectable like weight-training. Just the thought of spending an afternoon in a gym (with my habits it wouldn't be the morning) pushing and pulling a load of heavy metal objects is enough to put me off the idea of physical fitness for life. I tried swimming, but in the end that just meant laying in the sun at the women's pond, reading, gossiping and watching all the other naked women do the same things.

At the first class we went through the old go around in a circle and say why we're here routine. A woman with long black hair and a graceful wide-hipped body spoke first. Her husband likes to watch Arabic dancing and would like her to be able to do it for him.

Everyone except me laughed in complicity. Other women said they wanted to lose weight. The woman with the long black hair added that she needs to lose a lot of weight, and didn't pay any notice when everyone rushed to assure her she was gorgeous the way she was.

My turn. I wondered about making a quick trip to the loo to get out of it. This sort of thing always embarrassed me. But everyone was looking at me.

"Well, I need the exercise. I always liked the music, and I sort of like watching it." I wondered to myself if that sounded weird ... after all, that woman's *husband* liked watching it!

But it's different ... I thought about the time I saw live Arabic dancing in a cabaret at a women's club, several years ago when I was first coming out. The dancer first explained a little about the dance; how Westerners degraded it into a bump and grind, tits n' bum act without understanding the meaning and beauty of the

dance. She got interested in it herself because it originally was a dance that women performed for each other.

I was so taken with the woman's dancing I wanted to talk to her afterward. It took me awhile to find her. Out of costume she was hard to recognize; her long hair was stuck up in a beret, she wore baggy jeans with a baseball jacket and strode around with hardly a hint of a swing to her hips or anything else.

When I tried talking to her she was caught up in an argument with a couple of women about whether dancing was politically correct or not and I couldn't get a word in edgewise. In fact, my ex recently told me she thought my interest in Arabic dancing highly suspect. But I couldn't be bothered worrying about what my ex-lover thought once the warm-up exercises began.

At the end of the class my muscles were aching, but as I walked out of the building my whole body felt lighter, and I couldn't keep my hips from swinging with a will of their own. Very conveniently, a women's disco went on the same night and I went straight there so my hips could move as much as they wanted.

Well into the term a new woman called Theresa joins the class. Round-faced, freckled, with bushy pink hair and a big smile, there is something about her that makes me feel like smiling just as big.

Since the whole idea of the class is swinging our thing, I can't help noticing her body. When she leans forward doing those wide hip-circles, I wonder at the large mysterious movements beneath her loose t-shirt, the plump shoulder and arms. Her legs are surprisingly muscular for such a soft, fleshy body. I see her as a relaxed, slow-moving woman who can spring into action when she wants to.

We're doing this movement called "figure 8." A flowing movement of the hips up and down, side to side. As if you're drawing a figure 8 with them. As I try and do mine slow and sensuous as possible, I look at her and smile. But I get embarrassed and make like I'm watching the tutor instead. I feel like a right prat when I try to flirt!

"Rachel, keep your feet flat so you can emphasize the downward movement," the tutor suggests.

Theresa is cheating too by lifting her feet up. Yes, I can see it isn't as smooth when it's done that way. But what do I care? To me she's the best dancer in the class.

I'm going to ask Theresa if she wants to go to the disco after the next class. Or maybe that's going too fast ... first suggest a cafe for something to eat, all that exercise really works up an appetite. Then, if things go OK I'll say I'm meeting some friends at the disco and would she like to come.

But I don't know even if she's a dyke or not. Maybe she's learning Arabic dancing so she can entertain her boyfriend?

Well, maybe we can just be friends. I hope I can think of interesting things to say to her in the cafe if she does come.

The tutor points at a woman called Judy. Judy's an aspiring model. She talks a lot about the special costume that's being made for her in Turkey and how she's going to make it big in the clubs. She and the woman with the long black hair hang around together, compare tummy sizes and figure 8's.

Judy starts going through her paces. The tutor laughs: "Very good, Judy. But you look so bored! Look up and smile, just as if you're performing!"

Judy flicks her long blonde fringe from her face. "I'll smile when I have a nice audience to smile at!"

"Huh? Who says we're not a nice audience? You couldn't get a nicer audience than us," a clear voice piped up. It was Theresa. I laugh and look at her, not feeling so embarrassed when I smile.

So now we're all dancing in a circle. We'd been doing "Swerves" which are sort of like the twist. "Pretend you're hitting a drum with your hip as you step forward!" the tutor exhorts. I swerve along, watching myself in the mirror on the other side of the room. Since it's a fairly basic — if side-splitting — movement I'm not doing too badly. I'm so intent watching myself that I swerve into Theresa ahead of me, my right hip seemed to give her a good chop in the bum. Shit, this isn't going to endear me to her, is it? "Oh, I'm sorry ... you OK?"

"Oh, fine. Don't worry." She patted her bum. "There's enough there to absorb any blow!"

Changing directions, we try the Egyptian walks. I'm very bad with the Egyptian walk. Just trying to keep the beat as I step down

with one hip then the other flung, and I can never get it right where the wiggle goes in between the steps.

After a while I stop and try to get in with the beat again. Theresa crashes into me from behind, tits first. We apologize at the same time. Though it's really my fault for stopping.

Because I'm so hopeless at keeping the beat on the Egyptian walk, it happens again though not as drastic. Every time I falter I feel her brush against me. On purpose? I turn round to smile instead of saying I'm sorry for being such a clutz, but I see she's busy watching the tutor.

I start looking at the clock now. Sometimes the end of the class is just a matter of sheer endurance, especially if we've been learning new movements.

"Now, since this has been a very strenuous class today, we should do a little massage before we go. Could you get into twos?" I make sure I'm partnered with Theresa, trying not to be too obvious about it.

Theresa leans forward first while I knead along her back. Up and down, feeling as much of her skin as I can beneath her shirt. It feels lovely. She arches her back, throws back her head so she gazes at me slightly upside-down.

"Ah, that feels good. Last week I was a bundle of aches and pains."

"Theresa, it's much more effective if you just lean on your partner's knee," the tutor interrupts. "Just relax your muscles, you'll find your head leaning forward."

I place my hands on that soft area between the neck and the shoulders. But all the kneading I'm supposed to be doing turns into caresses. I move my fingers in circular motions in the crook of her neck and past. I could just keep on doing what I'm doing, all over ...

I get jarred out of my daze when I realize everyone's getting dressed and leaving. Theresa is still sitting there with her eyes half closed like a cat. "You still at it?" asks the tutor laughing. "And you, Rachel, haven't even had your turn for a massage!"

And I get dressed fast as I can, not bothering to get the seams on my tights straight. I'm desperate to get all my numerous layers back on before she leaves. Getting dressed is a much simpler

affair for her. She's already out the door while I'm struggling with my second jumper.

I catch up though, trying not to seem too obvious. "You enjoy the class?" I ask.

She says she enjoyed it though it was nacking. "Especially since I come from West London. I take a bus at my end, the tube, and another bus to come here. Then I've got to rush back to my waitressing job. And I still have to get home to feed my cats before then!"

As we get closer to my favourite cafe we talk about cats. Seems we both love cats. She tells me she likes the way they dive under her blankets and cuddle up to her in bed.

I'm interested in this fact but I realize I better suggest a cuppa before it's too late. "Oh," I interrupt, "I'm going to the cafe," pointing to the Tasty-Bite cafe over the road.

"I'd better catch my bus. See ya next week."

Sounds like she only shares her bed with her cats. Perhaps there's some hope in that! Perhaps next week I can try and chat to her a little more while she runs for her bus, or perhaps I can find out which restaurant she works in, then wander in one evening just by coincidence. I look forward to the next class.

But Theresa never turns up again. I finally ask the tutor if she knows what happened to her. She says that Theresa had asked her about Arabic dancing classes in West London, and decided to switch to one of them.

I carry on with the classes. After class, I go to the women's disco where I usually meet up with my friends. But the disco is getting boring lately, more of a habit than a pleasure. Sometimes this place is packed, but tonight it's a dismal, plush and velvet cavern in its emptiness. A few dancing; and a few women, myself included, sitting glumly at the tables. I don't plan to stay longer than my half pint lasts.

Shit, sometimes I wonder. Being a dyke was supposed to be fun, remember? But tonight it's a bore.

It's strange the way a varied group of women manages to look the same. Slicked back hair with a wedge in the back, or one of those modified pudding bowl do's from last year. Trousers with creases, tailored blouses, or track suit bottoms for the more casual

look. Nothing too bright, disorderly or *soft* seems acceptable here. Women arrange themselves carefully at the bar, looking at each other or nothing at all with half-closed eyes. Even the ones talking or dancing look like they've got their movements well-rehearsed.

Sometimes I think people who think they're too cool for words should be boiled in oil. Why do they bother anyway, when it's so deadly dull? The sort of woman who catches my eye is the one who sticks out like a sore thumb. Someone so uncool she's hot!

Maybe there'll be someone I know in the other bar.

This room is always full of women hiding under tables to avoid their ex-lovers. Or trying to ignore their ex-lovers ignoring them. Fortunately my ex-lover lives in another city so I don't have to look at her ugly mug. Of course I considered her mug to be the most gorgeous mug on earth several months ago, but never mind about that.

I try and case the joint without being too obvious about it, which is difficult being short-sighted. I take a long look at the corner where I usually sit with my friends ... maybe some of the gang might've turned up after all.

Women at that table stare when I sidle near to get a look. Looks like I'll be gang-less tonight after all.

I decide to have another half pint because I'll sleep better when I go home.

Back in the other room I station myself in a corner behind a pillar where I'll be unobtrusive and left alone by the "come on your own?" questioners. It's not that I'm not happy to talk to new people. I appreciate it if a stranger says "hello" ... I'm too shy to do it myself! But what's that got to do with who or what I came with? I'm old enough to walk around the corner — get on the tube even! — on my own.

"Go on! Don't say hello to me then!" Who ...

"Theresa, from Arabic Dancing."

Her deeply pink hair shows like a beacon under the strobe lights, almost but not quite matched by her long clingy stretchy pink skirt. When she sits down and puts her feet up on the chair next to me her skirt rides up and I notice her wooly tights have holes in them, revealing fishnets underneath. They look like the

same tights she used to wear to class, plus a few extra holes. Her hair is even bushier since the last time I saw her, lifted higher off the face and barely restrained by a stripey headband. Shiny black roots flash in the pink mass.

Very uncool. This woman definitely sticks out like a sore thumb.

I wonder if she came on her own? But I won't ask.

She supplies the information. "I was supposed to meet a friend here, but I'm very late and I think she might've just pissed off in disgust. Felt kind of funny being here on my own. I had to hide in the toilet for a while. I don't go to places like this too often. Dunno if I like it. Everyone here's so *cool* and I don't feel like I fit in."

"Aw, don't worry about it. You're probably the most interesting of the lot here anyway."

I could shove my DM down my throat for that one. Fuck, she'll think I'm chatting her up. Watch it, now she'll be saying 'oh I gotta go catch a bus so I can go to work' even though it's 1:00 AM ... and disappear. For all I know she might be straight. By "places like this" she might've meant women-only discos.

But she just sort of smiles and suggests dancing. I agreed, though the music was really boring, the sort of thing you just end up bending your knees to and talking about the weather.

"You still do Arabic dancing?" she asks.

"Yeah, every week. Then I come here."

"I went to another class in Shepherd's Bush, but I haven't been too regular about it. I still love the dancing though and I wish I could do it. Sometimes when I'm just dancing at a party of something, I start wanting to try out some of the movements. It'd go alright with the reggae, I reckon."

"I do if I'm pissed enough. But if I'm not pissed, I get embarrassed."

"Eh, speaking of which, I brought a little bottle with me." We go back to our corner, and she produces a bottle from her bag. "A friend brought it back from Portugal. It's called firewater. 50% alcohol." I take a whiff of the stuff and feel light-headed already.

While I'm getting our glasses of orange juice at the bar a slow sinuous reggae tune comes on. Have to get that firewater down, quick!

This is much better. Without thinking about it, I try a figure 8. Sway the hip up, then down. Theresa grins and does the same, then frowns. "It doesn't feel right, still. I know, we need our scarves!" When the class started the teacher said that the only mandatory part of the costume was a scarf around the hips, it made both you and the audience more aware of what you were doing with them.

She disappears and comes back with both our wooly scarves. I look doubtfully at my red and black checked scarf, "it's not really the right kind though."

"Who cares. Here, I'll do it for you." She carefully ties it round my hips, taking great care as she knots it, smooths it with her hand from hip to hip. Then briskly puts her own on.

I move my hips slowly to the reggae, thinking about how her hand felt across my stomach. Somehow I was able to feel the light touch of her fingers even through my layers of winter clothing. I finally stop looking down (where my thoughts seem to be) and look at Theresa. She's swaying gently with a dreamy smile on her face, watching me. Drawing closer, she says, "Ah yes, you have improved!" pretending to be the tutor.

All I can think of doing to the next song is a shimmy. A shimmy starts at the knee to shake what's above it. There's all sorts of shimmies you can do — large voluptuous shakes to minute little tremors. You can add them to all the other movements too, but I'm not good enough to do that.

I sometimes used to feel turned on doing them, with the feeling of the air going up my cotton skirt and my thighs slapping together.

It feels the same as I do it now, except my heavy tights make my thighs rub and slither instead of slap. We start shimmying all over the place. One minute on opposite sides of the room, then close together again. Theresa's scarf falls off. I find it and try putting it back on her, but her jumper has got all bunched up and bulky.

"I might as well take that jumper off, I'm getting sort of hot anyway," she suggests.

Back in our corner I take both of mine off. The air on my sweaty skin is a sweet sort of shock as I emerge freed of my layers of wool.

Theresa is still undoing the buttons on the cardy underneath. I wish she'd hurry up. "Where'd my scarf go?" she mutters. "I'm starting to lose track of things."

I find it under the pile of all our coats and jumpers. As I tie it round for her in the back, she finally gets rid of her cardy. I start thinking about stroking my hand up the valley made by her backbone, exposed by her too short t-shirt. What it would be like to keep stroking up that valley, between her shoulders, to the front ... What would it have been that time we were doing that massaging in class, if the classroom had just disappeared and we were somewhere really comfy and it just went on and on?

I have a lump in my throat where my heart is beating from imagining. I have to dance more, or touch her more, or both and everything. Because I can't really speak I pull her back to the dancing, with a brief stop at the DJ booth to croak out a request for more reggae.

But the DJ — bless her! — does even better. She puts on this Middle Eastern disco record that's really some sort of modern "belly-dance" music.

We go wild doing hip circles, a movement like doing the hula-hoop. In the big ones you're either bending forward or arching backward as you do your circle. We add shakes and figure 8's and a few things invented on the spot. I know for the first time what my dancing is for, besides being an alternative to press-ups. The sensual strength of moving and flowing to this music, and the delight of watching and responding to her movements. She radiates a calm sensual ease in the way she dances; in the slow lift and drop of a hip, a shake of a bare shoulder where the t-shirt slid down, lazy inviting hula hoop circles coming closer. I love the way her flesh ripples when she shakes, the movement of her breasts as she leans forward and back, and the smiling warmth shining in her face that I feel almost as a physical touch.

We circle around each other, closer and closer, hips and thighs and bums brushing. First time I feel just the fabric of her skirt, then the warm impact of her body underneath. Again and I feel a steady returning pressure from her, and a shake rippling against me. What could be chance brushings of hip against hip or thigh against thigh become sustained, until there is no parting at all. Just surrounded with the curve of her stomach, her breasts

against mine, and her arms around me. My face against the back of her neck, veiled by a soft fuzz of hair that has escaped the headband.

As the dance floor gets more crowded and we get bumped into several times, we back laughing and stumbling into the corner where we left our stuff. "Alright, now we can do our shimmies undisturbed," I say, and kiss her.

"Shimmies it is then!" Standing close, we softly rub and shake against each other. I draw my hand along the broad line of her inner thigh, and up along the round undercurve of her breast over the t-shirt fabric sticking to her skin. Lusciously we wiggle against each other again, mouths connecting, sucking, exploring, I touch her where and whenever our movements allow the space between our bodies. Her hands surprise me, as they discreetly press and stroke; here, and there. Our delicious dancing goes on and on.

Until I start feeling like everything in me is liquid and soft, like I don't have any bones left. I'm not sure if I can stand up anymore. I have to wrap myself around her to keep from collapsing. For a while we hardly move at all, just pressing together in time to the music. Such small movements, that set off such tremendous waves in me. Wondering, I touch the plump curve of Theresa's cheek, listen to the sighs and laughs that echo my own.

I don't think either of us can keep on our feet anymore. I am feeling so wobbly I lean against the wall and she leans against me. I puts her hands down the back of my skirt, rhythmically moves them up and down my bum and the backs of my thighs. It's a good thing I didn't wear my too-tight mini-skirt tonight, or she wouldn't have been able to get her little finger past the waistband! I was pissed off when I found I couldn't fit into it anymore but it's worked out for the best. And this is the best I've felt for a long time as I lean back held by the firm strokings of her hands, gripping her leg between mine.

I hug her tight and gather her against me. We are sort of doing little hip circles, clinging together. Shaking, sliding, entwined, though I suppose it just looks like we're dancing. Her sighs and shudders become my own pleasure. I look at her and wonder who she is, what brought her to being with me this way.

Softly buffeted and kneaded-hands, breasts, thighs between

them I don't know the difference anymore. I am turning into water, yet I am all flesh and can think only of hers. So much softness I'd forgotten I'd had moving and yearning against and with her. I feel a hand clapping inside me, turning into a pleasure opening between my legs that blows me inside out and almost makes me cry.

I can't stand up anymore, even slumping against the wall. I flop down in the nearest chair and bring her with me. I hold her round the waist, my face resting against her back. I didn't even expect to see her again unless I went round looking for the restaurant where she worked.

Now it scares me though I don't know why. I put my hand up her skirt and stroke her thigh, as I wonder why I should feel scared when it's so pleasurable.

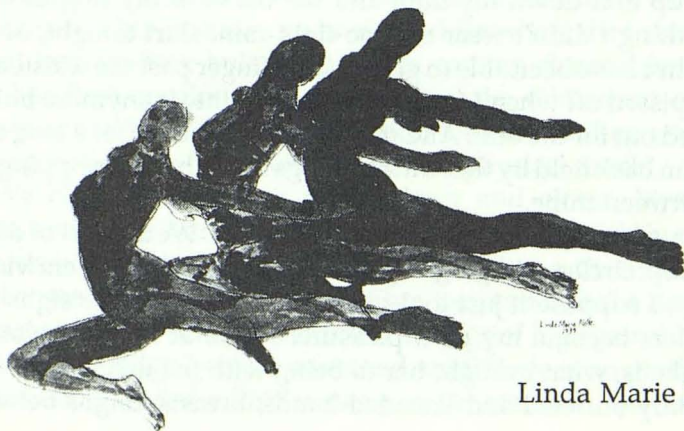
"Alright?" she asks, when my strokes reach further up where the fabric of her wooly tights feels much warmer and slightly damp. Her smile is open, friendly, and mischievous, nothing to be frightened of.

"Alright."

She strokes my hair. "We haven't finished." What else could she have in mind?

"You remember, after so much strenuous exercise, it's best to have a massage. I still owe you one, don't I?"

"Oh that!" I have to hug her. "Sure, let's have a massage. But I think we better go to my place for that."

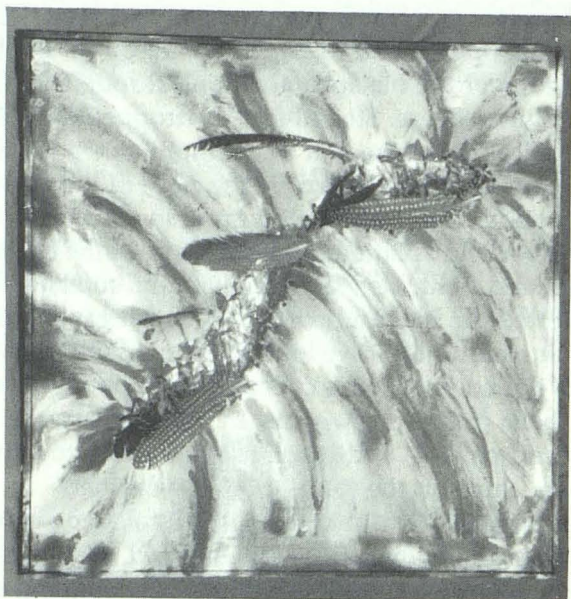


Linda Marie Nolte

The Jungle of My Body

When I died you stuffed me in the refrigerator and left for vacation. First the milk soured. Then the mushroom slime oozed from the tear in the plastic bag into the vegetable bin where I lay rotting. In the cool dark a shriveled carrot's tiny white roots nudged against me, into me, its surrogate earth mother, and the sound of its crown sprouting stirred a turnip into following suit, and a few sweet potatoes began to throb and soon their vines cracked open the drawer, twined up out of the bin and slipped over the black bananas and through the holes of moldy swiss cheese. Steadily seeds dropped from the shriveled slice of watermelon down into its own juice on the bottom shelf and slid over the edge of the opened bin of my body. One watermelon grew so fat it shoved open the door and splattered on the floor. In the blast of warmth and light, vegetable seeds found me and fruit pits converted me into an orchard. The lush green rushed over the linoleum, the stove and the sink, over the bottles and cups, the bowl of rocks collected from national parks and the shells from the Bahamas, into the silverware and pots and pans — two zucchini vines raced toward the stale potato chips on the top shelf of the cabinet; popcorn sprouted from under the burners, snap beans dripped from the faucet, avocados dangled from the ceiling, it was growing hot and humid when you entered and my long tendrils coiled around your body. But you broke away, returning with a machete and a large garbage bag. But I kept growing and growing — I'd reached the dining room; one cucumber had claimed the TV. Still you hacked away and I bled the color of water, I suffered with only the sound of wilting leaves, but I kept growing,

I forced a clove of garlic in your ear, a plum pit in your navel. Everywhere I planted into you, I rooted in the dirt under your fingernails, I sucked the juices of your eyeballs, and you struggled in vain, you yelled and yelled until a grapefruit swelled in your mouth. But now you've settled down, you're home again for good, and though things will never be quite the same, like I always say, at least we're together.



*Thief! how did you crawl into, crawl down alone into the death
I wanted so badly and for so long, ...*

Anne Sexton from the poem "Sylvia's Death."

mixed media, 2'x2', 1987

b. ann

Anniversary Poem

I want to wake you slowly,
with my head on your pillow as usual.
I go out while you sleep,
dig up two of the grape hyacinths,
brush off most of the dirt,
bring them to bed with the wetness still on them.
But you hear me come in.
Don't open your eyes yet, I say.
I want you to tell me what these are like
without opening your eyes.
Okay, you say, reaching out.
Soft...smooth...wet. You smile
Petals curly, with rounded edges.
One bunch just fits in my hand.
Fragrance almost too strong,
almost too sweet, but wonderful.
I can put my little finger in the center of a flower
and it seems to close around it and hang on...
I'm getting all wet from this hyacinth, you say.
Never mind, I say, go on.
You bury your face in the flowers and nip one.
Well, they taste like...like something strong,
you say. I think they taste like beets.
Beets! I say. Beets! Beets aren't very romantic!
I can't help it, you say, that's what they taste like.
Young beets, though. Tiny ones. Just picked.
I think you're supposed to eat them with sour cream,
you say. You laugh.
Huh! I say. That's not so funny! Now it's my turn!
HMMMM. It's like a bunch of things mixed together,
I say...this may take me awhile.

You groan.

Serves you right, I say.

Finally I decide the hyacinths taste like asparagus.

Asparagus! you say. That's not romantic either!

I know, I say, but I've sworn to be honest
in this as in everything.

We kiss each other's hyacinths as a pledge of honesty.

Go on, I say, what else?

I can put my tongue in the center of this flower,
you say, and it seems to hold on.

I can run my tongue all the way down the stem
and it feels like the hyacinth is getting bigger.

Mine too, I say. Definitely...

when you taste them this way they seem bigger.


And then suddenly we are kissing each other
like women who have been starving for centuries
who suddenly come upon the most delicious thing

they've ever seen or smelled or touched or tasted,

and we eat each other's hyacinths for hours

until we're both full

and we burst.

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Up Close

We've come back, darling, finally.

The hotelkeepers think us quaint, spinsterish, until our coffee grounds stop the toilet; until they smell gin on our breath before dinner; until they find our beds pushed together. Then, I believe, we become to them sin ridden hags.



They arrange a lobster bake for all the guests, for the next sunny day. Every day here is sunny. We wonder why they make this provision, what cataclysm they are counting on. They ask everyone, and so must ask us. We dare not ask how much will be added on to our bill for this adventure.

On the island we are told to explore while the lobsters bake. We find a small waterfall and wade in its pool. We pull off our clothes discreetly, behind dense trees, though we are wearing our old lady bathing suits underneath. We exhibit flabby, flagging arms, and between our wrinkled thighs a few grey tendrils gently curl out around the edges of our suits. Is this what they are afraid of? (They keep their young girls away from us. "Rosalie," they call, "Jocelyn, come play on the beach.")

We whoop and splash, and give in, doing wonderful, terrible things with our bodies, our hands, together under the dense trees.

He has to make two trips to get everyone back to the mainland. On his return to the island for the two of us (everyone else fit in the first boat) he runs out of gas and drifts for hours. Except for the cold, we do not mind. They took the provisions back in the first boat.

Early morning, having returned for us again, in a sailboat that first grounded itself on a ledge off the island, he shows us seals bobbing in the water. Up close, we discover them to be logheads.



Long, dusty walks. The bicycles have flat tires when we want to use them.

Hitchhiking eight miles to town for a soda. Anyone from the village (who hasn't been told about us) will pick up two old women on the road.

We came here to do nothing and are struggling doing it.

Like an oil slick, the sun-glinted coffee ripples against the edge of the styrafoam. The cup is too hot, the wind too cold. We brave the pier for one afternoon, watching small boys catch small fish with glee. Someone is happy here. We are pleased, rather than encouraged, by this.

The restaurant has been bought and sold many times. It is not as good as we remembered it, from twenty years ago. It is the only alternative to the hotel diningroom. All the other hotels and guest houses have been closed since we were here last. It seems colder, quieter, than when we were here last. So much has changed, we begin to doubt our memories of this place.



I meant to say, after the third day the maid stopped separating our beds when she made them up in the morning.



We have been here ten days. We have eleven days to go. We are not going to make it. We have not yet admitted that to each other. That would be failure, our not having a good time, not wanting to make something, anything, at this end of our lives, last.

Separately, secretly, we take the hotelkeeper aside and question him about the bill. He will charge us for our full intended stay, he says, and then reduce the bill by ten per cent: as much incentive for us to leave, apparently, as he can afford. He throws in a ride to the airport if we leave tomorrow, market day.

We approach each other, this decision, cautiously. It will be an act of faith to go home happy. It will require memory instantly fickle to truth: not insurmountable odds, it seems, given that we may have deceived ourselves about this place once before.



Before we drive away, a photograph is taken: we are all standing in front of the hotel, smiling. The children are before us, and our stained hands, for one brief second, are allowed to rest on their thin, unresisting shoulders.

Sharp Turning

(A Crown of Sonnets in 4 Parts)

1.

We joke when he finds out I'm in English; he tells me his first hard-wrought paper was returned with only this thin-lipped comment: It seems English is not your native tongue. I say, sometimes it's meant to be an initiation rite, designed to hone us down to size. Like this: learning a speech I shrink from, whose signs — calcification, biopsy — mean but one thing: cancer, a word I want to translate back into my own domestic tongue, bring to heel, render obedient, colloquial, tractable as any well-trained dog. I've got, I tell him, a deal: I'll do your write-ups, you make me well.

2.

"I'll do your write-ups, you make me well!"
I'm not alone here. *No one* wants to face the news I'm now compelled to tell over and over, that it's likely cancer's found a place in me to squat, to set up shop, to run its numbers racket — and all without my say: outrage against the self's belief that we're the sum total of these our faultless parts. The day after the tests I call relatives, friends to let them know, insist they tell me troubles of their own, and so hear how ankles sprain, toilets won't stop running, families bear down from all directions in this heat. O my friends, I too want the simplest ills, the easiest to mend.

3.

I too want the simplest ills, the easiest to mend,
not this disease that eats away my flesh,
invisible beneath the skin, while I pretend
to live. I turn to books for help, do stress
reduction twice a day, eat bran, run Ms. Pac-
Dyke* around my ducts to suck the cancer out
like hail-stones after summer storm. But the season's slack
and slow to turn. Something says to drag my sketchbook out
and stand undressed before the glass. I take my time,
shading every rounded place, and where the shadows fall,
till it takes shape beneath my hand. Mine,
this breast, and when I choose to claim her after all,
she starts to talk, to tell me what she sees: my life
at a crossroads: the still point, the sharpened knife.

4.

At crossroads, the still point, the sharpened knife,
the dream. I have taken a train to get here.
I stand now at the fork of the Y, my life
laid out as a choice before me, hands empty, fear
in my pockets instead of change. I thought,
when I first heard of Ostra Brama, the black
virgin who stands in Vilnius above the wrought-
iron city gate, that I would have to track
her down myself. Now she whose name means
Takes a Sharp Turn appears at my own
sharp turning, two roads crossed behind her. She leans
toward me, laughing, in one hand the blade grown
keen as eye of death, and in the other
her breast, undone and overflowing. Mother, I say. Mother.

* my own version of the imagery suggested by the Simontons for use in visualization exercises in which leukocytes are imagined at the site of the disease "gobbling up" the cells of the tumor.

Judith & Sabrina

Part One: The Finite

Judith drives an old car. It is known around town for its profusion of messages: Boycott, Support, Lesbians Ignite.... The roof is peeling; black strips flap in the wind. She has confessed to Sabrina that she cries while driving, brief anguished gushes controlled by the necessities of the road. Crying has become difficult otherwise.

Writing this story is difficult, so she asks me, brings me her notes. I held her hand in childhood, an invisible companion on the walk to school and back. Now I hold her words. She says the true story is Sabrina's. The one I tell is Judith's.

This is not a suspense story, at least not intentionally so. If I withhold information it is not to peak curiosity but rather that so much is withheld from Judith, particularly the future; also this present, which is so different from our predictions.

Sabrina has cancer. There are thousands of microscopic cells fighting against the survival of their host, heedless of the consequences for all involved. The dissolution of bones, the suffocation of lungs, these are possibilities, cathexia, pain, premature death.

Judith feels the words in her bones; walking down the sidewalk, sandals flapping against her heels, cement vibrating up tibia and femur: Can-cer Can-cer. Maybe repetition will convince her of its truth. When she speaks the word aloud, writes it on the page, she fears that she creates the future, brings her lover closer to what should be unnameable. So I write this for her. I tell others the parameters of disease. It is a betrayal: my hands upon a brick, their hands upon bricks, our conversations build fear and fatality around Sabrina.

This story will not have dialogue. Only random quotations. The protagonist's life is threatened by someone else's life-threatening disease.

Initial diagnosis (we are in the past, that first time when the colors fell off the wall, the world shifting by one degree on its axis

permanently) *ca rt b* carcinoma of the right breast. Acquiring the new language was easy. *Axillary node dissection* slice into the armpit, pull out some lymph nodes, check for CA. *Lumpectomy*. Judith and Sabrina become proficient in pronunciation and definition. Medical journals, textbooks, healthfood store flyers... the words form more than knowledge: they are access to the person behind the doctor. Jargon keeps the professionals shielded, so they use medical terms to impress on the doctors their common class, the possibility that they sit at similar restaurants not slurping their soup, that their children could grow up and marry each other. It works. "The advantages of this many *rads* versus that many, a study in the Journal suggests...." In this way the radiation treatment is tailored. Only because they present themselves as nice middle class girls despite their perversion, only because they use technical language to ask "whatever for?" when he wants to irradiate the armpit which no longer has potentially-cancer-carrying lymph nodes (those healthy glands now lying in some hospital dumpster awaiting what transformation before joining the sea?), the doctor agrees to reconsider the protocol. He will spare her the unnecessary radiation, but for the patients before and after them there is only standard treatment. Anger is so easy Judith could have written this herself.

Numerous and easy are the complaints. The nurses call Sabrina "Mrs." The doctors refer to Judith as "your friend" although Sabrina clearly prints her name under "spouse," having created the category "spouse" on their forms. I accept the challenge of writing that Sabrina is thrown away. Bombarded by x-rays to the breast, no one shields her thyroid, her abdomen. The radiation is to keep her from dying but to them she is as good as dead.

"I hope," one doctor says, "you're not planning to do anything foolish. Like change your diet. Or take vitamins."

"I have seen," says another, "the results of quackery: dehydrated patients on their deathbeds."

In their waitingrooms and on stretchers in the hall are some of their patients: hairless, emaciated, ulcerated. They can be found vomiting in the parking lot before and after treatments. When the cancer reoccurs, Sabrina and Judith go searching for quacks.

Writing about chemotherapy and jerks is something Judith could handle. She likes to articulate righteous anger and Sabrina is not yet a candidate for their poison. It is not being Sabrina, not being "the one," which allows Judith to turn aside from allopathic barbarisms. She only fears standing by, choking on sympathetic waves of nausea, while her beloved retches for twentyfour hours on the bathroom floor. It is Sabrina who must turn the collected knowledge into wisdom: what will keep *this* body alive?

She does research beyond Judith's capacity for research; she tracks down rumors and health practitioners and others who live with cancer. She does not leave rocks unturned. Mexico and New York are visited; Germany is a possibility. Judith falls behind; Sabrina feels deserted. Rising to the occasion means Judith must confront the telephone and talking to strangers; she doesn't think crisis is a good time for change. She wants to be more of who she is and not who she is needed to be. Especially she wants Sabrina not to need her to change. She wants her to go back and be well.

I feel kindly towards them both. They have been living with cancer for too long. They hope to live with it forever. For three years each has been trying to form a pearl around this illness, something which contains the irritation and turns beautiful in the process. Not spiritually beautiful. Not, they affirm to each other, beautiful with suffering or acceptance or love or whatever it is other people seem to be expecting of them, but only that they shouldn't fail themselves, shouldn't cease in some way to be.

Judith writes essays; she is sincere in her anger, even if it is easy, easier than grief. "Dutch Elms disease blights trees because trees are physical entities subject to illness, decay and death, not because they have an unresolved emotion from their saplinghood, not because the seed from which they rose contained karmic burdens which need the experience of Dutch Elms disease for atonement. Those who bear possibly mortal illness are assaulted with the fantasies of other people's fear as if by a cutting rain." Judith reads the Sunday paper to relax: the comics, Dear Abby, an article on nude beaches. The author says that the old people who are not ashamed to lie naked in the sun won't be found pushing walkers down supermarket aisles. As if the victims of arthritis, osteoporosis, strokes, car accidents hadn't loved their bodies well, could never be that author who so

enjoyed the view of what he assumed were "healthy bodies."

Sabrina's body has five scars: one from the lumpectomy, two from biopsies, one from the node dissection, one from the oophorectomy. Some of the lines are pale, others are still bright red. She's lost a little weight —anxiety, a change in diet, surgery; there is cancer in the skeleton which supports her, the lungs which process oxygen. Judith's hands no longer find flesh rolling into their palms; when Sabrina lays on her, she needn't shift beneath her weight. At the nude beach a washcloth is draped over the radiated breast because the sun too easily burns such flesh. At home Judith gently makes love: to her survival, this breast not the enemy of her beloved but her beloved, not only pain to her but here take it a light light touch on the nipple, find where it belongs again to your pleasure.

Things have changed. Their commitment, they used to joke, was "'til menopause." First cancer made such jokes insensitive; then the cancer spread and made the joke ironic. Sabrina has her ovaries removed in order to deplete her estrogen supply, to starve the malignant cells.

There is a decision to be made. Judith is the sparring partner, the pacing horse. She prepares for the main event by learning all she can. She thinks it over. She sleeps on it. There is a recurrent fear that Sabrina will return from the doctors weaker, closer to dying. Judith shies away from their invasions. Sabrina is frustrated by her predictability, can't she approach the decision with an open mind? Judith says she has taken years evolving a philosophy of healthcare, should she abandon it now? Every decision Sabrina faces, Judith enters into but she does not make the decision, never can, hasn't the right, gladly hasn't the responsibility. And yet it is her life. She cannot escape the ways Sabrina is her life. Her armpit aches for weeks after Sabrina's first surgery; her breast develops lumps. In grief, hair falls from her head. It would have turned color overnight, Judith laughs, but she's already gray. They must decide: estrogen depletion via daily medication or through surgery.

Time propels them forward, but I see the sequence of days stop, roll backwards, lurch on again. I have read about Judith's condition; the symptoms of grief include irritability, disorgan-

ized thoughts, memory loss... I can't find a description of visceral anguish.

Two years after the lumpectomy and radiation treatment Sabrina finds a tumor near her breast; it is benign. She finds another tumor, in her breast; it is malignant. For two years she has asked each doctor — the radiologist, the surgeon, the oncologists — about the spot on her forehead, the area which grows as if something were living in the skin or beneath it. They have sworn it was nothing, like the original cancer she carried from office to office for years being told "It is nothing." Because of this new cancer in her breast, she has a bone scan. It reveals two "hot" spots: her femur, and her skull, a small area of the forehead. "Very unusual," the doctors say.

And in her lungs. The x-ray shows it's in her lungs. How can this be real? Judith pounds the words into her own bones as she walks; pain makes everything true. It makes it possible to hold the reality of Sabrina strongly fleshed, breathing, and to cry. It makes thoughts of surgery unbearable: losing Sabrina to the hospital, the risks of anesthesia, the wound to an already-weak immune system....

They don't fight over the decision, just the process of deciding. Judith keeps saying "I favor pills but you seem to prefer the other and you have to go by what feels right for you." And Sabrina screams, "This is my life and death. I can't go by 'feelings.' I need to know!" They fight for one night. They can't afford to spend any more time being estranged than that; there is a life to be saved, there is time real, finite and losable.

And there is surgery. They go to pre-op: a large parkinglot of a room, on the second floor but windowless, just rows of empty gurnies. Sabrina is the last customer of the day. The orderly closes a curtain around them. Judith packs the clothes as Sabrina changes into hospital garb, lies down. From outside they catch worried phrases; someone is muttering about "sterilization," "informed consent," "no paper with chart." Someone enters the curtains, reads her blood pressure and temperature. He doesn't ask about the missing paper, so they do not enlighten him. Later they exchange their opinions on patient invisibility, and how much easier it is to say "oophorectomy" than "sterilization."

Judith and Sabrina have enough suspense in their lives, I will

not add any here. Sabrina sails through her surgery. She recovers quickly and well. The pre-op room haunts Judith.

The nurse comes forward again, "Something to make you drowsy." Sabrina protests; in her last surgery she was alert until the operation itself. "This is standard," he says. The i.v. is in her arm. He pushes in the morphine. Judith watches Sabrina's eyes glaze; she raises her head, "Wha? Wha?" and falls back against the pillow, nodding out. One moment Sabrina was with her and the next she was not. Judith is stunned beyond the power of her mind to make it better. The nurse yanks back the curtain, as if with loss of consciousness went all right to privacy, as if Judith were not awake. He fetches a liquid, "Hope she's not too far gone to drink." Judith helps prop her up. "Grotesque," Sabrina says of the taste. Judith marvels at the word. They lay Sabrina back down.

In a space of time she comes more conscious, drifts with eyes half-opened, tries to make reasonable the flavor in her mouth. "Morphine," she concludes. "No, something you drank for nausea," Judith corrects. "Grotesque," she offers, "when you drank you said it tasted grotesque." Sabrina frowns; she doesn't remember.

When the surgeon arrives, her mind is clear to its intent, her words are sloppy, slow, and sure. "Member put ascorbate in the drip; say positive things only." The doctor leaves; a nurse leaves her flirtation with a male. Still glowing success, she gives Sabrina her name. She is the escort. Sabrina smiles back to her. Purple eye shadow glows on the nurse's lids. Sabrina goes with her. The gurney wheels turn Judith's stomach. It will take time to recover.

Judith drives the car, listening to the same music her father's radio had played. Sabrina knows a lot of dead people, even though she has only just turned forty. The people are of her age, men dead from AIDS, women from cancer. There is a quilt for the men. At the university, a portion of the AIDS memorial quilt and a model of the Vietnam War memorial are displayed the same week. Judith reworks an old joke, something about if men menstruated there'd be a monument to the rag. She tastes the names of dead women, metallic and salty in her mouth.

Sabrina has a body. Judith's eyes close; as if this were a secret, she cannot write it. What requires the forced expulsion of air, a levitation of grief, that is my role. Sabrina is beautiful being this

body. Her skull is round, very round and regular, cupped in Judith's palm. Her hair is fine, surprising as spiders' web; it waves; it is brown, medium brown. She wears eyeglasses, her eyebrows are perfect. Below them are large eyes, long eyes, blue eyes of the kind that change color with her clothes. She'd like different teeth. Her lips form every sound Judith wants to hear.

Part Two: The Infinite

Open some windows; it is time to let the air flow back into this story. I have been amiss in the telling: two women, the medical profession — Judith protests the narrow focus. In truth she is a mother; all this time young arms have been encircling her. Friends are prepared to catch her if she will let herself fall. And Sabrina — her answering machine runneth over. Everyone wants to know when she gets out of surgery, when she goes home.

At home, she heals. It's a full time job. Sabrina and Judith have researched the banned, the illegal, and the simply unaccepted. They find a health practitioner knowledgeable enough to coordinate their forays. Sabrina swallows eighty pills a day. Some of them she must encapsule herself. She drinks fresh juices, carrots and greens. The vegetables require cleaning; the juicer needs assembling, running, and then disassembling for cleaning. There's the medicinal tea to be brewed and drunk. The special diet to follow. The yoga class, the acupuncture sessions, the daily walk, the visualizations. What would they do without friends and the VCR?

Once upon a time Sabrina lugged her own laundry up and down the apartment steps; now she has been diagnosed and bearing weight is too risky for her bones. For love of her, a dozen women and men gather each month to schedule their activities. They do shopping, laundry and dinners, errand-running and housecleaning; company-keeping. Sabrina breathes easily, her legs carry her on long walks. The support group becomes physical evidence of her illness. They are welcomed with anxiety and gratitude.

The VCR is less complicated. Although it calls on resources usually reserved for the car, the unit is finally connected to the

television and most systems are go. Judith likes musicals; Sabrina favors Hitchcock. Simply listening to the music from a suspense movie makes Judith's stomach queasy. Sabrina has never accepted the convention of people breaking into song and dance in the middle of conversation. Their compromise is comedy. Sometimes they laugh so hard, they actually forget. It is a gift.

Gifts. I feel no compunction about using cliches; that time comes to them wrapped in ribbons and bows is no secret. Judith would still my hand. I want to write about lips, and the way it feels to become the fusion of a kiss, all else fallen away. She knows I will write about change.

Everyone but the doctors knows that removal of the ovaries affects one's sexuality. They were not surprised when the surgeon said psychologically healthy women don't notice much difference; after all, the oncologist had said patients with good attitudes don't get sick from chemo. They are afraid.

Five days after surgery Sabrina offers Judith a gift. She offers her sex. Judith refuses. I think they both stopped breathing. "You don't want me." "Your stitches are still raw." "You made love to me after the lumpectomy." "That was higher up." Once upon a time Judith had joked that sex was eighty percent of a relationship. Sabrina has never believed she wasn't serious. Five days after surgery rubbing her clit creates strain on the incision, she cannot attempt her own orgasm. Sex is something other than orgasms, she wants that something with Judith.

Her body is changing. Judith listens to her discoveries, the deep cold and the hot flashes, the vaginal dryness, the diminished intensity of orgasms. And the tiredness: post-surgery tiredness, emotional exhaustion, cancer tiredness. She cannot imagine intruding her desire ... she fears Sabrina making love to her without desire. They talk. Shyly, like new lovers, they name themselves. Despite their talk, it is difficult. Despite their difficulty they do turn, one to the other, and make love.

"Making love." Judith takes desire seriously. Crossing paths in the kitchen, she moves up against Sabrina letting her feel the connection of their flesh ... this is how she says "I love you." She says "I love" when her body warms to Sabrina's pleasure, when touching Sabrina's vulva is like touching her own the excitement so immediate; she says it when Sabrina takes her into her own

body, teaches her exactly where she lives, all of Judith rushing home inside Sabrina's touch. Having sex by herself does not take her home.

A friend whose ovaries were shrunk by chemotherapy reports, "Sex is good — I just can't remember the last time we had any." They have sex less often than before. Their loss is profound and insignificant. Sabrina's life is riding on a gamble: two to one odds that she's successfully traded her ovaries for more time, nine to one against a complete remission of illness. Into the statistics is thrown the lucky horseshoe, her non-standard medicines. Passing Judith in the kitchen, Sabrina moves up against her, warming them both. There was a time when desire could be frustrated, when not being sexual was a rejection. Sabrina moves on into the next room. Judith is left feeling pleased and loved.

Judith is a character in an avant-garde play. She moves forward with her head turned back over one shoulder; her eyes strain but she cannot see what lies ahead, at any moment she might fall. A bell is set at irregular intervals, the intervals determined by medical practice — an x-ray this often, a bone scan that; the longer she walks the more her ears reach for its sound. When the bell rings she will stumble — a rock or a chasm in her path — or there will be no obstacle and her startled heart will resume its normal rhythm. The first x-ray after surgery shows that the cancer has spread. There is a whole world going on in ignorance of two women leaning on each other, walking out a door.

Four weeks later they return; wait their turn with the doctor. How they lived that month ... beyond the weeping of their hearts, I hear nothing, see nothing. The memory will not be disturbed by present suggestions of fear, denial, and outraged hope. Once the world had shifted on its axis, rocked by the first diagnosis; now the world falls away, is in danger of disappearing altogether. Four weeks pass and there is another x-ray. This one will name the success or failure of Sabrina's treatment.

They watch from the hallway as her doctor moves in and out of rooms. Last time he was angry, rude and abrupt, bad news is so difficult to tell. What is his mood today? "He doesn't look happy," Sabrina says. "Hard to tell," Judith offers. They wait and watch. He passes by them, turns back, "Did you have a test? I'll go check it now." Okay, they say to each other, his face wasn't our

bad luck. They wait and watch. He returns flying, flapping a large brown envelope like a wing. "It looks normal!" He grabs Sabrina by the arm, "Normal." There is still another patient to be seen; they are left alone in a room with two photographs of Sabrina's lungs taken four weeks apart; one does not show cancer. The future opens like a rosebud one could not fully trust to bloom. Like a bushel of rosebuds. They lean on each other, they cry. The future opens as it should: unpredictably. Sabrina says they must prepare themselves for good news.

Judith drives an old car. It was her brother's, and before him, their sister's; once their parents had owned it, brand-new. It comes from New York same as Sabrina and Judith; they live in California now.

I have done research into astronomy where time is neither chronological nor real, but a dimension into which space expands. I have learned about stars, that those of equal mass pull each other. They become partners, revolve around each other, dance in a pattern determined by their mutual attraction. In our time, we see paired stars orbit. Sometimes one of the stars loses mass, must dance a little faster, loses more mass, can no longer fuse protons. In our time we can no longer see it, there is no light, only the movement of its partner describing still the other's presence.

To Judith it is no comfort that in the fourth dimension she and Sabrina still kiss for the first time, can be seen in the embrace they will know tomorrow. So I hold the thought for her.

Chambers of the Heart

Understanding comes slowly, like saliva around a stone in a dry mouth, or a pulse from the neck of a child in trauma. Learning is a continuum, like a heartbeat; failure to learn, a kind of death. Far south, my father casts his line into the sea, an aging fisherman who sees waves as wrinkles, and waits for the day the sea is calm. In the east, my mother continues to define insomnia, as one who cannot sleep, one who holds her dreams at arms' length, who lives on the edge of dark and darker. Each day I wake to my lover's body; my hunger for peace spreads through the room with morning light. I have read that the heart is the strongest muscle, that the elements of the sea are identical to those of the heart's blood, I've read the studies showing the heart beats differently while dreaming. When the sun sets in the west where I have no family, when it pulls with it the red sky which looks like the sea, when night is the prelude to sleep for children with mothers and without mothers, I hear the wistful chant of the chambers of my heart: "all that I am, and ever will be..." The stone in my mouth is a pearl, my neck throbs like the jewel at my lover's throat.

An Unsent Letter to Emily: Constellations of Desire

What remains unspoken, becomes unspeakable.

— Adrienne Rich

When you think of me,
do you not dare remember
how I would brush your hair
into waving magic
smooth as the darkest river
heavy, aromatic.

Your wilderness of birthmarks
became my constellations.
Andromeda and the seven sisters
graced your slender wrist.

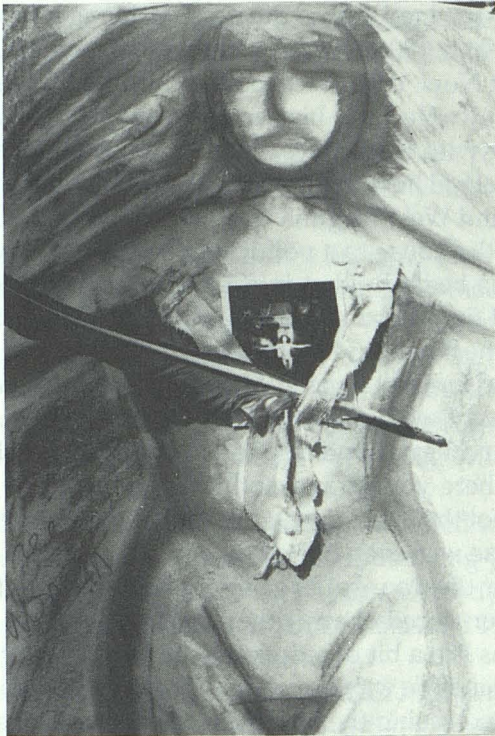
At night you would tuck me in
careful as the dearest mother:
hug, kiss, smooth, rustle.
Your touch — perfect ripe gentle melon.

Could you have forgotten how
pale as milk, damp from bathing
skin luminous as the moon
you would lie down with me.
We slept coupled, inseparable:
mist within mist within mist.

You would rise before dawn, before all
and leave me solitary —
the bedroom air — a nurturing blanket —
smell of your sleep.

For all the ways in which
we dared not speak, will not now name,
touch, invent or risk
perhaps the greatest pain is this —
longing does not wither,
but persists.

Tell me, have you been successful
in your insistent forgetting?
Or do you dream of me with you
as I have dreamed of you with me?



Even in your Zen heaven we shan't meet.

Sylvia Plath, from the poem "Lesbos"

mixed media, 24" x 18", 1987

b. ann

Mineola, Mineola

In Charleston, West Virginia, on Quarrier Street, there is a big old house that used to belong to my great-grandmother Wycke. It was built around 1905, when she and my great-granddaddy were married. They had quite a lot of money then. My great-granddaddy was a lawyer, in a long line of lawyers, right on back to the American Revolution. But he was kind of a rover, too, like the first Wyckes who trudged across the Appalachians into western Virginia in the early 1800s. Great-granddaddy took off suddenly in the 1920s for New York, because, he said, he just needed to try something new. He took his secretary with him. He left great-grandmother with three boys and the house on Quarrier Street. Her family helped her out as long as they could, but then came the Depression and West Virginia was hit pretty badly. Great-grandmother sold the house to a politician. Now, over fifty years later, the house has been divided into three apartments, one on each floor. When I first heard the story, I was just a kid and I would go and stare at the house and fantasize that I lived there. It was years before I found out that I was staring at the wrong house. One day my daddy and I were driving along Quarrier Street on our way downtown and I said, pointing to the house, "I just love that big old house where your grandmother lived."

"That's not the one," my daddy said. "It's a few doors down." The real house was even bigger and grander, with a leaded glass window over the door set in a sunrise pattern. In a few weeks, I forget I'd ever stared at any other house.

So I guess I'm a bit of a dreamer, and that's why things have happened to me the way they have. I've dreamed about living in big houses and seeing the ocean and being a famous writer with a hit play on Broadway. But until I followed Leah to Mineola, I had never been out of West Virginia, except once to visit my second cousins in Lexington, Kentucky, and that doesn't really count.

When I met her, Leah and her two friends were on their way

back from a cross-country camping trip. They were getting tired of their adventure and were stopping in cities, checking into motels, looking up relatives so they wouldn't have to sleep outside. One of the women had a cousin in Charleston, and they were all staying with him for a few days. I met Leah by accident in the express line at Kroger's. I kept stealing glances at her over my shoulder, because she had the shortest hair I'd ever seen on a woman, misty grey eyes, and one silver earring in a design I'd just become familiar with recently. She was definitely not from Charleston, I could tell that right away. When she noticed me looking at her, she smiled and ran a hand across her hair.

"Do I know you from somewhere?" Then she blushed and looked at her feet for a moment. "I know that sounds like a line, but you look so familiar. Did you used to wait tables at Network, by any chance?"

"No," I said. "Is that in town?"

She blushed again. "No, that's a bar in New York City. You look like one of the waitresses there, but your hair's a little longer."

"No," I said again, "I've never been to New York." The checkout person rang up my milk, hamburger buns and mustard. "You from New York?" I asked to keep the conversation going.

"Yeah," she said, fingering a silver necklace that matched the earring. "I work in Manhattan, and I live out on Long Island."

"Near the ocean?" I asked, picturing my great-grandmother's house perched on a hill overlooking the raging Atlantic.

"Sort of," she smiled.

As the checker bagged my groceries, I decided to be bold and comment on the earring. "I couldn't help noticing your earring. It's real pretty." I picked up my bag but wasn't ready to leave yet. I had taken a real chance, I thought, but what could I lose by being forward with someone from out of town?

"Wait a minute," she said, as she paid for her orange juice. "I'll walk out with you." I stood there obediently, my heart pounding in my chest.

I remembered that Reva, my roommate, had a pair of sweat socks with the same entwined women's symbols on them, meaning that she was gay. She'd gotten them through a mail-order catalog. I had wondered why she wanted to announce she was

gay on her socks like that, and she said it was so other gay women could spot her. Reva had said maybe that's why I wasn't getting any action, because I wasn't making announcements. But mostly I wasn't "getting any action" because I was scared. I'd never been with a woman before, though I'd been thinking about it since I was in high school.

Now here I was walking out of Kroger's with a gay woman from New York City. "Are you from here?" she was asking me. When I nodded, she continued, "Then you must know where the bars are. I'm here for a few days with friends, and we only found one that was mostly men."

It was funny, I thought, how in one simple acknowledgement of her earring, she'd known I was gay. It was really a network, just like Reva always said. Now it was going to be hard to follow up. I had only been to the women's bar in Charleston a couple of times but wanted to act like a seasoned regular.

"Yeah, it's over on Morris Street," I said. "I'll draw you a map, if you've got a pen."

"Better yet, maybe you could come with us," she smiled, opening up her orange juice carton and offering me some. "My friends and I wanted to go tonight. How about it?" She took a big drink, and smiled embarrassedly. "Here I am, inviting you out and you don't even know my name. I'm Leah Shane."

"I'm Cass Wycke," I said, holding out my hand, which was sweaty with nervousness.

I don't know how I got up the courage to ask her to leave the bar with me, but it probably had something to do with the three gin-and-tonics I had. She was drinking beer and telling stories about all the women they'd met going cross-country. Camping cross-country seemed like the most romantic thing to do, and I was already saying, "I'll have to try that sometime," forgetting that my friends were not the camping type. Maybe it was the fact that she flirted outrageously with me and no one had ever really done that before. She rubbed her knee against mine under the table, put her arm across the back of my chair, touched my arm as she told a story. She wore a tight black t-shirt with the word "Lesberado" across the front. And her eyes, which looked, I thought, like the mist rising out of the ocean, were so penetrating I felt a little hypnotized by them. She talked authoritatively about

New York and whispered encouragingly, "You really should come to New York sometime. You'd love it. We could see a play together. Have you seen 'La Cage aux Folles'? Then we could hit the dance clubs." It seemed more like a proposal of marriage than an invitation dropped casually in a bar. So when it looked like they were getting ready to leave, and with them most of the excitement I'd known in the last few years, I leaned toward Leah's ear and said, "Would you like to come back to my apartment? It's not much, and I share it with a friend, but she'll be asleep."

I didn't have to ask twice. And I didn't mention that, even though I was twenty-one and had been on my own for two years, I'd never had sex with anyone, man or woman. I hoped she wouldn't notice and that the drinks I'd had would give me the nerve to try out some of the things I'd memorized from Reva's *Joy of Lesbian Sex* book. I didn't have to worry too much. She was all over me, and I just followed her lead. Whatever she did to me, I did to her, just changing it slightly so she wouldn't think I was copying. It was better than I ever dreamed, sexier than the pictures in Reva's book. I knew from the steamy novels I read as a kid that you were supposed to make lots of noise if you were having a good time, and I did that, too. I don't think Leah guessed my secret, because before we fell asleep, she said, "You Southern girls sure are something else."

It makes me blush to think we stayed in bed for almost two days, but we did. We got up to eat and take showers and then went right back to bed. Reva winked at me once as I cut through the kitchen back to my room, but we didn't talk about it till later. On Sunday afternoon, Leah got up and started to get dressed.

"This must be what they mean by a lost weekend," she smiled, pulling on her jeans and t-shirt. She sat on the edge of the bed to put on her sneakers. "So when are you coming to New York?"

"Soon, I hope," I said, quietly realizing that she was leaving.

"Let me give you the number in Mineola," Leah offered, scouring the room for pen and paper. "If you ever make it up my way, you can give me a call."

The leaving was not like I imagined. I thought she'd hug me tightly and ask me to come along, say that she couldn't stand to be one night without me. Instead she hugged me and brushed the

hair out of my eyes. "Here's looking at you, kid," she said, but I had never seen that movie, and Reva had to explain it to me later.

I got a postcard from her about ten days later as she wound her way up the East Coast. It was Rehoboth Beach, which she said was a little gay paradise. I figured out approximately when she would be back in New York. Reva tried to talk me out of it, but I decided to take a few extra days off from work in a couple of weeks and go to New York over the Labor Day weekend, surprise Leah. Then I thought I'd better not surprise her, in case she had plans, and I sent her a postcard detailing my trip, saying I would love to see "La Cage aux Folles," if she could get tickets. I tried to call her a couple of times before I left to confirm the plans, but she wasn't home.

I guess it was crazy to go but I went anyway. I told Reva I was going to visit my aunt in Beckley. I took the train, which was almost a fifteen-hour trip, including transfers. Most of it was at night, though, so it wasn't so bad. I did mind missing all the scenery, but I figured there would be plenty of time for that on the way back. And I knew that once I saw the Manhattan skyline, once I'd breathed the ocean air on Long Island, once I saw Leah, I wouldn't regret the trip one bit.

It was early on Saturday morning when I got on the Long Island Railroad to Mineola. It was further from Manhattan than Leah had let on, and I marveled at how she could make the commute every day. I was used to the ten-minute walk from my apartment to the state office building where I was a word processor. I kept worrying that I would miss the stop, but the conductor called "Mineola, Mineola" right in front of me, as if he'd read my mind.

At the station stop I called the number scratched in Leah's unfamiliar hand onto a piece of notebook paper.

"Leah?" I asked breathlessly, looking around and wondering where the ocean was exactly. All I could see were dismal row houses against a heavy grey sky.

"No, she's not home right now. Who's this?"

I hesitated, thrown by the fact that she lived with someone and that she was not there to welcome me to New York. "This is Cass Wycke, a friend of hers from West Virginia. I'm at the train station ..."

"Oh, yeah, Cass!" the woman said, cheerfully. "She left a message for you. Hang on ... She got invited to Fire Island at the last minute for the weekend and won't be around to see you. Says she's sorry and hopes you have a good time."

I stared at the row houses beyond the station, wondering if I had known this would happen all along. I couldn't even smell the ocean, just a faint odor of car exhaust. Mineola, I decided then and there, didn't look much more interesting than towns I'd seen in West Virginia. "That's it?" I said.

"I guess so. I mean, yeah, that's all it says here," the woman answered, unconvincingly fumbling over her words.

"Thanks," I said, hanging up. At least, I thought, she could have left tickets for "La Cage aux Folles."

I didn't start crying till I was back on the train to Manhattan. If I'd known where Fire Island was, I'd have followed her there just to embarrass her, to demand an apology. But then, I thought, an apology for what? An apology, I guess, for not living up to my expectations, for not having a house on the beach, for not equating sex with simple kindness and caring.

I intended to go right back home, I thought that would show her. But when I stepped outside Pennsylvania Station and saw Madison Square Garden, the Empire State Building, all the places I'd heard about, I decided I might as well spend the day. I spent too much for a hotel room and much too much for a ticket to "La Cage aux Folles," which I liked pretty well. Then, to make the evening complete, I looked up "Network" under "Bars" in the phone book, but it wasn't listed, and I didn't know the names of any other women's clubs.

Just before I left in the morning, I wrote Leah a note on a hotel postcard: "Mineola's not so hot, and neither are you." But I didn't send it. I got to thinking about something Reva said once, after she'd been dumped by this girl, Holly. They'd been going out for a whole year, and one day Holly announced she was in love with someone else. Reva took it pretty well. She went out a lot, and let friends fix her up on dates. When I asked her if she wasn't hurt and mad, she said, "Sure, but living well's the best revenge." So when I thought about that, I decided I didn't want Leah to know how upset I was. All I wanted was to get on a train, go home, and talk to Reva.

mrs. tucci and the car

a fable

Little falls, new york. a town best known for its proximity to herkimer, new york, which is where herkimer diamonds are found. 1931. mollie, hymie, and leah had the whole family from the city coming up to visit. uncle issie and aunt mirka and melvin, phillip, sophie, yeida, joe and fanny, the whole mispacha. uncle issie and aunt merka were the last to arrive. uncle issie had his new car and aunt mirka was showing off her newly found driving skills. knowing they were late, aunt mirka drove with a fury right into the driveway where she somehow managed to get the car caught in the mesh fence. she tried moving the car forward and then backward. then she tried moving the car forward then backwards again. back and forth, forth and back. it was definitely stuck. uncle issie was screaming. aunt mirka was screaming. the rest of the family came down to scream too. in turn, the men each decided they could handle this situation, and in turn each pushed, pulled, and maneuvered. it was still stuck. then all the men decided to make a collective effort to push, pull and maneuver. it was still stuck. everyone screamed some more. uncle issie tried screaming the loudest, this being his new car and all.

now this whole time mrs. tucci stood on the porch quietly watching and waiting. mrs. tucci lived upstairs from mollie, hymie, and leah. she was their italian landlady, in a town where jewish and italian immigrants were two sides of the same coin, and where mollie and mrs. tucci were two of many who formed a mutual admiration society. "best landlady we ever had," mollie would say, "and such a good person too. taught me everything i know about baking." mrs. tucci stood on that porch watching this scene with the car unfold, until she could watch no more. finally, she walked over to the confused and screaming crowd. "move away," she said. "move away," she said more and more sternly, and as she was a large woman with a rather imposing voice,

everyone finally and quietly moved from the car. mrs. tucci circled the car once and then circled it again. then she slowly walked to the back corner that was stuck on the fence. she knelt down till her knees were level with the bumper, took one long deep breath, put both hands under that bumper and lifted the car up and moved it away from the fence. "there" was all she had to say and walked back to sit on the porch leaving everyone quieted in their own amazement.

brooklyn, new york. a town best known for being a borough of "the" city. a small tenement kitchen. 1983. mollie is there with her granddaughter, who is still a tad unbelieving and incredibly amused at this at least 100th telling of the mrs. tucci and the car story. "really, grandma. did it really happen that way?" "yes, bubula, as god is my witness, that's exactly what happened. she picked up the car all by herself. ask your mother. she was there. leah. leah, come here and tell her how mrs. tucci picked that car up all by herself."



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all whispers now.
all close. all touched.
all givings born.

blessed are the berries,
dark
and sweet.

Invisible Woman

Fay picks the most intruding weeds from the garden. It is time to plan her winter crops, mustard greens, kale and tulip bulbs for the spring. The autumn chill is damp but with the exception of her hands, she is comfortably warm. Her hands grind through the brown earth, almost becoming the earth as the colors in her hand and the earth match. She digs determinedly and comes across a small piece of metal. It's a bullet. Probably dropped by someone, maybe even Ruby. Fay fingers the cold object, turning it over and over, trying to beat back the memories that it brings.

Ruby bought the gun years ago. She insisted they needed it to protect themselves from the trifling no-accounts in the world. There had been a rash of burglaries and physical attacks on neighbors and Ruby's brashness was really a cover-up for her own fear. Fay objected, of course.

"A gun is dangerous. Someone could get hurt. We might even have an accident and shoot each other."

But in the end the gun came into the house.

Ruby convinced Edith, Germaine and Tiehl to purchase guns. Many Sunday afternoons were spent with the five of them at the firing range shooting until their ears hurt from the noise. In spite of herself, Fay learned how to shoot quite well, enjoying such a precise skill. Detail work came easy to her, so the simple concentration necessary to shoot a gun accurately calmed her. Target practice soon became her favorite past-time, and she relished the controlled release of aggression.

No one ever burglarized their home nor threatened them in any way, but their friends and co-workers were not so lucky, and Ruby's and Fay's anger mounted at these unprovoked attacks.

Fay chuckles to herself as she remembers that they used to keep the gun in the top drawer of the china cabinet, underneath her grandmother's mauve table linen. How impractical. How were they ever going to get it from there if someone did come in and threaten them?

Fay finishes weeding and goes into the house. The hot air from the furnace envelopes her in a sheet of warmth as she moves to turn the thermostat down. Reaching for a sheet of note paper on the table, she begins a shopping list for plants from the nursery. Tunisia will be by later on and Fay will ask her to pick up the plants.

Going up the stairs to get dressed for her poker game, she runs her hand along the banister for support and catches a splinter in her finger. The jagged area of exposed wood on the banister stands out naked against the neighboring wood all sanded, polished and shining. Fay grimaces at the pained finger and picks at the splinter with her fingernails. It remains stubbornly embedded and she sits down on the step, determined to be spared the burden of finding a pair of tweezers.

Fay's granddaughter Tunisia begged Fay to have that section of the banister repaired. But Fay held out wanting, or maybe needing, a reminder.

Ruby had been gone for maybe two years by that time. Fay's heart still ached from longing, but she had learned to let go of the anger that death so deftly instills. Often she felt lonely, finding friendships just not enough after so many years with a close lover. It was while she was in a particularly gruesome funk that she realized something was wrong. She had an eerie feeling of dread, and for the first time since living in her house, she felt fearful of some sort of attack. She interpreted this intuitive message as a warning that maybe some trifling no-accounts were going to break in that night. Though she had no rational reason, she decided preparation was the best medicine. So she cleaned the gun and just after sunset positioned herself in a rocking chair by the stairway, facing the front door. Her plan was to shoot them as they entered the house, picking them off one by one.

As she sat there rocking back and forth, fear mounting with every second, she realized she hadn't acted quite as wisely as she thought. Why didn't she call someone and tell them of her feelings? Why hadn't she at least called Tunisia to let her in on the situation? Why was she so sure she was going to be invaded anyway? It had never happened before—why should it happen now?

Just as she was about to reach for the light and use the telephone, she heard someone jimmying her lock. In no time at

all, four strident males entered the house. The lights from the street lamps streamed into the room causing shadows to dance across the wall and on the floor. The whole front area of the house appeared as a dark landscape with deep black holes juxtaposed against varying shades of grey figures. Before Fay could catch her breath one of the men turned on the hall light. They were evidently not afraid of being discovered by her or anyone else. Their boldness surprised her, even with her knowledge of many other similar situations.

As the hallway filled with light, the greys and blacks gave way to stark outlines and clear, complete objects. The four no-accounts were standing in the hallway, talking among themselves. They paid no attention to her. She was plainly visible, with the angular dark object resting neatly in her hand, and yet they acted as though she wasn't there.

Fay then spoke, something between a normal speaking tone and a shout. They didn't flinch a muscle, nor cast a nod in her direction. She then got up and walked toward them with the gun ready for firing. Again no response. Fay stood still, not three steps from them. Her mind tumbled as pieces of a plaguing puzzle fell together.

They didn't see her. And even more astounding, they didn't hear her. They were not aware she was there. This realization shocked her. If she was really invisible, that explained why she was constantly overlooked at the meat counter, or passed over in lines at the post office, or unable to get decent service at certain dress shops. These people simply didn't see her. They weren't being rude. She was just invisible.

This clarity came to Fay in a few moments, and just as quickly, she adopted survival mode. She remembered the assaults against her friends and neighbors, pulling the rage from her visceral depths. Visible or not, this was her house and they had invaded it. She went to the front door and locked it. She then turned off the light and shot the nearest no-account in the back of the head. The sound of the gun shocked the other three and they turned too late to see their companion fall. Before another breath was drawn Fay moved to the next one and shot him through the heart.

By this time the other two were terrified and the necessity for escape had become apparent. One ran towards the living room,

aiming for a window. Fay shot him in the leg and when he slowed down, finished the job with a bullet in his brain.

The fourth, not thinking clearly, ran upstairs. Fay, not caring to chase an agile young man, turned off the hallway light, sat down in the rocker and waited. She made no sounds as she waited for him to descend. Eventually he did, and she sent him to his maker with no hesitation. The bullet grazed the banister on the way to its host and left the splintered chips. Fay considered this a baptism of sorts and still continues to refuse Tunisia's pleas to repair it.

Not sure what to do after such a grizzly task, Fay reverted back to the posture of the obedient citizen and called the police. She had to call five times before she got someone on the phone who could hear her. Everyone else merely repeated their initial salutation, "police department may I help you, police department may I help you." The woman who finally could hear her was polite, concise and took the time to ask her if she was all right. She said that she would send a squad car as soon as possible.

Fay then called Tunisia, needing a comforting, take-charge woman. Tunisia arrived a few minutes after the police. Fay had opened the door for the police but they didn't see her, so they informed Tunisia that the door had been left open. They asked Tunisia if she lived there and Tunisia told them that her grandmother lived alone. When asked where her grandmother was, Tunisia tartly replied that she was sitting on the sofa. The police detective looked in the direction of the sofa, saw no one sitting there, and stiffly told Tunisia that this was no laughing matter and she needed to stop playing games.

"Detective Thurman, my grandmother is sitting on that sofa in plain view. If you want to talk to her, then go right ahead. I'm sure she has an explanation. However, don't continue to be insulting, insinuating that I don't want to cooperate."

Tunisia's very black eyes rolled in anger as she pursed her full lips into a thin line of irritation. She folded her arms across her ample bosom and paced back and forth. Tunisia was a striking woman, having much of Ruby's personality. She was actually Ruby's granddaughter. But Ruby and Fay had been together all of Tunisia's life, so she grew up regarding both of them as her grandmothers. However, her impatient balderdash marked her

as a sure descendant of Ruby.

Detective Thurman snorted, shrugged, asked Tunisia a few questions, vowed to check out her alibi and left. The other police fiddled and searched and finally removed the bodies. It was several hours before the house was cleared and Fay and Tunisia were able to sit down and talk privately.

Fay told Tunisia what happened, including her realization of invisibility. Tunisia looked at her grandmother thoughtfully and calmly replied, "Gran Fay, you aren't invisible. I can see you very well. No, probably someone else killed these men and you just don't remember what happened. Yes, that's it," replied Tunisia confidently, gathering speed with each new assertion.

"Maybe these men were being chased, randomly picked your house as a refuge only to be caught anyway. You must have left the door unlocked." Then with condescending compassion, "You must be in shock and don't remember or realize what happened. Gran Fay are you alright? Do you want me to spend the night? Or would you rather spend the night with me? I'm worried about you."

Tunisia's furrowed brow was set above dark eyes that probed her grandmother's face for an entrance to intimate thoughts. No entrance was found but Tunisia continued to study intently.

While Fay knew she had been invisible to those men, convincing Tunisia would be no less miraculous than stopping the flow of the ocean. "No dear I'll be all right. Go home and call me in the morning. I'll drink something hot and go to bed," sighed Fay, acquiescing to the familiar role of harmless old lady who needs to rest when there is too much excitement.

After everyone left, Fay found sleep entirely out of the question. She put down sheets on the carpet where blood was stained. She washed down the walls and door as much as possible and she sprayed air freshener and opened the windows to rid the room of the aroma of death. Pleased with herself, she then baked a chocolate cake with mocha frosting, her favorite.

The whole evening had been a series of surprises; the intuitive dread, the now-deceased intruders and the invisibility. She was an embryo wrapped in a cocoon gradually unfolding into a butterfly. She felt exhilarated, happy, and, for once in her life, powerful.

How the police finally resolved the case was unknown to Fay. Although they searched her house they didn't find the gun as it was on her, and of course they couldn't see her. They did watch her house and follow Tunisia, but eventually gave up on finding any leads. Tunisia received a few hate letters from members of the deceased's family, but that never came to anything. In the meantime, Fay went about adjusting and changing her life to accommodate her new-found freedom.

That was four years ago.

Fay finally removes the splinter with a few good tugs. She gets up and changes for her poker game. When she calls for a cab, she hopes one of the regulars will answer. Luck is not with her. A young woman chants, "Confidence Cab." Fay swallows, states her name and her desire for a taxicab. The new voice just continues to chant, "Confidence Cab may I help you. Is anyone there? Confidence Cab." Just as the speaker is becoming exasperated another female voice comes on the line.

"Ms. Wilson is that you?"

"Yes, it's me. Thanks for picking it up. I would like a cab here in about 20 minutes please."

"Well we only have two new drivers available but I'll send both of them. If it doesn't work out then call me again?"

"Thank you. I really appreciate your consideration."

"We really appreciate your business. Now, they are both new and we don't know them very well, but maybe it will be okay."

Fay hangs up the phone with a sigh. Confidence Cab is a woman-owned company that runs on a shoe string. She has been dealing with them for four years and counts on them for a great deal of her transportation needs. They hire only women and most of the drivers have no trouble seeing her. Fay notes the ones that do have trouble usually don't last very long.

When she first started dealing with Confidence Cab all of the drivers were able to see her. It wasn't until about a year and a half into their relationship that a problem arose. A driver came to her house, honked the horn and didn't see her approach the cab. When Fay opened the back door the driver became alarmed and reached to pull the door shut. A minor tug of war ensued with Fay being thrown off balance and falling in the street.

She called the company, complained and was immediately sent another driver. The owner later stated that some of her drivers were just not very polite and didn't want to deal with senior citizens. Fay knew better, but kept her own counsel.

Fay had not learned to drive, at first stating that her reflexes weren't sharp enough and then later crying poor eye sight. The real reason was that she secretly liked being driven around. She didn't want to be bothered with concentrating on traffic when it was so much more amusing to look out the window and day-dream. Ruby liked driving so this was not an issue between them. And now most of Fay's friends drove so she could usually get a ride. When it was inconvenient for her friends to pick her up, she called a cab.

After that fateful night when she realized she is invisible, she began to understand who can see her and who can't. Absolutely no men can see her. Some women can't see her either. But some women, especially those in her type of circles, can. It is tricky figuring out who can see what. But Fay has started to be able to recognize a certain posture, gleam in the eye, energy or feeling about some women that make her visible to them.

Fay is drawn back to the present by the sound of a horn honk. She makes a mental note to tell the company to train these new drivers in taxicab etiquette, such as ringing doorbells. Fay locks the front door and eyes the drivers as she walks briskly down the walkway. The one in cab no. 9 will see her, she is sure of it. She is right. The driver looks her dead in the eye, speaks and simply asks her destination. Fay notes the name of the cabbie — she'll request her in the future.

Tiehl answers the door, wearing a red sweat suit and her poker cap. Germaine and Edith are already sitting at the table nervously shuffling the cards, prematurely counting their winnings no doubt. They greet Fay, giving her smiles, hugs and sweet kisses. Judy and Carmen come in from the kitchen laden with trays full of sandwiches, freshly baked cookies, potato chips and fruit. The coffee maker is already on the buffet and the smell of fresh brew permeates the air. Lenore is the last to arrive, breezing in with brisk excitement, wearing cool autumn colors matching her latest hair tint.

"You'll never guess who I saw today," breathes Lenore.

Before anyone can reply she states, "Kitty. She was with her husband and she all but tried to ignore me. But I wasn't having any of that, no one ignores me! So I went right up to her and said hello. She backed off like I had something, but that didn't stop me. I introduced myself to her husband and told her that we hadn't seen her in a long time. Asked why she had been away so long. As I moved on I could hear him asking her who I was and why hadn't he met me before. I could also just imagine what she said."

Everyone laughs at this, but an undertone of sadness was unmistakable. Kitty had been a friend for many years. Then she started to change. Fay had been oblivious of the changes in Kitty until one evening at Kitty's house. The poker game was over and everyone had gone. Fay was putting on her sweater when she caught Kitty looking at her through squinting eyes. Fay had seen this expression often enough to know what it meant. The woman was having trouble seeing her.

"Fay, you know maybe my eyesight is going but sometimes I could swear that you are a ghost, or transparent or something like that." Then shocked at the illogic of what she had said Kitty hurriedly added, "Oh, but that must be nonsense. I mean you are flesh and blood just like me. Maybe I just need my eyes checked." But she continued to look at Fay through squinting eyes. Fay knew by the expressions on women's faces whether they saw her or not. And Kitty sometimes didn't see her at all.

Undaunted by this situation Kitty caught herself asking the other players, "Where's Fay? She was just here a minute ago." Then someone would look up from her cards, and absent-mindedly reply that Fay was sitting right next to her or across the table. Kitty would mask her shock by an over-jocular laugh, but still, apparently, found Fay invisible.

Eventually Kitty stopped coming to the poker game. She made excuses; no time, illness, other commitments. But when Kitty married a neighboring widower six months later, Fay knew why she had become unable to see her.

The game is fun. Germaine and Edith do go away with the pot but Judy's cookies sweeten the plight of the losers.

Fay gets a ride home with Carmen, and Tunisia drives up just as they arrive. When Fay gives Tunisia the nursery shopping list, she asks if she wants to stay for dinner. Tunisia accepts and

together they prepare a simple meal.

Tunisia is currently involved with another project to bring down the system. A grad student at the university, she is responsible for establishing Adamu, a Black lesbian feminist organization on campus. Adamu is a name for the female principle of matter. It means red and represents the blood of the womb and menstruation. This organization has been active in promoting positive change around a myriad of discrimination issues on campus. Adamu has protested the dismissal of a woman professor and launched a campaign to gain her tenure, contributed to the Pan-African celebrations by bringing in Black lesbian poets and musicians, and worked hard with other lesbian groups on campus to institute a few lesbian culture classes. They are also writing a guideline sheet for changing the language, moving away from words that insult those who have been incarcerated in mental institutions.

To Fay, Tunisia and her organization seem indefatigable in their relentless pursuit of justice from the system. Tunisia's enthusiasm is inspiring and Fay enjoys her stories about tactical encounters as well as the soap opera dynamics of sabotage and power plays among the members. She is grateful that she isn't involved, but is happy to know that the legacy of political action continues.

Fay and Ruby were quite active in the civil rights movement through their participation in various Negro women's clubs. She did her share of marching, petitioning and door knocking when she was younger. Now she reminisces the vibrancy of those times through Tunisia's renditions.

Tunisia often invites Fay and her friends to Adamu's events, such as speeches, readings, concerts and the like. Although Tunisia introduces Fay to a wide variety of people only a select few actually see her. Tunisia is oblivious to this, however, and when by chance she does notice her grandmother being ignored she chalks it up to the appropriate ism — ageism, racism, sexism — never discussing the situation with Fay.

At 7:30 p.m. Tunisia leaves, stating that she is late for a meeting. Fay settles in her favorite overstuffed chair with a mystery while listening to jazz on the radio. It is a thrilling whodunit and she wants to finish it tonight.

At 11:00 p.m. she finds herself on the last page of the book. Finishing with satisfied relish she gets up, goes to the closet and reaches for her plaid cape. This is her favorite part of the day, the midnight stroll.

Being invisible to all but a chose few has its drawbacks. However, it does make it possible to walk in the moonlight, carefree and unfettered. This one luxury is worth all the inconvenience that sometimes surrounds her daily life. She wraps a scarf around her neck, grabs her purse and leaves one lamp on before walking into the chilled night air.

As she walks back home the silken rays of the moon soften her heart and she thinks of other walks taken with Ruby. She remembers when they were much younger and lived downtown. They would walk at night, arm in arm, two maiden ladies out for a stroll or going to one of the colored clubs. She could almost hear the delicate strains of Ella, Sarah or Dinah as she noted the heavy dampness of the air against her skin. Those were magical times; feeling loved, building a business, constructing a life together and feeling secure.

Of course, these are magical times too, she reminds herself, reluctant to slip too deeply into the nostalgic repartee.

What would Ruby say now? Would she be invisible too? Would I be invisible if Ruby was still alive? If I was invisible would Ruby acknowledge it or would she simply dismiss it like Tunisia?

Fay doesn't know why she is invisible or how she came to be invisible. She quizzes herself daily with questions on this line, but with no answers, the questions just float into the atmosphere.

Welcoming the warmth of her home Fay makes a cup of tea. Tea helps her sleep after a busy day and insures a sound rest for the next.

The Woman Whose Garden Becomes the Whole World

They say my mother's gone insane.
She survived 30 years of marriage
with sayings neat and final as epitaphs:
"Of course I'm happy, I don't complain."
"I forgive but I never forget."

Every week he cut the grass,
mowing over her vegetables, shrubs and vines,
Dad called his tyranny "forgetfulness."
"A woman has to keep the peace," she'd say,
and after dinner, stacking the china without a clatter,
she'd leave the glasses too near
the edge; then picking up the shards
she'd smile, "Things always break, you know."

But now she sleeps with shears beneath her pillow,
and rises as dusk to sing her seeds to sleep.
At first she planted only moss and ferns
until the neighborhood women began to help.
They gather in the greenest corners,
and speak confidingly of lime, manure, rain and sun.

Mom says, "The soil is my best friend.
The stones share their secrets."
With her first crop, she fed the town.
The bordering junkyard she's reduced to compost.
Her magnolias bloom cream-colored against the snow.
At first I was afraid:
the melons large as crates,
the earthworms murmuring my name.

But now I begin to understand.
She said in five years
her garden will be everywhere,
and then she whispered,
"Tend your window box.
You, too, can save the world.
And if I die before I'm finished,
I'll leave my seeds,
watering can and shears to you."

Lesbian Ethics, Toward New Value, by Sarah Lucia Hoagland. (Institute of Lesbian Studies, PO Box 60424, Palo Alto, CA, 1988, \$14.95)

Taking Our Lives Seriously

It takes guts to write a book called *Lesbian Ethics*. For one thing, it invites scrutiny of your past and future actions by other lesbians, searching for instances of unethical behavior. Sarah Hoagland wrote this book "in the hope that it will provoke discussion which will take us beyond where we are in our understanding and actions." Since I began reading *Lesbian Ethics* I have thought about and frequently discussed the concerns it raises. I have considered what Sarah Hoagland had to say when faced with moral dilemmas in my own life. To that end, I find the book completely successful. What follows are some of her major points which moved my own thinking. It is the movement which is essential and for which I thank her.

What Do We Mean By Lesbian Ethics?

Two obvious interpretations of the phrase "lesbian ethics" come to mind: 1) ethics between and among lesbians, 2) ethical concerns of lesbians. She means the first, particularly lesbians in voluntary association. (She also includes relations with our companion-animals.) I find this a limitation of the book. In my experience lesbians are interested in a variety of ethical situations, not all of which involve other lesbians.

Certainly she discusses in depth many issues which the lesbians I know are vitally concerned about. These include: withdrawal; attending; blaming the victim and victimism; justice; accountability; being in and out of control; therapy; consciousness raising; the importance of lesbian friendship; lesbian battering; racism, classism, ableism and ageism; and sexuality.

Other important issues which she discusses in passing are: implications of lesbian belief in karma; implications of large numbers of lesbians turning themselves over to a higher power; anarchism; sizism; and anti-Semitism.

Then there are issues she does not discuss at all, which I find puzzling. But it is her book on lesbian ethics, not mine.

I am even more puzzled by concerns she raises which I don't think are part of the conceptual framework of most lesbians I know. These primarily stem from what she calls "traditional ethics." (I would call it European male ethics.) In her preface Sarah Hoagland tells us: "I have included some discussion of traditional material . . . with which I find lesbians caught up; I think it important to know from where these ideas come and how the tradition functions among us." But are we really caught up with the ideas of Aristotle, Hegel, Kant, Sartre? I am unconvinced. Rather than a refutation of Kant's categorical imperative, I would have preferred, for example, exploration of the philosophical implications of Hopi linguistics, mentioned in a tantalizing footnote. She does offer some concepts which I find extremely useful additions to ethical discourse among lesbians. These include: moral agency under oppression, intelligibility, responsiveness and the suggestion of lesbian clowns as an alternative to judges.

Sarah Hoagland takes utterly seriously and playfully how lesbians treat each other. One of my favorite aspects of this book is the examples from the lives of real lesbians. This book is full of the words of lesbians, what we've said and written in books, letters, songs and conversations. Clearly she has been paying attention.

I wish, however, she had listed more examples from her own life. For instance, how does she think her job in the philosophy department at the University of Illinois affects her work to create lesbianism as the ground of be-ing? How has she resisted the University's values? The only reference she has to any of this is a theoretical discussion of "freedom of speech" as it applies to non-conformist thinkers within the academy.

Where We Are Now

It seems to me Sarah Hoagland is frequently unnecessarily pessimistic in her appraisal of what we have accomplished thus far. She asserts: "Despite our best intentions our interactions with each other failed more often than they did not." Is this true? Compared to whom? Or is it that we perceive difficulties and hard times as failures because we care so much? Of course I think

there's much room for improvement in how lesbians behave toward each other and in the world generally. But despite the heartaches and disappointments I've lived through in the 18 years I've named myself lesbian, I still believe our points of intersection, sparking and weaving add up to more successes than failures.

Elsewhere she maintains: "Up to now the power we have been using has involved strategies of control such that our collective resistance has been simply in our survival." The existence of this book is much more than mere survival. It is one of many examples of creativity, experimentation with different ways of living and relating, theory, analysis.

She also tells us: "It is not clear, with a few notable exceptions since the onset of patriarchy, that women have resisted" (dominance and subordination between men and women). In a footnote she then lists European beguines and Chinese marriage resisters as exceptions. Surely she could think of many more. What about world-wide lesbianism as an example of resistance? Later she says, "Significantly, even feminists and lesbian-feminists shun amazons, apparently for fear of appearing out of touch with reality." In the next footnote she cites thirteen *exceptions* to this statement. "We do not acknowledge the amazons even as symbolic defenders of womanhood," she continues. The lesbians I know still wear labryses, value resistance and speak positively of amazons.

As additional proof for the discrediting of amazons in current lesbian-feminist culture she writes, "even radical feminists push for greater police and state protection." I find this a grave oversimplification of differences of opinion among radical feminists about the use of the state to halt male violence, for instance, as it applies to pornography. Or does she refer to the attempt to change statute of limitation laws so that incest survivors can sue their perpetrators many years after the event? These are strategies some radical feminists advocate and some reject. Probably most radical feminists advocate some examples of "pushes for greater police and state protection" and reject others. I don't think there's a clear connection between either position and being for or against amazons. Rather it's a particular tactic, under capitalist patriarchy, which one might either oppose or use.

Sarah Hoagland asserts: "Because there is no mythological, much less historical, memory of female resistance to male domination, isolated and individual acts of female resistance are also rendered imperceptible as resistance." Generally, I agree with this observation. But saying "no" instead of "little" or "suppressed" exacerbates the problem. I consider it the job of radical feminist scholars to fight against erasure of female resistance, not perpetuate it. I do agree with her observation "within the confines of the feminine stereotype no behavior *counts* as resistance to male domination." But memory is far deeper than any particular version of the feminine stereotype. For instance, early in 1989 archaeologists working in the rain forest area of the Amazon basin in Brazil found many examples of female figures of a type heretofore undiscovered by archaeologists. When they asked the local indigenous people what they were, they answered, "Oh, those are the Morakiten, the female warriors who used to live here." According to the news report from which I learned this, anthropologists are surprised, because they thought the Amazons of South America were mythological. But the people who live there never thought that. Now the Morakiten has been adopted as the symbol of those fighting to preserve the Amazon rain forests. Memory persists and resurfaces.

A Moral Revolution

I join Sarah Hoagland in her desire for a moral revolution. Now what exactly does that mean?

Language

As an artist whose medium is words, I appreciate her concern for language. She takes language seriously and thoroughly attempts to apply the ethical concepts she deems important. For instance, in her Introduction she critiques ableist, sizeist, racist and sexist language; she then goes on to eradicate it from her book. Nowhere was "see" used for "perceive," black equated with negative. Analysis of how everyday use of such metaphors reinforces ableism, racism, etc., has been around for years. But I still find their use entrenched in lesbian writing (including, occasionally, my own).

Sarah Hoagland is critical of debtor/creditor concepts of

relationships among us, and by extension, economic metaphors such as “investments” and “negotiations” which she thinks push our relationships toward the mercantile. I think of negotiations as willingness on the part of both (all) members to compromise, to move — much like what Sarah Hoagland means by intelligibility. I suggest that economic terms may have different meaning for Jews, because of our history of persecution and being forced into occupations that dealt with money. We do keep track of things. Irena Klepfisz writes: “I am scrupulously accurate. I keep track of all distinctions. Between past and present. Pain and pleasure. Living and surviving. Resistance and capitulation. Will and circumstances. Between life and death. Yes, I am scrupulously accurate. I have become a keeper of accounts.”¹

Many of the terms Sarah Hoagland wants to eliminate should also first be examined for their cultural meaning for lesbians from various backgrounds.

She analyzes the word “woman” as a constructed category, pertaining to biological female in relationship to men. She maintains the word can connote neither lesbian bonding nor female resistance. It surprises me, given this analysis, that she then goes on to use the words “woman” and “women” throughout the book to mean females with agency, power, etc.

I’m also surprised she uses the words “appropriate” and “inappropriate” uncritically, since they are used by psychiatry and its offshoots to prescribe norms of affect, behavior and feelings. In general she is quite critical of this kind of social control.

Lesbians from a variety of races, classes, cultures, ages, and abilities are included throughout the book. But I find it a problem when the ethnicity or class of a lesbian is listed when a point is not being made about racism or classism.

In one example Sarah Hoagland tells us: “a working class lesbian responds, for example, to her upper-class friend who is acutely and chronically ill by assuming her friend’s mind is as debilitated as her body, not realizing that her friend doesn’t have the energy to maintain and defend herself but still absorbs the energy and games around her. Or a white middle-class lesbian responds with incomprehension to a black working-class lesbian’s lack of emotional display at some tragedy in her own life,

not realizing that, in her friend's life, expression of emotion carries dangers of exposure."

Here's where the real problem comes. An example in which class/ethnicity is germane directly follows one where (as far as I can tell) it is not. If she is making a connection between class and either chronic illness or insensitivity to chronic illness, this is very serious and should be much more explicit.

Finally, some of her language I find inaccessible. The worst example is her word *autokoenyony* — "a self in community who is one among many." I have no problem with the concept. But why coin a word so difficult to pronounce, the meaning of which (at least to me) is not apparent from its form?

Principles

Sarah Hoagland doesn't find principles useful. She says, "principles only work when they really aren't needed . . . Acting from principle interferes with rather than enhances our ability to make judgements."

I don't find this to be true. For instance Pauline Bart extrapolates from the common Jewish principle of asking "Is it good or bad for the Jews?" to "Is it good or bad for women?"² This seems to me, while not infallible, certainly useful when considering a particular act. Another principle, which I hope to get better at applying as I grow in wisdom and consciousness, is the Cherokee maxim to consider the effects of an act through seven generations.³ More immediately useful in my life is to consider who is likely to benefit from and who may be hurt by a particular action.

Of course, there will always be questions in applying any principle. They don't prevent me or anyone else from having to figure out what to do in any given situation. But, both in thinking about what to do and what I've done, I find these and other principles useful.

Moral Agency Under Oppression

This is a central concept in Sarah Hoagland's work and one which I endorse wholeheartedly. She defines it as: "developing ability within a situation without claiming responsibility for the situation . . . resisting demoralization under oppression." She goes on to say, "While we don't control situations, we do affect them."

While the words she employs are not in general use among lesbians with whom I discuss ethical issues, I do not find this concept at odds with the frameworks we use. I agree with her that "It is because we make choices, act in the face of limits . . . that we declare ourselves to be moral beings."

In another application of this concept she rejects both victimism⁴ and blaming the victim. Even in terrible situations, wimmin are moral agents. "A woman is a . . . breathing, judging being, acting in coerced and oppressive circumstances. Her judgements and choices may be ineffective on any given occasion, or wrong, but they are decisions nevertheless."

Vulnerability

Sarah Hoagland criticizes lesbians who use vulnerability as a weapon. While I've known this to happen, I certainly wouldn't want invulnerability to become more fashionable among lesbians. And I wouldn't want lesbians to feel they couldn't be present in the community if their vulnerabilities were showing. I think she exaggerates both the phenomenon and problems of vulnerability.

Praise and Blame

Sarah Hoagland does not find these concepts useful. According to her: "When we praise someone we tend to worship her, to have unrealistic expectations of her." I believe we can and do acknowledge limitations as we praise. I think it's important to affirm the positive effects of someone's actions. We want to know what we do matters. I believe we really need each other's praise, to have our work acknowledged, to be affirmed, to express our caring for each other.

Of blame, Sarah Hoagland says, "focusing on who is to blame denies important aspects of the situation." I appreciate this, another example of her theory embracing the complexities of real life. However, while I agree with her that blame can touch off immobilizing guilt, it's still important to learn the consequences of our actions. What I want, when someone criticizes me, is room to move, not to feel backed into a corner.

I also want to affirm the right of abuse survivors to name the abuse and their abusers. Breaking silence about abuse must not stop because the abused don't want to blame the perpetrators.

Accountability vs. Intelligibility

Sarah Hoagland advocates replacing accountability with intelligibility. She considers intelligibility a two-way process and accountability one way. (But why would I consider myself accountable to those who aren't accountable to me?) She defines intelligibility: "being able to offer explanations for our choices and being able to assess the energy between us, including our abilities, defenses, intentions, goals and needs . . . both of us trying to reach the other, to connect, at some level . . . a presumption of cooperation." While I still find the concept "accountable" useful, this definition does offer a texture and complexity I appreciate.

She advocates "understanding other lesbians' choices, particularly choices we don't approve of. Understanding another's choices includes understanding our part in them." I find her discussion of this very helpful.

Justice

Sarah Hoagland is critical of the concept of justice. In tracing the history of justice she says, "The old testament 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth' and Solomon willing to cut a baby in half to determine the mother was about the extent of the biblical concept of justice."

This seems entirely too simplistic, and an "injustice" to Jewish history, which has always included concerns about justice, both in the bible and elsewhere. Even these two examples are not adequately addressed in Sarah Hoagland's treatment of them. The "eye for an eye" paradigm was actually a reform over existing contemporary forms of punishment, which called for death for stealing, and other extremes.⁵ And the judgement of Solomon story demonstrates a woman's emotional logic sense in the face of male rational violence.

Sarah Hoagland says that, "Justice ultimately is tied to punishment." I think of justice as having to do with restoring balance, restitution, remedy, and stopping injustice.

Withdrawal and Ignorance

Sarah Hoagland focuses repeatedly on the strategy of withdrawal as a primary moral option in all circumstances. She posits separation as central both as a political strategy and as a choice in

individual relationships. She articulates a position held by many lesbian separatists: "In certain respects to . . . attempt to change a system through designated avenues of reform or rebel against it through designated avenues of rebellion (act in ways named evil or bad within the system) . . . we are operating within the system's parameters and are thus giving the system meaning."

This seems to me a limited way of regarding acts of resistance. Plotting escape from genital mutilation, jail, or an incestuous father will be "named evil or bad within the system" and the state will try to return the colonized to her "rightful place." Working for the liberation of wimmin, challenging what Sarah Hoagland calls the axis of the system, may be labeled either praiseworthy or criminal by whatever version of the patriarchy currently reigns. It is imperative that we name our actions for ourselves.

Sarah Hoagland identifies ignorance or ignoring as the privilege of the privileged, an arrogant perception which doesn't have to take the other into account. "A central part of working out of oppression involves divesting ourselves of ignorance and its effects." My concern is that withdrawal, by the privileged from the oppressed, can perpetuate this ignorance. I do agree with her that withdrawal can often prevent further harm and must always be considered a valid option.

Controlling, Attending and Intervention

Sarah Hoagland is critical of the desire to be in control. "I am asking us to question the heroine in us: our urge to find our essential value in someone else needing us, being dependent on us." I think a distinction needs to be made between controlling a situation and improving a situation.

I believe I can make a difference, that (on good days) interactions with friends benefit both of us. Certainly issues of dependency enter into how we are with each other. But I've been disturbed the last few years to find lesbians increasingly reluctant to offer each other personal assistance because they are "working on their co-ing issues."

She recommends "perceiving what she is experiencing, understanding her situation, making suggestions, but leaving the choices to her." But how about increasing her options through sharing our resources?

I agree with Sarah Hoagland that intervention is very serious. But so is the decision not to intervene.

The kinds of situations in which she discusses intervention are "battering relationships, seizures, arrests, and someone about to step, unknowingly, into the middle of a busy street.

"Rather than explaining a decision not to intervene . . . we would feel a need to explain our intervention."

If I am having a *grande mal* seizure in the presence of my friend and she does nothing, or if I am arrested and my friends know about it and make no attempt to find out what I want/need from them, I certainly want an explanation. Both action and inaction have consequences and I would want the person who does either to "feel a need" to explain her choice.

Coming Out

Sarah Hoagland refers us to our coming out, to that initial energy which moved us to declare ourselves lesbians and find others who did likewise, as a source for where to go from here. "There is something in each lesbian that questions the norm at some level and starts us on our own path . . . a certain ability to resist and refocus." I agree that early energy and excitement was precious. It's a good idea to hark back to the invocation of lesbian desire as an act, a decision which affirmed our wholeness.

Lesbian Ethics is extensively footnoted; Sarah Hoagland has been most conscientious in crediting her sources. I got so much more out of the book the second time around I'm tempted to suggest everyone read it twice. Conversely, a lesbian friend who's very serious about ethical matters skipped the academic first part of each chapter and also got a lot out of the book. Because I've heard a number of lesbians say they had problems with the book stylistically, I urge lesbians to try again, if they've not read the book because something about the way it is written put them off.

Lesbian Ethics is organized with a table of contents, good index and margin notes; if you're only interested in reading what Sarah Hoagland has to say about certain subjects, it's fairly easy to find what you're looking for. Best would be to read it with a friend and

talk about the issues as you go along. I am glad to say that in a recent issue of the local lesbian/gay paper, I saw an ad announcing the formation of a study group to discuss *Lesbian Ethics*. Who knows, maybe there is a way for lesbians to get together in 1989 without 12 steps or a shrink. I thank Sarah Hoagland for her efforts toward new values.

— Barbara Ruth

I wish to thank Adrienne Lauby for her inciteful analysis, magnificent editing, delicious food and loving patience, all of which made this review possible. I also want to thank Rebecca Ripley, whose written reactions to Lesbian Ethics moved my thinking on the book.

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1. Irena Klepfisz, *Different Enclosures*, p. 169 (Onlywomen Press, London, England, 1985).
 2. Conversation, Pauline Bart. Also in her essay, "How A Nice Jewish Girl Like Me Could" in *Nice Jewish Girls: A Lesbian Anthology*, ed. Evelyn Torton Beck (Persephone Press, Watertown, MA, 1982; now published by The Crossing Press, Freedom, CA).
 3. I learned this from the teachings of Dhanyi Ywahoo, Cherokee medicine woman.
 4. This word is Kathleen Barry's.
 5. Jano brought this to my attention.

Books Received

History and Geography, the second book of wonderful poetry from Judith Barrington, 1989, \$7.95, The Eighth Mountain Press, 624 SE 29th Avenue, Portland, OR 97214-3026.

Lesbian Bedtime Stories are 29 short stories with happy endings to give us sweet dreams, gathered by Terry Woodrow, 1989, \$9.95, Tough Dove Books, POB 528, Little River, CA 95456.

Metamorphosis — Reflections on Recovery, poetry and essays by activist Judith McDaniel, 1989, \$7.95, Firebrand Books, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

The Big Mama Stories from the Black small-town South of the early '60s, the first collection from Shay Youngblood, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

Letting in the Night, a novel about women dealing with love and death over time and distance by Joan Lindau, 1989, \$8.95, Firebrand Books.

Don't—A Woman's Word, a personal chronicle of childhood incest and adult recovery by Elly Danica, 1989, \$8.95, Cleis Press, PO Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

In a Different Light, an anthology of lesbian writers, edited by Carolyn Weathers and Jenny Wrenn, 1989, \$9.95, Clothespin Fever Press, 5529 N. Figueroa St., LA, CA 90042.

Dyke Hands & Sutras Erotic & Lyric, poems and essays by SDiane Bogus, 1988, \$9, WIM Publications, 2215-R Market St., SF, CA 94114.

Lizards/Los Padres, dyke-ful short stories by Bettianne Shoney Sien, 1988, \$7, HerBooks, PO Box 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

Woman Plus Woman, a reissue of the 1974 classic by Dolores Klaich, 1989, \$9.95, The Naiad Press, PO Box 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

South of the Line, a civil war white lesbian romance by Catherine Ennis, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

Slow Dancing at Miss Polly's, a first book of poetry from Sheila Ortiz Taylor, author of *Faultline*, 1989, \$7.95, The Naiad Press.

Clicking Stones, a fantasy moving from the present into the 21st century, by Nancy Tyler Glenn, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

Surviving Sisters, a complex lesbian novel dealing with the familial aftermath of the Vietnam war, dead brothers, goddess research, by Gail Pass (author of *Zoe's Book*), 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

Of Love and Glory, a romance set in England during WWII, by Evelyn Kennedy, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

In Every Port, a steamy executive and her "little black book," set in the early '70s, by Karin Kallmaker, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

Raging Mother Mountain a lesbian land group begins in Oregon with an unlikely band of women, Pat Emmerson, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.

- The Bee's Kiss*, a romantic lesbian novel set in a '50s' closet outside London by Shirley Verel, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.
- In The Blood*, a future fantasy of a U.S. divided by biological warfare, and militia of womyn, doctors and lesbian groups struggling to survive, by Lauren Wright Douglas, 1989, \$8.95, The Naiad Press.
- Surviving Sexual Violence*, a study based on sixty interviews covering a range of sexual violence over women's lifetimes and the development of strategies to resist, cope and survive by Liz Kelley, 1989, \$14.95, Univ. of Minn. Press, 2037 Univ. Ave S.E., Minneapolis, MN 55414.
- Lesbian Love Stories* by 29 very different dykes, edited by Irene Zahava, 1989, The Crossing Press, \$9.95, PO Box 1048, Freedom, CA 95019.
- The Original Coming Out Stories*, expanded from the 1980 Persephone Press edition, with a new introduction, edited by Julia Penelope and Susan J. Wolfe, 1980 & 89, \$10.95, The Crossing Press.
- Everyday Zen: Love & Work*, a woman's perspective, by Charlotte Joko Beck, 1989, \$9.95, Harper & Row.
- The Woman in the Body, A Cultural Analysis of Reproduction*, an anthropological study of economy and alienation with women as a primary source, by Emily Martin, 1987, \$11.95, Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.
- The Nonsexist Word Finder: A Dictionary of Gender-Free Usage*, with alternatives, explanations or definitions for over 5,000 sexist words and phrases, by Rosalie Maggio, 1989, \$9.95, Beacon Press.
- Visual and Other Pleasures*, essays on cinema and visual art from the '70s and '80s by Laura Mulvey, 1989, \$12.50, Indiana University Press, 10th & Morton Sts., Bloomington, IN 47405.
- Healing Heart, Poems 1973-1988*, by Black feminist scholar Gloria T. Hull, 1989, \$8.95, Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, PO Box 908, Latham, NY 12110.
- The Pied Piper*, an anthology of lesbian feminist fiction whose hallmark is surprise and revelation edited by Lilian Mohin and Anna Livia, 1989, \$8.95 (£4.95), Onlywomen Press, 38 Mount Pleasant, London WC1X0AP, England.
- Panhandling Papers*, a collection of articles/essays and drawings by Kady, anti-patriarchal revolutionary Lesbian feminist who wrote the *Notebooks That Emma Gave Me*, 1989, \$10 pp, Kay Vandeurs, PO Box 623, Northampton, MA 01060.
- Bittersweet*, a lesbian "frontier" adventure set in the 1900s, with detail drawn from women's diaries of the "Old West," by Nevada Barr, 1984 (paper, 1989), \$9.95, Spinsters / Aunt Lute, PO Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.
- Singing Softly/Cantando Bajito*, a novel of 3 generations of Puerto Rican women, told by the youngest, who finds a way home again through the telling, by Carmen de Monteflores, 1989, \$8.95, Spinsters / Aunt Lute.

Contributors' Notes _____

b. ann: almost 30. lots of scorpio. i come from a family of complicated stories and beautiful faces. i have no degrees. i have shown my art in a handful of private and public places. i live by my wits, a staunchly independent poor woman misplaced somewhere in america. this published art is my partial legacy to my children t. and banana peels. thanks to my family, and marion for calling me so often, a.l. for your naked ways.

Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa: I am a Chicana-tejana-lesbian-feminist who loves to write. My problem is there are not enough hours in the day. Right now, I'm soliciting material for *Haciendo Caras/Making Faces, Making Souls: Constructing Colored Selves*, a reader of creative and critical perspectives.

Diane Blyler: I am currently a graduate student at Goddard College. I also have an MFA from Vermont College and have done additional graduate work at Dalhousie University. I am currently looking forward to returning to Vermont or moving to Maine in the fall with my lover, Julie, and our dog, Sugar.

Lisa Marie Bronson: I'm 22, a native Cincinnati, majoring in theater and Afro-American studies at Yale.

Juana María de la Caridad is a Cuban lesbian, artist, dancer, traveler, and visionary. Her portraits explore issues of power, passion and adventure in life and in art.

Lisa Carlin: commie-Jew dyke. blue collar. bad attitude. as her friend Janet Capone says, "make what you need/take what you need/and value it ..."

D.A. Clarke: I am not JJ! But I could have been. For a living, am responsible for a lot of "serious" computers dedicated to astronomical science. In the vanishingly small remainder of my time, pursue a passionate interest in Right and Wrong as understood and practised by dykes; enjoy the sound of radical lesbian argument. Have published poetry, essays, music; this is my first published fiction. Born 1958, British, immigrated 1962, mostly but uneasily assimilated, live in CA: atheist, techno-puppy, feminist, pessimist.

Anne Dalton is a feminist, poet, activist, and scholar currently completing her Ph.D. in Literary and Feminist Studies at the University of California at Davis. Poetry was one of her first loves and has proven to be one of the most sustaining.

Natalie Devora: I am a 26-year-old Black Albino Lesbian living in San Francisco I am currently working on a novel about my experiences as a Black Albino woman. I am interested in connecting with other Albino women, especially third world and those of color. Please write me at 355 Fulton St., Apt #39, SF, CA 94102.

Myra Fourwinds is a writer, photographer and videographer. She believes that images using mythic archetypal symbols speak to us on an unconscious level across time and cultural boundaries. By finding these archetypes within ourselves and others around us, we become aligned with the collective imagination and find access to the essence of life force.

Karen Elias is alive and well, teaching English and Women's Studies at SUNY Oswego and practicing beginner's mind.

Carolyn Gage is a lesbian playwright who has recently moved to southern Oregon where she is producing lesbian theater. She is an incest survivor.

Terri L. Jewell: 34-yr-old Black Lesbian Feminist hypergraphic who works everyday at making her own happiness her career. Her poetry, book reviews, essays and profiles have appeared in many Lesbian/Feminist publications. Soon, she will make the first step toward proclaiming professionalism!

Sondra Knight: Self-defined; I am what I write.

Vivienne Louise has been writing in the lesbian-feminist media for 11 years. As an African-American lesbian separatist I write of ancient lesbian cultural values in the present.

Beth Houston teaches creative writing at San Francisco State and has had poems published recently in *The Literary Review*, *Poem*, *Minnesota Review*, *Confrontation*, *Commonweal*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Descant*, *Magazine* and *Wind Chimes*.

Jasmine Marah — enigmatic, eclectic, elastic, eccentric, enthusiastic, fat, forty, furious fotomaker.

Paula Martinac was born in Pittsburgh in 1954 and now lives in Brooklyn. "Mineola, Mineola" is from a collection of her short fiction, *Voyages Out #1* (Seal Press, Fall 1989). She is on the editorial collective of *Conditions* and the editor of *The One You Call Sister: New Women's Fiction* (Cleis Press, 1989).

Lisa Morphey is a lesbian artist and writer who lives on a farm with her lover of 12 years and her daughter.

Marilyn R. Mumford: I'm a feminist poet and teacher at Bucknell University (PA). I've published primarily in little magazines and journals. My latest research project is on images of African American children in children's books between 1850 and the present.

Linda Marie Nolte can be reached at PO Box 7061, Minneapolis, MN 55407 and would like to hear from anybody who has seen elves in Iceland.

Pamela Pratt: I'm living in New York, have just finished my first novel, have been previously published in *Sinister Wisdom* and *The New York Native*.

Sudie Rakusin: I am a lesbian, and an artist, 6 planets in fire, live in the woods with my four dog companions doing some sort of art every chance I get.

Barbara Ruth is 43 years old. She is of Potowatomee, Ashkenazic Jewish, German, English and French descent. She was raised in a lower-middle class, pass (for WASP) family and is currently poor (by US government standards). She is a fat, anarcha-feminist, female-separatist, femme (though critical of feminity) dyke, with multiple unstable disabilities, numerous writing projects and an abiding love for women.

Catherine Reid: This story is a chapter from my first (unpublished) novel entitled *ISLAND ASH*. I'm still on the island and working on novel #3.

Rozanne: I was born in the Bronx in 1957, emigrated to New Jersey when I was 9. Went to Oberlin College, lived/worked in N.J. (for as short a time as possible!) and San Francisco ... settled in sunny South London for many years. Like a lot of women I'm currently "unemployed" but very busy. I try my best to survive,

be disruptive, and enjoy myself at the same time. I write, I work on a stropy women's mag called *Feminaxe* and play bass in a rude rowdy dyke band called the Sluts from Outer Space.

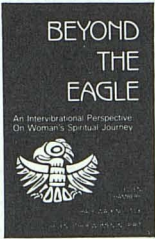
Teya Schaffer lives in the United States where one in three people get cancer. It didn't used to be this bad. Write to the American Cancer Society and tell them green vegetables aren't healthy if they're grown with pesticides, and aerobics won't help if the air is toxic; suggest that they put their/our money into stopping the nuclear industry. It may be too late, but what if it isn't?

Jill Spisak lives in Atlanta with her lover of many years and their three cats. "Taking Rachel Home" is from her manuscript, *Rachel Lives in the Heart*, which is nearing completion and will be looking for a publisher.

Donna Steiner: I'm originally from New Jersery. I've done a few readings in Syracuse, NY, where I live now. I've conducted poetry workshops for children and senior citizens, and I work as an office manager for a criminal defense law firm. I got your call on my 30th birthday and this is my first actual publication.

M.S. Taraba, who answers to the name of "Suzy," moved from Manhattan to Durham, North Carolina. Some days it seems like she never left.

tova is continuing to live.



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EAGLE**
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Announcements and Classified Ads _____

PUBLICATIONS

HIKANÉ: THE CAPABLE WOMON — disabled wimmin's newsletter for lesbians and our wimmin friends. \$4 sample (more if you can/less if you can't). Available in print or cassette. All wimmin welcome to subscribe. Hikané, PO Box C-9, Hillsdale, NY 12529.

NEW PUBLICATION! *Out/Inside*, a Women's Newsjournal Focusing on Lesbian Prisoners. Barbara Ruth, Editor. \$6/year, \$1.50 sample (plus 50¢ postage). PO Box 2821, Oakland, CA 94609.

THE LESBIAN UNRAVELER is a new "West Coast news service," publishing bi-monthly, \$5-12 sliding scale/year. For info: The Unraveler, PO Box 1521, Santa Cruz, CA 95061.

HEATHER HAS TWO MOMMIES, by Leslea Newman, with illus. by Diana Souza, a picture book for ages 3 to 103. Out in fall, 1989. To pre-order, send \$10 to In Other Words Publishing, 11 Massasoit St., Northampton, MA 01060. Donations welcome.

CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

EROTIC LESBIAN POETRY needed for anthology. No s/m, no previously published work. Deadline 9/30/89. Send with SASE to Sidewalk Revolution Press, PO Box 9062, Pittsburgh, PA 15224.

WOMEN AND CANCER anthology, being edited by Judith Brady for Cleis Press, is seeking submissions in all forms. Send submissions (2 copies) or inquiries to Judith Brady, 62 Sussex St., SF, CA 94131. Deadline: December, 1989.

LA BELLA FIGURA — a literary journal for Italian-American women, with a special welcome for lesbians. Send SASE for guidelines and subscription info to Rose Romano, PO Box 411223, SF, CA 94141-1223.

METIS-NATIVE AMERICAN? ATTENTION: half-quarter-other mixed breeds of Native American, Black or other races. Send your thoughts, problems of being a mixed breed for an open forum. Lin Craig, 7131 Owensmouth #22G, Canoga Park, CA 91303.

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December 31st deadline to Caffyn Kelley, Ed., Box 2901 Panorama Drive, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6E 4H1

MENOPAUSE ANTHOLOGY seeking submissions reflecting diversities of culture and sexuality on all aspects of menopause. Editors: Amber Coverdale Sumrall and Dena Taylor. Deadline: March 31, 1990. Send submissions, inquiries and SASE to Dena Taylor, PO Box 334, Capitola, CA 95010.

JEWISH WOMEN as consumers or providers of feminist psychotherapy for a special issue of *Women & Therapy Journal*. Send 2 copies of 1 page abstract with SASE by September 1 to: Rachel Josefowitz Siegel, 108 West Buffalo St., Ithaca, NY 14850.

LESBIAN IMMIGRANTS to the U.S., *all* submissions welcome, all held confidential. Send SASE for guidelines: The Project, c/o Lundy, 3 Madison St., Cambridge, MA 02138. Deadline: Sept. 30.

CONTESTS

SPINSTERS/AUNT LUTE LESBIAN LONG FICTION contest offers \$2,000 prize for novel-length, well-crafted fiction focusing on the lives of lesbians. Contract given along with award. Manuscripts accepted between January 2 and February 28, 1990. Write for rules: Spinsters/Aunt Lute, PO Box 410687, SF, CA 94141.

BY THE BAY AREA first-novel competition sponsored by Alyson Publications and San Francisco's A Different Light Bookstore, \$2500 advance and \$2500 promo budget. Open between June 1, 1989 and February 1, 1990. SASE for guidelines to A Different Light, 489 Castro St., SF, CA 94114.

CONFERENCES & WORKSHOPS

WEST COAST CELEBRATION II, a conference for old lesbians 60+, August 4-6, at the Conference Center at SF State University. On-site registration available. Write PO Box 31787, SF, CA 94131 for info.

4th ANNUAL WOMYN AND WITCHCRAFT: DEVELOPING DIANIC WICCA Conference, August 31—Sept. 3, in central Wisconsin. Open to all womyn, specifically designed for Dianics and/or lesbian witches. Wheelchair accessible. Brochure: DDW4, Box 6021, Madison, WI 53716.

LESBIAN AGENDA FOR ACTION CONFERENCE ON RACISM for Bay Area lesbians, fall 1989, write for info: Conf. Planning Committee, 3543 18th St. #32, SF, CA 94110.

A NATIONAL LESBIAN CONFERENCE is in the works, tentatively planned for Spring, 1991 in Atlanta, GA. Local organizing and national meetings are happening around the U.S. now. For more information, write: PO Box 3057 Albany NY 12203.

FIRST NATIONAL ASIAN/PACIFIC LESBIAN RETREAT, by for and about Asian/Pacific lesbians, Labor Day weekend, Sept. 1-4, UC Santa Cruz, CA. Wheelchair accessible, sign language and bi-lingual interpretation, sliding scale (\$100-\$150). Write for details, registration: PO Box 2594, Daly City, CA 94017.

GENERAL

N.C. COUNTRY LESBIANS: let's network! Write: Bold Moon Farm, 5780 Plowfield Rd., McLeansville, NC 27301.

LESBIAN PRISONER, 15, would like lesbian correspondents. Letters only (no printed material) to: Lin Elliott #68216, Arizona State Prison Complex, PO Box B-68216, Florence, AZ 85232.

JEWISH LESBIAN DAUGHTERS OF HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS (AND PARTNERS) meet semi-annually for a weekend of discussion, support, and networking around issues faced by children of survivors. For information write Box 6194, Boston, MA 02114, or call (617) 321-4254.

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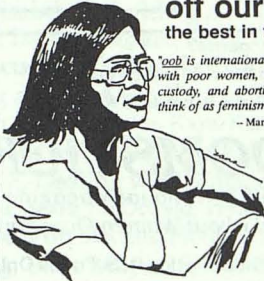
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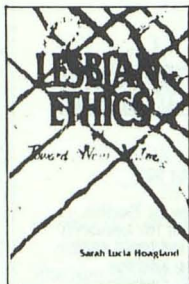
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We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as women of color, ethnic women, Third World, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or which perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. See p.6 for details on upcoming issues. The themes are intended as guidelines, not as rigid categories. If you have work that doesn't fit an upcoming theme, but belongs in *Sinister Wisdom*, don't hesitate to submit it.

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"Would you like to kiss
again?" she asks.
I'm smiling in the dark.
I turn and kiss her.
She keeps it very slow.
I'm the one who pushes for
more. I move my face
over her. She's lying back
looking at me now. I look at
her too, for a long time.
And then we kiss again.

from *Confessions of a Lesbian Groupie*

—Carolyn Gage

Two women are
dreaming together.
This is a private land.
It is the point
of departure.

from *Private Transportation*

—M.S. Taraba

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