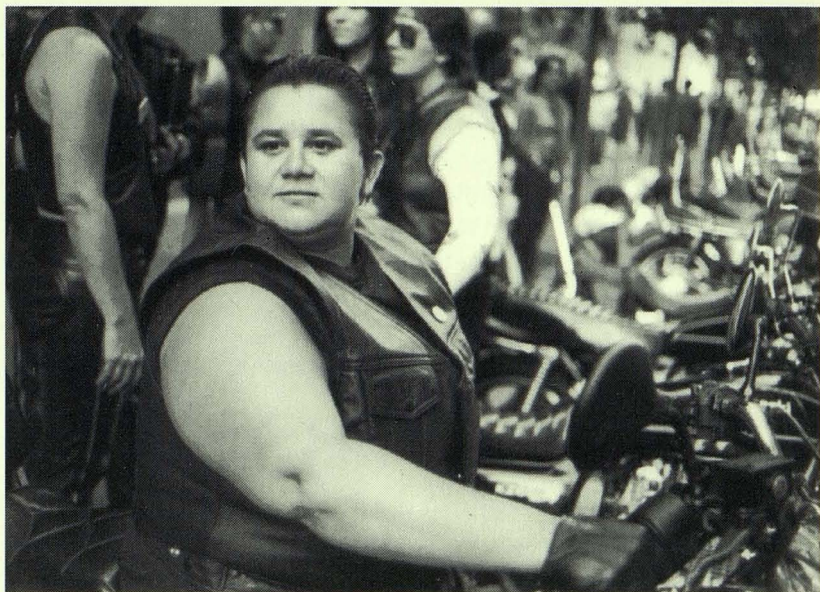


# sinister wisdom 46



## DYKE LIVES

*Anna Lee*

4-3-92



## Sinister Wisdom 46 Spring 1992

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A Journal for the Lesbian Imagination  
in the Arts and Politics

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*Sinister Wisdom: Institution or radical zine?*

After 15 years *Sinister Wisdom* is no longer a home business "owned" by its editor(s) — in November we received our 501(c)(3) approval from the government, and *Sinister Wisdom, Inc.* became a tax exempt corporation.\* What does that mean?

We pay less postage, we're able to apply for grants and your donations may now be tax-deductible. But in terms of structure, much remains to be seen. So far, my job is the same: shepherding words through electron currents, balancing business with a hundred lesbian realities. My house looks the same — piles of paper on every available surface, stacked under tables and in all the closets.

Sustained production is itself a form of institutionalization: you or your work/affinity/friendship/political group gets identified by the thing you make if you make it long enough. Add to that the formality of petitioning the government for tax status, codifying bylaws, naming a board of directors, having to fulfill reporting requirements — the *structure* of the product can take over the contents/intents in a flash. Way scary.

What I really wanna make is trouble. I want to sharpen the edges of dissatisfaction into action on every issue; I want to suspect my own comfort and compromises; I want to see the patriarchy end in my lifetime. Don't you? Don't you still?

I stop and laugh at myself: at 42 aren't you getting a little old for this? And I remember when I was 23 or so, volunteering at the Northampton Women's Center. We had regular work days, and I was in a work group with a 33-year-old straight anti-war activist. I remember thinking: cool — she's *still* marching and pouring blood on missiles, I hope I'm *that* radical when I'm *that* old. (Time for an issue on ageism?)

A couple weeks ago I went to a benefit for the Whiptail Lizard Lounge (a group of mostly young Bay Area dykes trying to make a womyn-only space, named for a parthenogenic lizard). There were tables where dykes could network their wares, and the SF galz were out with their zines — *GIRLJOCK: the Magazine for the Athletic Lesbian with a Political Consciousness, Lesbian Uprisings!*

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\* Thanks to Susan Levinkind who managed to get us through the red-tape maze.

and *On Our Rag* (cover of #3: six crotch shots with tampons in glorious xerox). Zines are usually stapled 8 1/2 x 11, 16-32 page magazines with interviews, gossip, news, tough talk, sex or wannabesex, cartoons—sometimes silly, often exquisitely pissed, mostly white with multi-cultural aspirations, usually outrageous as they can get. With daunting graphic styles that are really no harder to access than Zap Comix or the old xerox underground, they make you wonder.

All of us publishers traded zines — and now I wonder if they think *SW* is cool or stodgy — real revolutionary dykes or a bunch of stiffs over 30 being like, so serious you could yawn. They make me wonder about institutions and cycles: what comes from each fresh wave of flash and rage? Is *Sinister Wisdom* part of the “establishment” of dykedom *against* which new generations have to define themselves or is there a common ground, a way to talk about “isms” and revolutionary change? Where’s the bridge, the old/new sisterhood, the being of each other?

Of course we’re still just beginning to get the gist of this sisterhood thing, aren’t we? I thought the last *SW*, *Lesbians and Class*, was great — and certainly pointed out how far we have to go to “be of each other” in ways that matter. Now will middle- and upper-class dykes take the ball and do something? Will poor and working-class dykes have/take more and more space? Where are the effects of the trouble we make? I mean, can your consciousness just keep getting raised and raised until you glow from the great purity of it all, or, at a certain point, do you do something? And what is that thing?

One of the tabloids I picked up at the Whiptail Lizard benefit was a more traditional format newsletter for the *Womyn’s Barter Network*. I’ve always thought that barter was our only hedge against total state control posed by the possibility of electronic transfers of funds (that is, a totalitarian future where you cannot get *any* goods or services without a computerized access code and barter becomes an illegal form of anarchy/rebellion). I often think our resistance to barter is a measure of our dependence on the class system — our fear of having to evaluate the worth of what we have to offer fairly within a lesbian context.

But how do we go about that evaluation? Is, for instance, one hour of doing laundry worth an hour of chiropractic? Most of the time the emphasis is on the professional: she has to pay for equipment, she has to pay rent. But consider the dyke doing the

laundry: likely she doesn't own her own laundromat. \* Often womyn who offer support services in barter networks are womyn who can't barter within their 9 to 5 survival jobs. In order to get health care, they have to offer their labor. The chiropractor will probably make her trade by filling in a gap in her appointment schedule; at the most she'll stay late in her own office an extra hour. The launderer will be expected to pick up the laundry, shlep it to the laundromat and bring it back — *after* she's done her regular 40 hour a week job. The chiropractor gets support service done — she's got more leisure time. The dyke doing laundry may end up working sixty hours a week, doing more physical labor for which she goes into deeper barter debt in order to get the physical care she needs. The chiropractor may use her extra time to work more — but then she's using her "extra" time to build wealth, while the launderer is using her time to support a professional's practice. When we're talking about the value of work, we're not just talking about the value of labor but the value of leisure. As far as I know, no dykes have created a practical economics that takes the value of leisure into account. So it's easier to just swallow the dollar values that men enforce.

In "All the Pieces I Never Wrote About Class" in SW#45, Caryatis Cardea published the first critical analysis of casually-thought-out barter systems that I've read. \*\* In her article she points out that the folks most likely to have stuff to swap and feel entitled and at ease doing it would be artisans and professionals. "This would increase their disposable income for the purchase of more consumer items which they can maintain for free through the lesbian network..." and "contribute to the gaps" between the classes.

Theoretically it would be possible to use that new disposable income to set up a lesbian fund or support lesbian projects, and eventually form self-sufficient communities made up of dykes from all class backgrounds, withdrawing support from men's economies. But we haven't done much of that with the disposable income we have now, have we? If middle- and upper-class womyn

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\*For the purpose of this example, I'm assuming the dykes have the class status of their work. Of course the launderer could be an upper-class lesbian "trying to make ends meet" on investment income and the chiropractor, a working-class dyke paying off school loans and supporting two kids. What would that change and how would we account for it — theoretically and in practise?

\*\* Many of my thoughts around the problems of barter got clarified in conversation with Caryatis, whose editorial work continues to be invaluable to me and the magazine.

have more time and resources, it's not likely that the "trickle down" effect will do any more for poor and working-class dykes than reaganomics did for the homeless.

But actually starting a network is gutsy and rough — it opens you up to all these questions. And doing it, even if we don't get it right our first 310 attempts, may lead us to the well-considered barter system, to new structures that work. The womyn who organize the Womyn's Barter Network\* consider our economic system a "giant pyramid scam" and want to see womyn getting the fruits of their labor without having to "give them your last dollar with your last breath,"\*\* want to "find a way to exchange services which does not fall into the same classist ways of thinking we've been brainwashed into believing."\*\*\* They see themselves as providing a forum for discussion and theory as well as a list of the offers and needs of participating womyn.

Developing real barter networks may, in fact, be crucial to our individual and collective survival — but we have to talk clearly about who profits and what's done with that profit. We have to make sure our networks aren't just clubs for dykes-like-us. And when we think we've stretched ourselves and created an accessible system for every dyke we can imagine, we have to re-examine what we've done, imagine what access might mean all over again.

Speaking of sharing access — we want *Sinister Wisdom* to be an open access dyke space. Lesbians who want to guest edit an issue are encouraged to let us know. There is some process to go through (that is, the editorial group will decide yes or no), and we make a contractual agreement. After that, we pay the regular costs, and work with guest editors on production. It helps if you live nearby, but it's not critical. We hope our future will expand with the intensity of new vision. The Italian-American Women's Issue, Lesbians and Class and the upcoming Lesbians of Color Issue are gifts for the mind and spirit.

One of the things I hope will come out of *Sinister Wisdom's* incorporation is that more dykes will use this journal as lesbian community space. A place where we make trouble and change together.

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\* Send \$2 for a copy of the next issue to: 1087 Valencia St. #F, SF, CA 94110 or call Ren at 415-648-2488. To get the other zines, talk to your local women's bookstore.

\*\* Arrugula in *Womyn's Barter Network* #2, Fall 1991.

\*\*\* Ren, *Ibid.*



## Lesbian Metaphysics

Of all the holes I've jumped  
in the air, being a dyke  
is the holeiest. Look,  
even my tracks  
have no edges. I leap, spin  
around once, both feet  
off the ground, bright  
sun everywhere and below  
  
my body, no shadow.  
How different, I think, even  
talented to leave  
no trace. But practical?  
Who will wonder where I am?  
Who will muse about me  
if they never knew  
I was here?

I keep jumping holes  
in the air. Sometimes a meteor  
falls through one and burns  
a crater in the earth.  
I did that, I think  
to myself, pointing.

---

"I keep jumping holes in the air" comes from a Dutch saying, "een gaat in de lucht springen," used when one isn't making any progress.



*Self-Portrait*  
Juarez Hawkins

## Reasons and Strange Rejections

She used to weave blankets  
of smoked kelp, beige ribbon  
attach herself to nameless animals  
that scratched the surface of her nights.

Did her parents really die?  
Was she greater than she knew?  
Did she wear black leather pants  
for the gay girls in the bar?

She drove up to my house  
stretched her dreadlocked hair  
over frameless wire chairs  
told me a dream had led her there.

Did birds peck her windowsill?  
How quickly had she walked  
the pathway to her soul?  
Does she tongue without asking?

She stood naked in my mirrors  
conjured all juju prophecy  
over soiled plates, left-over news  
mutual friends without partners.

Was she foolish beyond her years?  
When did the women welcome her?  
Had they discovered her excretions?  
The lines she hid with scarves?

She shaved my rattan mats  
after pitching the rune tiles  
called my name out seven times  
then left without a trace.

Did friendly fire find her?  
Did it come alive in her veins?  
Did little boys throw rocks at her?  
When will she ever stop?

## A Wedding Story

Right in the middle of Yahtzee, Annie and Jill announced that they were getting married. "After being together for all these years, it's time we publicly acknowledge our relationship and make another step toward a more global way of thinking," said Jill.

"Global, huh?" I snickered. "Before you tell Zimbabwe, why don't you tell your parents?"

Risa, my girlfriend, kicked me under the card table and snarled into my ear, "Deb, honey, be nice!" She then turned to our guests, smiled through clenched teeth and hissed, "You can dress 'em up..." We finished the adage together, "...but you can't take 'em out." I hoped our laughter and attention to the game would squelch any further talk of weddings.

Our foursome got together in each other's homes once or twice a month to gossip, eat, play board games and marvel at the longevity of our relationships. For several weeks I had a bad feeling that the hot topic of marriage was about ready to be shoved to the front burner.

The last time Risa and I had dinner at Annie and Jill's their coffee table was loaded with what looked like every piece of printed material ever created on the subject of ceremonies, rites and celebrations of commitment. Somehow I managed to avoid the issue *that* night. And if I worked hard enough I'd avoid it *this* night, too! I refused to believe that these women were about to cave in to societal pressure. Silently, I sizzled.

Were we fast becoming a Lesbian nation of Lucy and Ethels, Rhoda and Marys, or worst of all, June and Junes, prancing around in housedresses and pearls waiting for some fool to walk through the door saying, "Honey, I'm home!"? I could see it all now, heart-shaped meat loaves and brains turned to oatmeal. I stayed quiet for as long as I could.

"Can't see why you think a wedding is necessary. *I know* you've been together for 16 years, *you know* you've been together for 16 years, even *the postman* knows you've been together for 16 years! So what's the point?" I blurted.

"We feel that having some sort of ceremony is an important political and personal statement of our commitment to each other." Jill intoned in her best I'm-just-trying-to-educate-you voice. "You know as well as I do that there are no legal or moral supports for dykes in this society. We *have* to find ways to affirm and empower ourselves."

"And holy deadlock is the answer?!" I yelled. "I know what it is, you just want presents! I can't believe you two are willing to sell out and submit yourselves to that ancient, heterosexist bondage ritual. Get a grip on reality, girls. Matrimony is *not* the answer to empowerment!"

Much to Risa's dismay I proceeded to rant on and on. I pulled out every tired, old shred of political rhetoric against marriage that I could think up. Everyone seemed engulfed in ecstasy at the prospect of a lezzie wedding. Speaking lovingly of macrobiotic wedding cakes, the moon, blue chip bond funds, babies and second mortgages they all laughed and floated off into the living room.

"I've heard just about enough. That's it!" I hollered and threw the dice across the room. All five dice smacked the wall and landed on the floor in a perfect Yahtzee, all sixes. Everybody took this as a blessing from the Goddess. It was my "lucky" toss so, of course, they figured it only made sense that I should be Matron-of-Honor.

"Are you all out of your minds? I haven't set foot in a church since my First Holy Communion when my veil got caught in the Holy water font. The whole damned thing tipped into Sister Timothy's lap! AND I have never dressed up in *anything* froo-froo or mint green! Next I suppose you'll want me to go to a department store and have my face done by some woman with big hair!"

"Come in here, hush up and sit down!" commanded Risa. I dragged myself into the living room and threw my body on the couch.

"I really don't understand why you're so threatened by this, Deb," said Annie. "We're planning on doing it up nice in a very centered and womanly way. The ceremony is going to be held on the land we bought up north, in the clearing I told you about."

I shrieked and flew off the couch. "Me? Outside? In the woods? You know I don't do dirt! We-l-l-l, you're not gonna catch me jiggin' around like some damned wood sprite with my bare chest flappin' in the breeze. I will be keeping all my clothes ON, thank you! And if I SEE any naked breasts, I'm leaving!" They just smiled and kept

planning. Eventually, after some coaxing, teasing and a double-dare from Risa, I gave in and went to the wedding. At the last minute Risa was called to work, so I had to brave the nuptials alone.

The day of the blessed event, I agreed to give a ride to a couple I didn't know, who were close friends of Jill's. I picked them up that morning and something told me I was in for a rough trip. When I honked the horn, a pair of thin, blonde women skipped down the walk. They were dressed as if they'd been caught in explosions at Pier One, L.L. Bean and Banana Republic. They looked ethereal, ethnic, gauzy yet practical all at once. This pair also reeked of patchouli oil. I, on the other hand, had sprayed on so much insect repellent my pants were clinging to my legs and my butt was permanently glued to the driver's seat.

"Hi, and blessed be," they chirped in unison. "I'm Birch Bark and this is my friend, Autumn Wind. What's that awful smell? We both have allergies."

I thought quickly, then in my best Jamaican accent replied, "I'm a Voo-doo princess. What you're smellin' is the juju bag I carry in my purse."

"Oh," said Ms. Wind, "we respect all religions, except Christianity, of course, so it's o.k. We'll just hop in and open the windows."

"You just do that," I purred.

Fifty miles into the journey I almost got pulled over for speeding. It was either that or overdose on patchouli. My companions sang Kay Gardner songs for the next 100 miles until they fell asleep. Or did they pass out? I couldn't tell which.

Finally, we found the hand painted sign that directed us to an unpaved road. We trekked in about a quarter mile and came to the wedding site which was nestled in a beautiful clearing. The surrounding pines were decorated with fresh flower garlands and their smells filled the air. In the very center of the clearing stood a stone altar. All around the altar, growing right out of the ground, were hundreds of day lilies, black-eyed susans and other summer flowers I'd never seen before. I was overcome by the sheer unadulterated beauty of it all! This skulking euphoria crept up on me. Suddenly, I was seized with a woodsy, organic, crunchy-granola-kinda-bean-sprouty feeling. I actually started to understand why people were so enamored with the out of doors.

Just as I was beginning to unwind, a half-naked ephemeral flit

danced up to me and tried to mash a halo of dried flowers onto my head. "Do I look like a Smurf?" I screamed. "Do you understand that dried flowers and nappy hair *do not* mix? I don't wanna be pickin' that shit outta my hair for the next week!"

Ms. Flit, obviously high on life, continued to leap about and grin. "I know you," she pronounced delightedly, "Matron-of-Honor, perfect Yahtzee, all sixes." She waved the crusty crown in my face and whined, "Everyone in the wedding party is wearing these. You can't be the only one not wearing a halo. We're videotaping the whole ceremony and it just wouldn't look right. Come on, let me help you tie it on."

Well, I had come this far because I loved Annie and Jill. I genuinely wanted to be a part of one of the most special days in their lives. So I stood still and let her anchor that stupid crumbly thing to my head.

"By the way, gift table is on the right, food far left, Brenda's giving neck rubs behind that oak and Pilar is reading Tarot down by the creek. Enjoy," she called over her shoulder as she skipped off to find the next victim.

The day was moving into afternoon and all I wanted to do was sit down. As I walked across the clearing, a realization hit me. Women were seated *directly* on the grass. No blankets. No lawn chairs. Nothing. I began to panic! I can't sit on grass. *Things* live in grass. Animals pee on grass. Maybe it wasn't too late to find Birch Bark and have her whittle me a chair. What was I supposed to do? Frantically, I searched the group for some sign of Jill or Annie, but no luck. Well, at least there was food here. When in doubt, eat.

I assumed the spread would consist of your average dyke fare. You know, wheat-free this, rice flour that, tofu ridden this, carob laden that and the ubiquitous blue corn chips, all undercooked and bland as Pat Boone. I knew it would be futile to look for chicken. When I arrived at the table, none of the food resembled *anything* I'd ever eaten. Among the entrées was a black paste encircled by gray crackers. There were also purple things floating in purple liquid, a gelatinous steamy casserole and some crunchy red stuff that women kept popping into their mouths and commenting on how yummy the batch tasted. In the center of this repast sat a huge brown mound. *That* was either the wedding cake or beavers had crawled up from the creek and begun construction of their new

home right in the middle of the table. By this time, I was starving. I would've danced the mambo butt naked across Montana for just a Ritz cracker and a slice of cheese! I *had* to find Annie and Jill! They'd know where the REAL food was hiding. My blood sugar level dropped dangerously low. I wobbled around the perimeter of the clearing, feeling almost drunk and bumping into the guests as I mumbled, "HaveyouseenAnnieorJill?" I stumbled back over to what I loosely referred to as the food table and discovered that someone had brought a plain mixed green salad. Mine! Mine! I swooped down and hung over that bowl like a vulture. After I'd eaten, my head started to clear and my eyes unglazed. I leaned against a tree and drifted into that full tummy coma. All of a sudden somebody shrieked, "Goddess! Oh, my Goddess!" The noise came from the direction of the creek, so everyone made a mad scramble for the water.

Once there, we encountered a large Black woman in a bright yellow toga. She was pacing, leaping and yelling under a gigantic maple. She too was wearing crunchy dried flowers on her head. Ms. Yellow Toga pointed up into the branches. "My poor baby," she moaned, "My Terpsichore, my darling. I told her not to go up there but she insisted. I turned my back for one second, one second. She's not healthy at all, you know, she's due for her asthma shot at 4:30 and it's already 5:00. Oh, Goddess, what am I going to do?" Her voice trailed off into a distressed sob. I looked around. We were all just standing there frozen like a pile of Lincoln Logs. I couldn't believe it! I didn't know about these girls but I'd had my veggies and was fired up! I felt prepared to do whatever it would take to save that poor little lamb.

"What is the matter with you women?" I cried. "Let's help the sister get her child out of that tree." I started forward, expecting them all to follow, when someone whispered in my ear, "It's not her kid, it's her cat."

"Say what? Why would anyone in her right mind bring her cat to a wedding?"

The woman who'd whispered to me straightened up and fixed me with a look like Superman doing x-ray vision. "You sound quite hostile and just a little judgmental. I think your aura needs cleaning."

Before I could tell her to go get the Dustbuster, someone shouted, "Stand aside!" As we all stepped back, Birch Bark made



a running start and hurtled herself onto the tree. She was plastered to the trunk and hung there for a moment, then she shinnied up, turned, gave the "thumbs-up" sign and disappeared into the branches.

We stared up into the tree for what seemed like hours. My neck hurt like the devil. I couldn't even see the beast. Then I spotted her. Contentedly snuggled on a wide bough was a snotty looking Siamese that had absolutely *no* intention of coming down to earth in *this* lifetime. I felt kind of sorry for Birch Bark wedged up there doing that "nice kitty, here kitty" baloney. Each time her hand got close enough to grab, the little rat catcher would mutate into Pussy from Hell. Then just as quickly it would turn back into Miss Prim. The only thing Birch Bark seemed to be getting from her act of bravery was a pair of badly skinned knees.

The situation, in my opinion, was reaching maddening proportions. I happened to look down and there at my feet lay a massive pinecone. I picked it up and thought, "Maybe I'll give Terpsichore a bit of a hand." I wondered if I could put some serious velocity on that pinecone without hurting the impudent puss. I knew I'd probably bring the wrath of the whole Lesbian universe down on my head but I took aim and let that prickly baby fly! Bull's-eye! The cone thwacked Terpsichore's fuzzy flanks. She leaped, all teeth and claws, a parabolic trajectory soaring over our heads. Before you could say "inappropriate," she landed WHAM! right in the middle of the gift table. Vibrators, power tools, sensible cotton underwear and tie-dyed jog bras flew in every direction.

In the confusion that ensued, I escaped from the crowd and sprinted for the altar. I figured if they were going to kill me, we might as well turn it into a ritual. My freeze-dried crown bounced merrily as I ran straight into a teeny, bird-like woman clothed in black. How could retribution have arrived so quickly? After all I was only trying to help. I hadn't done any real damage. Terpsichore walked away from the crash jolted but intact. Even so, guilt hung around me like fog. I fell to my knees on the clammy turf at Bird Woman's feet, stammered out the whole story and begged forgiveness.

"For heaven's sake, get up. You *must* be Catholic. I get that response quite frequently from Catholics. You'd think I'd be accustomed to it by now."

"Wait a minute," I said, "Just who are you anyway?"

She pointed at her clerical collar. "Reverend Ramona. I'm here to perform the ceremony. I've been doing some impromptu counseling with Annie and Jill to alleviate their stress. Cold feet. You know how it is."

"What? You mean you've actually talked with them today?"

"Oh sure. They're in the trailer down on the other side of the creek."

"Trailer, they're in a trailer?" Before she could utter another word I sprinted down the path and across the foot bridge that spanned the creek.

I arrived at the trailer and breathed a sigh of relief. Finally. Some sanctuary amidst this chaos. An oasis of calm, a snug harbor. A REAL toilet! I flung the door open and the atmosphere was, how shall I put this, a tad thick. Jill was stretched out in a hammock sucking back one pop after another, eating big floppy slices of pepperoni pizza and watching Madonna videos. Annie paced back and forth with her arms crossed tightly over her chest.

These words popped out of Annie like little explosions: "The wedding is *OFF!* I think we must have been in the grip of some heavy duty PMS when we decided to do this number!"

"You got that right," Jill mumbled between munches.

"I mean geez, Deb," snapped Annie, "You were absolutely right. Aping heterosexuals is *not* an act of empowerment, it's an act of stupidity. I honestly don't know what we were thinking of. We've been in here all damned day trying to sort everything out. I'm sorry, Deb."

I felt like a sandbag with the edge torn off. My whole body sagged. The tears gathered in the pit of my stomach and started that slow roller coaster climb to my throat. Then I caught a look at myself in the mirror. My halo, which by now was completely destroyed, had collapsed down around my neck. I appeared to be marinated from head to toe in leaves, mud and grass. My blouse twisted east, my slacks twisted west and there were cherry tomato seeds stuck to the corners of my mouth.

"Yeah," chomped Jill, "We know you're upset, so are we, but ..."

"Get out of that hammock! Put that pizza down and turn that TV off," I growled. "This event is going to continue as planned. And do you know why?" Their eyes were as wide as banjos. They thought I'd lost my mind. "Because I ventured all the way out into

the woods for you two today. My hair is full of mummified flower parts, my clothes are ripped to shit, the dyke tribunal may have put a bounty on my head for cat torture and *I STINK!* Now. You are gonna get your butts out there, smile and be happy, dammit!"

There was a long pause. They both just stared at me. Then Jill sighed. "Wow, Deb, you always know just the exact thing to say in a crisis situation." They hugged each other, brushed off their matching tuxedos and hugged me. Then hand in hand Annie and Jill strolled out the door. I picked up a piece of pizza, stretched out on the hammock and turned on the TV. Heh, I could always catch the wedding on video, right?

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*1919 anonymous photograph*

Courtesy of the Common Reader, New Salem, Mass.

Olga Krause

untitled

*translated from the Russian by Sonja Franeta*

What was your pink nipple  
staring at so intently  
while I kissed  
your other breast?  
Why were you crying?  
It's too bad  
that this fright  
before first tenderness  
will not be repeated.

ОЛЬГА КРАУСЕ

Куда смотрел так пристально  
твой розовый сосок,  
когда другую грудь  
тебе я целовала?  
Зачем ты плакала?  
Как жаль,  
что этот страх  
перед первой нежностью  
уже не повторится.

## Jackie

I keep her tucked under my tongue a small  
space for a grown woman she pushes the sinews;  
I can't leave her home.  
I curl her with my tongue, she used to  
sit in the curve where neck meets shoulder  
dressed in plaid and jeans protesting  
her death  
but no one would remark her  
eyes everywhere else and often on mine  
*how do you do, how are you doing*  
but what is my loss compared to hers I pulled  
her in, no sense continuing the embarrassment  
of ear tilting to her voice.  
I tucked her under my tongue  
comfort to my senses  
and wore the gaze of one who listens  
to inner voices. Conversations  
are infrequent, people see  
the odd grimace of her  
moving through my mouth and hesitate  
when my lips open, she calls out her name.

Susan Hawthorne

two from *The Language in My Tongue* —  
*A sequence of 23 poems on epilepsy*

## First Breath

**T**he first breath I took  
was late.

I've been holding it ever since.

An amniotic sea pushing  
me forwards.

But something was holding me back.

The doctor was late, so  
I was too.

He breathed his lunch on me.

## New Tongue

You say that later  
they said that when your memory failed  
you recognized only your sister  
your companion.

You say some thought you were dead.

But when, after three days you woke.  
Your ears heard the world as if for the first time.  
Your eyes saw the white cockatoo long before she flew over  
dropping feathers on your head.

You sang in a new tongue  
or so others said.  
You picked up a large stick brandishing it at all  
except your sister your companion.

You say that in your dream  
in some kind of fit or seizure  
you were entrusted with language.

## Dusk

Nawal timidly opened the door of the cabin that would be home for two weeks and looked into the eyes she had coveted for an eternity. Sparkling deep blue, open, eager. Yes. As if made to order, these were the eyes she had been dreaming about and wishing for.

The mouth beneath those beautiful eyes opened and sounds came forth but at first the words did not register. Finally they broke through Nawal's consciousness.

"...expect us to share this tiny little dump. Can you believe it? There is no way I am going to be able get my stuff in that thing they're calling a dresser. I mean, it's not like we're only here for a weekend! And the bathroom. You can't *even* believe it! The mirror is hardly big enough to see my face in. *Plus* it's warped. But I'm trying not to let it depress me. I keep telling myself, 'The darkest hour is before the dawn.'"

The words rolled off Nawal like olive oil. She just looked into those eyes. Perhaps if she wished hard enough they would become hers, replacing the ones her last boyfriend had called the color of shit. It dawned on Nawal that the words had ceased, and she wondered why.

"Well, come one. What's your name? Is it some big secret?"

Nawal's voice cracked as she began talking. "Hello. How do you do? I'm Nawal."

"You're *what*?"

"Nawal."

"Naaaah - well?" Emphasis on the wrong syllable.

"No, Nawal."

"I'll have to find a nickname for you. That's too weird. I know, you can be Willie. My name's Jennifer. Hey, is that all the stuff you brought? Maybe I could have one of your drawers. What do you say? Alright, great."

Several campers made futile attempts to pronounce Nawal's name that day. At the evening get-together led by Ms. Taylor, Colleen gave up after the fourth try, annoyance in her voice as she asked, "What kind of name is it?"



Nawal hunched her shoulders instinctively, as if protecting herself from a blow about to be delivered. "Palestinian."

"Palestinian?" Blue eyes widened. "Palestinians are terrorists."

Did it ever stop? Nawal gave the stock answer her parents had taught her. "I'm not a terrorist."

"Well, I hope not. I don't want to be at art camp with a terrorist. I think that —"

"Students," Ms. Taylor spoke sharply. "My first rule is that everyone is treated with respect. I will not tolerate any derogatory comments about a student's ethnic and cultural heritage. Anyone making such comments will not be allowed in my class. Do I make myself clear?"

Ms. Taylor made herself so clear that no one mentioned the word terrorist again in her presence. But the whispering around certain diningroom tables continued, and on Tuesday in the shower-room, Colleen and Roberta asked "Willie" if she liked being a terrorist.

Ms. Taylor's words to Colleen had stunned Nawal, and she studied her teacher carefully. Most nights Ms. Taylor talked on the pay telephone, and Nawal sauntered casually by enough times to discern she always seemed to be talking to Nancy. Ms. Taylor had green eyes and short sandy hair. She wore funny-looking sandals and long, baggy shorts. When Douglas asked, "Are you married?" she laughed before saying no.

Tucked away among the woodlands of northern Ontario, the art camp had originally been a Boy Scout camp. Nawal had never left Hamilton and she found the vast open space and silence frightening. She felt engulfed by the huge lake and never-ending sky but enjoyed the trees because they reminded her of the two in her backyard. She found herself drawn to a circle of pine trees set back from the cabins and trails, and she began visiting them each day.

Nawal was thrilled to be at the camp and couldn't understand the complacency of the others. Perhaps private art lessons and other camps had jaded them. Nawal's only instruction to date had been through her high school, and she hadn't realized its limitations until now.

She still found it hard to believe that out of hundreds of high school students hoping to attend the camp, she had been chosen. Nawal never would have applied. She heard about the competi-

tion from her art teacher Mr. Cummings, an extremely tall man with a precise British accent that for some reason frightened her. He told Nawal to remain after class and she sat in terror the full hour wondering what she had done wrong. But Mr. Cummings had only told her she had a good chance in the competition and he would submit her paintings.

Nawal said nothing to her parents, assuming she would not be chosen. When Mr. Cummings triumphantly announced her success to the class, she felt mostly embarrassment and wished everyone would stop looking. That night she told her parents as they did after-dinner chores, her father Hani washing dishes, Nawal drying, and her mother Jameelah making lunches for the next day. They responded to her news as expected, anxiety overriding everything else. How far away? Are all the costs really covered? Tiredness etched keenly in their faces, they told Nawal they were proud, hugged her and sent her off to bed. As she drifted into sleep, Nawal could hear anxious murmurs from the kitchen.

The first few days passed in a blur. Nawal loved the structured art classes, and soaked up the teachers' words with fierce intent. She felt alive and at home with drawing pencil in hand. She also loved the time after dinner spent with the circle of pine trees and for the first time realized the magic that happened at twilight. In Hamilton, dusk passed and night fell without her noticing. But not here.

However, the rest of the free time alarmed her. She used it to practice new sketching exercises while the others ran to the lake and jumped in exuberantly. They couldn't believe she didn't know how to swim. "Everyone knows how to swim," Jennifer said. "Get with it."

Just that day Jennifer completed a stunning depiction of an orchid with bold strokes of purple that seemed to move the flower past the confinement of the page. This joined her other recently-finished painting of a smart set of cabins nestled in a white-sand cove that was, she explained, the resort in Hawaii she had visited several times. In both of these she had used watercolor techniques that Nawal did not know. Upon discovering this, she told Nawal to meet her in the studio next morning at 8:00. This became a regular occurrence.

At one session, Jennifer patiently explained a concept using sponges. When Nawal had trouble executing the technique, Jennifer advised "Don't give up. Remember, 'The darkest hour is

before the dawn.' You're almost there." After practicing several times, Nawal could perform the technique adequately.

When Jennifer left, Nawal lingered to look at Ms. Taylor's artwork. One series focused on patterns and colors, some of which made Nawal think of lines, forms and colors in new ways. Nawal paused in front of one painting and realized with a start the pattern mirrored the one in the scarf she had unexpectedly come across in her mother's closet a year ago. Her mother had taken the intricately-marked black and white material from her and told Nawal not to ask any questions.

Every day Nawal looked into Jennifer's eyes and wanted them for her own. This dream was the oldest one she had. It had begun in grade school, when she had also wanted blond curly hair, pale skin, a light dusting of freckles, and a delicate body. These days she didn't care about hair, skin, freckles or body; that had stopped after Cousin Cecilia's visit.

Cousin Cecilia had not been at all what Nawal expected. When she arrived, she strode confidently into the tiny living-room, a tall woman with a muscular body, cigarette dangling from a corner of her mouth, dozens of bracelets clinking on her arms, wearing a tight-fitting red dress. She kissed Nawal extravagantly, leaving gobs of lipstick on her face, but somehow Nawal didn't mind.

At dinner she had third helpings of everything, and drank two more beers than Nawal's father. Nawal couldn't keep her eyes off her. Cousin Cecilia had teased and sprayed her black hair and drawn heavy black lines under and over her eyes. Her brown skin, covered with rose-scented oil, shone like marble. She talked a lot, and so did Hani and Jameelah; Nawal had rarely seen them so animated.

When Tommy threw the paper by the front door, Cousin Cecilia exclaimed, "Don't tell me you subscribe to the newspaper!" as shocked as if they had committed some heinous crime. "Darlings, all these newspapers are owned by fascists. You'll never read a smidgen of truth in them."

Nawal puzzled over the word. Fash-ist? What did it mean? She looked it up in the dictionary but couldn't find it. Cousin Cecilia used it often, especially when talking about bosses and businessmen.

Cousin Cecilia stayed up until 5 in the morning and slept until 2 in the afternoon. After a large breakfast, she lay in the yard for two

hours in her leopard skin bikini that exposed the snake tattooed on her left shoulder. "You can never be too dark," she told Nawal, critically examining her tan lines in the mirror. "The darker the better. Your skin is quite nice, but you could spend a little more time in the sun."

One night Cousin Cecilia belly-danced for them. She appeared in a strapless, short black dress that hugged her body, the inevitable bracelets, hair teased extra high, the snake in full view. Hanı put on music Nawal had never heard, so why did it sound familiar?

Cousin Cecilia began to dance. Hanı and Jameelah held hands and stepped rhythmically around the outside of the room, smiling and nodding. And Cousin Cecilia danced. Her body moved, shook, writhed. Cousin Cecilia became a snake on the ground, a bird in the air, a snake again, then a beautiful woman with feet indistinguishable from brown earth.

Cousin Cecilia took a break, but one of her favorite songs began playing before she finished her cigarette. So she danced as the cigarette dangled from her mouth, she danced down on her knees and arched back, back, back, hands and pelvis continuing the dance, then she completed the arch and her head touched the floor, and chills covered Nawal's body.

The next afternoon Cousin Cecilia tried to teach some basic moves to Nawal, putting those eerily familiar records on full blast. But she didn't get too far.

"Loosen up, loosen up," Cousin Cecilia chided Nawal between chugs of beer. "Let those hips go."

Nawal tried to no avail. Cousin Cecilia came and stood very close behind her. "Just follow my body," she said as she moved her pelvis back and forth against Nawal's buttocks.

Oh — that movement! Nawal's hips moved freely. "Yes, yes, that's it!" Cousin Cecilia cried. "Follow my feet."

They took a few steps together before Nawal's feet, legs and pelvis proved unable to coordinate their movements, and the two of them crashed to the floor, arms and legs entangled, laughing uproariously. Nawal could not remember when she had laughed as hard.

"Hey," Cousin Cecilia said once they had disengaged themselves, "keep practicing. Put the music on extra loud. That helps. Now how about showing me those paintings of yours?"

Up to this point, Cousin Cecilia had seen only the portraits of Nawal's parents at work — Hanı pushing a broom and Jameelah

washing a window — that hung in the livingroom. Nawal brought out her vinyl carrying-case and sat silently as Cousin Cecilia looked carefully and slowly at each painting, pausing only to puff on her cigarette or drink her beer. After examining the last one, she sat for a minute, then said so quietly Nawal could barely hear. "Those fascist pigs sure get around, don't they?"

"What?"

"Honey, you have real talent, a real gift. You've got to do something with it, something for us."

Us?

"Nawal," Cousin Cecilia leaned closer and Nawal realized how achingly beautiful her face was, "Nawal, why does everyone you paint have blonde hair and blue eyes?"

Nawal sat in stunned silence. She didn't know why; she didn't even know that they did. But when she recalled each of those paintings in her mind's eye, she realized the truth of Cousin Cecilia's words.

"I, I don't know why, I, I guess it just happened that way."

"Nawal, you come from people with dark eyes and dark hair and brown skin. Draw your own people, Nawal."

What on earth was Cousin Cecilia talking about? It scared Nawal at the same time as she desperately wanted to hear more. She also had to fight back tears.

"Nobody's drawing us, Nawal," Cousin Cecilia said, "maybe that's what you have to do."

Just then the arm of the secondhand record player began grinding over and over the last section of the album. The moment broke.

When Cousin Cecilia took herself, her proud darkness, her three large suitcases back to the train station, Hani looked older than ever, tears streaked Jameelah's face, and Nawal hugged her for a long time. "Stay away from the fascists," Cousin Cecilia told her, "and keep drawing. I'll see you sooner than you think."

Nawal sat down the day after Cousin Cecilia left and, with only a pencil, drew her dancing. She caught Cousin Cecilia at the moment before her head touched the floor. The graceful lines of her body, the muscles in her long legs, the snake on her shoulder, the cigarette in her mouth, all emerged from the pencil in stark, piercing beauty.

Nawal sent the drawing to Cousin Cecilia, and it became her prized possession. Cousin Cecilia hung it in a prominent spot in

her livingroom, actually moving some of the hundreds of objects in that room to give it more space. She would drag strangers off the street to show them the picture.

By the end of the first week of art camp, Nawal had talked several times with Dwayne, a thin boy from Belleville. He had approached her one day in class to compliment her latest sketching effort. Dwayne showed Nawal his drawing of a large bird with outstretched wings taking off from a marshland.

"What kind of bird is that?"

"A blue heron," Dwayne replied. "My favorite bird. Something about them feels magical."

A few times Nawal had noticed Dwayne sitting alone during meals. Once Nawal approached to ask if she might sit down. When she got close enough to see the look on his face, Nawal stopped. It was that aching loneliness Nawal had felt upon her own face every time she thought of her mother and father. Unthinkingly she followed Dwayne's gaze out the window. It ended at Kevin. Kevin? How could Dwayne be lonely for someone from Toronto he had only known for a week? They weren't even friends. Kevin was too busy showing off for Roberta to make friends with anyone else. Not knowing what to do, Nawal turned and walked away, sitting down at a table with Jennifer and Colleen.

One night, Jennifer and Nawal sat up in bed and talked as they often did. Or rather, Jennifer talked and Nawal looked hopefully in her eyes. Nawal wore a long cotton T-shirt she had admired yesterday when Jennifer put it on. Jennifer had promptly given it to her.

"I got *another* letter from Bill today. He's been pining away for me ever since I left. He told me he's finally decided where he's going to get his M.B.A.

"I just don't know *what* school to go to. Sometimes it makes me anxious but I just remember, 'The darkest hour is before the dawn.' I mean, I suppose I should consider O.C.A., but *Toronto*? I'm thinking of Paris. That's where real artists go. I could take my easel down by the Seine and paint and then stop at one of the cafes. It would be so *romantic*."

Nawal wondered absently about the Seine and how Jennifer knew real artists went to Paris and what O.C.A. meant. Oh —

maybe the Ontario College of Art. Mr. Cummings said she should apply there. She hadn't asked about money.

"Bill told me about the latest meeting of the Young P.C.'s. His family has been in the Conservative party *forever*."

Nawal, who had never met anyone who didn't vote N.D.P., didn't answer. Soon Jennifer's voice faded and both girls slept.

Arriving early in the artroom the next day after lunch, Nawal looked thoughtfully at her pictures, trying to follow Ms. Taylor's suggestion of being her own best critic. Nawal realized her paintings contained a certain element of disharmony that had become more pronounced over the past week. The bodies of the men and women were rougher, stronger, darker, even their faces had begun to take on some of those qualities, but the eyes remained blue and delicate. This resulted in the creation of subjects who appeared off-balance, uneven, fragmented, not quite whole.

Nawal stared at the one landscape in her collection. Ms. Taylor had urged her to try her hand at this, since Nawal always drew people. Nawal had obediently taken her sketchbook outside and sat among the pines at dusk. She intended to try to capture what happened when the bright colors disappeared and the soft browns and grays took over the landscape. But something quite different emerged from her pencil. A portrait of odd-looking trees, rolling hills and desert presented itself, emitting a sense of desolation, sadness, and devastation. Nawal had no idea what or where this was. How could she draw something she did not know?

The sound of a voice startled her. She jumped up and knocked her seat backward. Ms. Taylor apologized, then repeated herself. "That must be Palestine."

Palestine? None of the history or geography books mentioned Palestine and this had caused Nawal great confusion. After all, as a Palestinian she must have come from Palestine. She had been quite young when she asked her parents. Their faces took on looks of desolation, sadness and devastation. Her father said "Some things are better off forgotten," and she never asked again. Now Ms. Taylor seemed to think she had drawn Palestine.

"I've heard it's a very beautiful land," Ms. Taylor went on. "It's a complete and utter tragedy that the world has stood by and done nothing to help your people. I think you've captured some of the pain in this drawing."

What on earth was Ms. Taylor talking about? It scared Nawal at the same time as she desperately wanted to hear more. She also had to fight back tears.

The rest of the students bounced into the room. Flushed and excited, they began telling Ms. Taylor that a mouse had run through the dining room. Jennifer and Colleen had jumped on their chairs and screamed for absolutely the longest time, even though the mouse had scurried to the other side of the room. Ms. Taylor said sharply she hoped Jennifer and Colleen would choose to break out of gender roles in order to become better artists. What are gender roles, Nawal wondered.

Then Ms. Taylor began the lesson. As always, she had the students' full attention.

"This morning I talked about how perspective gives depth to your art, and how it locates the viewer in a particular place. Now I want to talk about another kind of perspective. It has to do with the way you perceive what is around you. Every artist must constantly ask: How do I see the world? Through what eyes?"

I see the world through eyes the color of shit, Nawal thought to herself. She could not help but look at Jennifer. A stab of desire ran through her so fiercely it hurt. What would it be like to see the world through those eyes?

"I did not think much about this until 10 years ago when I spent a summer teaching in Heart's Delight, Newfoundland. I grew up in St. John's and wanted to teach children in my home province." That explained the occasional lilt in Ms. Taylor's voice.

"These children came from the families of fishermen, and had a hard life in many ways. At first I did not understand why they didn't draw flowers and trees as I encouraged them to. Instead, they drew angry seas, leaky boats, dead birds. Then I realized they saw the world differently than I did, and that they had many things to teach me."

As usual that evening, Nawal casually walked by the phone booth in hopes of hearing Ms. Taylor talking to the mysterious Nancy. Instead, she saw Ms. Taylor walking down a trail, immersed in a letter. She held a large envelope in one hand and tried to turn pages with the other. Something fell out of the envelope, and Ms. Taylor did not notice.

Nawal ran after her and picked up the pamphlet. She took a step toward Ms. Taylor and opened her mouth to call out, then



looked down and saw the word Palestine in big letters. She stopped dead in her tracks, closed her mouth, and looked from Ms. Taylor to the pamphlet several times. Was stealing always wrong? Certainly she shouldn't read someone else's mail. But. Nawal stuffed the pamphlet in her jeans pocket and ran to her particular spot in the woods. She sat there, touching the pamphlet with her fingers, the churning in her stomach becoming stronger with each moment. Nawal felt like she might throw up. She opened the pamphlet and looked at it. Scribbled across the top were the words: "Sweetie, I thought you'd want to see this once you're back. Miss you. N." Once again Nawal felt intense curiosity about Nancy's relationship to Ms. Taylor but it quickly subsided as she began reading the pamphlet.

The Palestinian Cultural Society formed in 1980 to ensure that the art, music and literature of the Palestinian people survive these harsh years of exile. Our group is made up of Palestinian-Canadians whose families were forced to leave our beloved land in 1948 when the State of Israel formed. Since then we have watched with sadness and anger as Israeli borders expand, and more and more of our people become exiles and refugees.

We are determined that during these trying decades, our culture will not be left to perish. While all of us are working toward the re-establishment of a sovereign Palestinian nation, we are also bent on preserving Palestinian culture and encouraging new Palestinian artists.

Our next event is an upcoming exhibit of Palestinian embroidery, which will take place...

Nawal could not read anymore because her vision had become blurry. It took her a moment to identify the tears streaming down her cheeks and the sad strange sound of her own sobs. She turned her face to the pine needle-covered earth and wept. She cried even harder upon realizing she did not understand all the reasons for her tears.

One rainy day Nawal and Dwayne worked in the studio together. After an hour of comfortable silence, Dwayne asked what Nawal thought of his tree. Nawal examined it and said she liked it.

"But there's something missing, and I can't figure it out. Can you?"

Dwayne wanted her opinion. How strange. Nawal's voice shook a little as she said "It's flat, it doesn't move."

Dwayne pondered the tree. "You're right. What do you think I should do?"

Nawal suggested angling the leaves a certain way and blurring a few lines to indicate the presence of a wind. They went back to their work. A half hour later, Dwayne asked her to look again. Nawal noticed with pleasure he had taken her suggestion and improved his drawing.

Dwayne began talking about Ms. Taylor. "She's great," he enthused. "I like the way she helps us see what's good and bad about our own pictures. I don't always want to rely on somebody else to tell me whether it's any good."

"Yes, I like that," agreed Nawal. "Sometimes I wish I could have her for a whole year."

Everyone knew about Wednesday's visit from the well-known artist, Ms. Fukushima. In actual fact, she was not well-known to the students but they had caught Ms. Taylor's enthusiasm and could not wait for the visit. Only a few had heard Ms. Taylor muttering under her breath about the appalling nature of Canadian high school art programs that failed to teach students about important contemporary artists.

Ms. Fukushima arrived early that morning, and spent her first hour talking with the teachers. The students examined the 13 long, narrow pieces hastily hung in the art room.

The paintings pulled Nawal into a swirling ocean. Horrible, beautiful, delicate, stark and overwhelmingly full, all at once. Emaciated people sharing desperately small quantities of food. Girls being led to back rooms by soldiers. Fathers reading tenderly to small children in crowded, claustrophobic bottoms of leaky boats. People singing in the face of guns. Babies showing blood and bone where skin should have been. Chanting crowds surging toward a building. Everyone had brown eyes.

Nawal did not know everyone had sat down. Ms. Taylor gently nudged her toward the empty seat. Many students asked questions, but Nawal heard nothing until Ms. Fukushima's words, spoken in the careful, precise way of Nawal's parents, pierced her consciousness.

"I do perceive the world differently than you." She looked at Dwayne as she said this; had he asked a question? Nawal looked

at Ms. Fukushima and for a brief moment it seemed Cousin Cecilia stood beside her. Nawal blinked and Cousin Cecilia vanished. "To use an example of great oversimplification, you see the world with blue eyes and I see the world with brown eyes. That means I perceive differently, no matter how much I may wish to see the way someone with blue eyes does."

How could words hit you like a sledgehammer? Nawal did not ask to be excused, she simply left and made it to the bathroom just in time to throw up violently. She retched for a long time, feeling as if a pair of giant hands were wringing her out the same way Hani would wring out the dishrag. Sitting on the floor next to the toilet, curled up in a shivering wretched ball, Nawal heard Ms. Fukushima's voice over and over. "You see the world with blue eyes and I see the world with brown eyes."

Nawal felt raw and shaky, but lighter. It took her a long time to realize her leg muscles had cramped, her clothes smelled of vomit, and sweat covered every part of her body. She made her way to the showers. Afterwards, in clean clothes, Nawal took her sketchpad and walked to the spot in the woods where those ancient pines surrounded her completely.

Dusk. There was less light and some things became invisible, but others became visible. The softness of the earth was not this apparent in the early hours. In some ways, the day's bright colors could not match the rich, glowing browns, golds, and grays of the dusk. Nawal wondered how she could not have noticed this beauty before.

Opening her sketchpad, she thought about images. Where did they come from? Why did some take a long time to emerge? Sometimes a fuzzy outline would appear and gradually fill itself in, maybe in a day, maybe in three months. The image now in her mind's eye had just emerged, spontaneously and completely. Now she had to hold that vision and transfer it to paper without forsaking any of its life.

Nawal finished the drawing just as dusk ended and night began to fall. She sat among the pines feeling the night descend and unfold. It enveloped her in its black beauty.

The next morning at breakfast, Colleen and Jennifer chatted while Nawal toyed with her food. Jennifer thought Ms. Taylor had overrated Ms. Fukushima.

"She isn't *that* great," she said between bites of granola. "I mean, her technique is very good, but it's all so *depressing*. Artists are supposed to cheer you up. And what did she mean when she said all that weird stuff to Dwayne about eyes? *He* said it's insightful but I think it's weird."

"You would," muttered Nawal so quietly no one heard.

Colleen was uninterested in art reviews. She rightfully feared the wrath of Ms. Taylor because once again she had not completed her assignment.

"What am I going to do?" she asked plaintively.

"Well, don't panic," said Jennifer. "Remember, 'The darkest hour is before the dawn.'"

"That's what you think," muttered Nawal, a shade louder.

"What did you say, Willie?"

Scared, angry and resolute, Nawal spoke clearly. "I said 'That's what you think.' But there's another way to look at it. Maybe the lightest hour is before the dusk. And my name isn't Willie, it's Nawal."

Nawal left Jennifer and Colleen gaping.

Nawal showed the drawing to Ms. Taylor. She had used a brown crayon and nothing else. Shading created edges and contours and features of the scene set in the dusk Nawal had come to love. A man and woman appeared on the desolate, sad, devastated land. They sat, unmoving, wearing scarves like the one in her mother's closet. Their large brown eyes told stories some people refused to hear. Nawal had never titled any of her work. But in clear, simple lettering at the bottom of this drawing she had written "The lightest hour is before the dusk."

## war meditation

Last night on ABC, Peter Jennings talked about *my menstrual cycle* to millions of americans when he announced that after six weeks, the war in the persian gulf was supposedly over. Six weeks, I thought, that can't be right. Because I remember it so clearly.

The night the war started and we saw those first greenish videos of our missiles carpet-bombing baghdad, I was crawling out of my skin with PMS. I remember, because I've charted the whole war using that as a reference point. Men always say that women shouldn't be in charge of anything, shouldn't be leaders of countries, because the day before our periods start we'll push a button and blow up the world as though some internal sea of blood is lapping up to our eyeballs and obscuring our vision of real life. And tampons stand in for missiles and our bodies become silos. Oh sure.

So I was killingly premenstrual, hating all countries, hating iraq and the united states because of what they do to women, but I wasn't dropping any bombs.

And then Peter Jennings in his immaculate suit said, let's see, it has been exactly forty-two days and three hours since the war began. And I thought, God, forty-two *days*? I was really *late*. I felt vulnerable, like he'd just announced some personal failing of mine to all of america. Forty-two days. Why not say twenty-eight days, or thirty days? And then I heard america's questions. Well didn't you *think* you might be pregnant? *Don't* you use birth control? Are you *sexually* active? And I heard my answer on the six o'clock news. I am a lesbian. I don't sleep with men. I'm not pregnant.

You bastards.

I didn't ask the war to be fought on my cycle.

I didn't *ask* the president, who has never shed one public tear about the rape of real women living in america — one in every three of us — to talk on TV about the metaphorical rape of *a place*.

When I turn on my TV I want to hear the *real* statistics: how

many women were raped today, or murdered by their husbands?  
How many dowry deaths, batterings and female circumcisions  
were there today?

I want a global sisterhood.

I want all the weapons.

Yeah, you could say I have PMS.

Sure. You could say that.

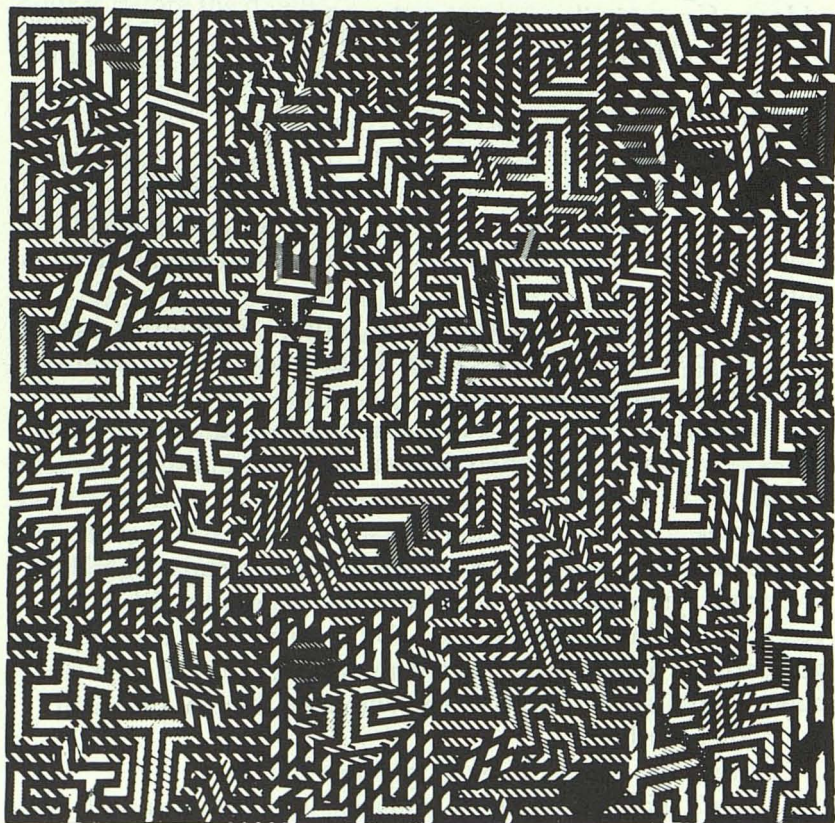


photo by Jan Warten

*Patriots Maze*

59" x 59", 1991. Silkscreened fabric, machine sewn, hand quilted.

Ellen Oppenheimer

Elana Dykewomon

## Oakland: February 1991, 1 AM

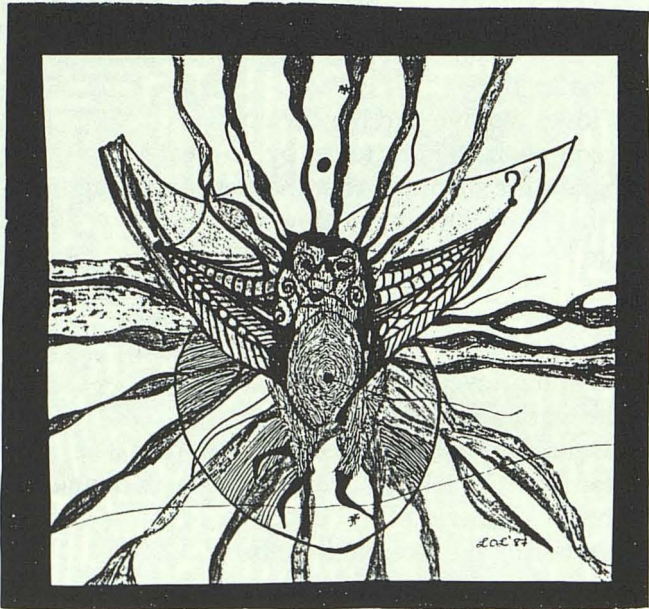
Put me in mind of my harbor,  
the easy romance of my luck.  
The taste is bitter, the moon is frayed.  
They say I know what I'm doing  
but I whistle to myself:  
the jig is up.

I've lived through enough wars in comfort  
to know that living comfortably through wars means  
nothing  
is only circumstance.

Tonight there's an Iraqi dyke who  
believes in herself who takes what she's given  
and makes do,  
who loves womyn and her own power  
to accomplish, to hide, to get by, to create,  
to make a life she thinks her mother can't imagine —  
and that lesbian might be blown to bits  
before I get to the end of this  
page

At the start of this war Evelyn called me up  
raved and grieved  
all the wars she's seen —  
at seventy-nine, she can describe war after war  
her family in Israel her grandchildren in danger  
her heart in danger of  
remembering the twentieth century  
miserable egos lousy mistakes  
that rage across our planet  
— now I don't think the salk vaccine was worth it  
the telephone, the automobile.

So this is it: I live through wars.  
I live in a country that kills all over the globe and never  
has a bomb dropped within its shores and I get to tell  
the girls who come after  
how a woman's life can be full of personal happiness,  
rich with work and friendship while  
human beings are vaporized with her taxes  
and she, she's up again at 1am  
watching another war  
on television



*Winged Merp*

pen & inks  
Lotza Luck



## At Seneca Army Depot

1.

I dip my hands  
into ashes, rub  
them in until  
my skin turns gray,  
not like this sky  
hours before rain  
but another sky when  
I dream of nuclear war.

Gray hands, hands who  
shake with cerebral palsy,  
mistaken for retardation,  
epilepsy, MS, hands who  
call to men on  
the other side of  
cyclone fences, hands who  
love women strongly before  
we cross those fences.

2.

Fences, weaving cyclone  
fences with red, green  
purple yarn, women weaving  
our lives into  
the chain-link boundaries.

Shadows of the wire,  
diamond shape, falling  
on your body, face  
painted with grief,  
long black lines against  
clown white.

3.

I want to climb  
that fence, follow  
the airstrip down  
to where the missiles  
lie stacked like firewood  
surrounded by barb wire  
and sit, place  
my gray hands palm down  
on the asphalt and  
wait with my whole life.

But instead  
I stand on  
the other side  
and watch those gray hands  
shake the fence until  
the locks rattle.

## After the Movies of Treblinka

I am eight  
watching the snow drop.  
Like soft bombs it hits  
explodes and joins the fragile white earth.

In the middle of our street is an island of snow  
a parkway; two skinny trees bow heads.  
Later, men with black umbrellas walk their dogs.

I know when the snow melts on the parkway  
there will be a sheet of gold glass.  
I will have to break that glass with a rock  
or my booted foot.

Underneath the glass will be green healthy moss  
then a warm layer of dirt rich with calcium and worms.  
In the spring I will lie down in the earth  
and listen to the words, the wish wish  
like wind through a tunnel.

I will listen to the earth that has soaked up the bones,  
the teeth, the words that like my mamma's words tell me:  
"Don't worry, ga shlofen, ga shlofen, sleep."

Lorrie Sprecher

## big-sister God hates me

In session my therapist was going on at me again about trust, and I thought, oh fuck you, what do you know about it? She said, "I want all the parts of you to feel safe to come to therapy, to know it's okay to talk to me."

God, I thought, why are you doing this to me? It means nothing to you, don't torture me by pretending you care when you don't. Because I knew so clearly that she didn't, I could see it in her eyes, she wasn't my friend, this was her job. Finally I said, "Why should I talk to you, what's in it for me?" which I could tell, as it came out of my mouth, was a pretty stupid thing to say to a fucking therapist.

"Health," she said.

Oh bullshit, I thought, I don't believe that any more than you do. I was starting to feel really fucked with and angry about that.

She said, "Do you think I can speak to the part of you that remembers?"

"Sure," I said, "I'll just get the fuck out of the way. Oh, sorry, I can't seem to leave my body today, I guess you're stuck with just me sitting here in this chair again." You can't talk to my "other parts," I thought sarcastically, the only person you can talk to in this room is me, just me, and I know that isn't good enough. Unless you want to fucking dissociate too, and then you can talk to yourself. But you're too good for that, aren't you?

"Very funny," she said.

Listen big-sister God, I thought, it isn't funny at all.

"What about you?" I asked. "Have you ever been in therapy? Do you know how this feels?"

She smiled. "I hear a lot of fantasy going on."

What the fuck did she mean by that? This is what psycho-babble is, I thought, this is what psycho-babble feels like. I should just fuck myself up now and forget it. "I'm sorry," I said, "I don't want to piss you off, but everything I say is always wrong so maybe I should just shut up."

"Keep going."

What did I just say? I thought. "I was only asking if you'd ever been in therapy because I was interested in knowing if you have

any idea how invasive this feels. Even though I'm paying you to do it to me."

"What you're really asking is for me to tell you what to do."

"No, fuck it, what I was really asking is have you ever been in therapy, that's what I was asking. Aren't you listening?"

"It sounds like you want to be the therapist."

"Sitting there would be much better than where I'm sitting," I said. "This is really humiliating."

"Why do you feel humiliated?"

"Oh come on," I said. "Therapy's a totally one-sided thing. I need you, you don't need me. It's completely humiliating. And now you're asking me to trust you. I already trust you. But it's not enough, I have to trust you more, and everything in me says that's a bad idea."

"What in our relationship makes you think trusting me is a bad idea?"

Relationship? I thought. Our *relationship*? "No way," I said, "I'm not going to get into that." It's a trap, it's a trap, it's a fucking trap, and I'm going to get thrown out of here. But if she wants to throw me out, she can do it all by herself, I thought, I don't have to hold the fucking door open.

"We're stuck on this issue of trust and boundaries. You want me to make it okay for you to trust me and I can't, it's your choice. What can I do that would make it safe for you? There's nothing."

Oh fuck you, I thought, if you really wanted to, you could at least tell me you like me. I said, "You keep telling me to trust you and I think, what's it to you? It's nothing to you. You don't give a shit about me."

"You keep testing me," she said, "and I'm supposed to make it okay for you to talk to me. You feel like you can't until you know about me as a person, but this is therapy. These are the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship and you don't get any more."

What I heard was, I don't like you, I'll never like you, how could I like someone like you? My self-esteem was down to zero anyway, but now I was hearing it in stereo, from myself and from this person who knew so much about me she ought to know. I said, "Just fuck telling me I can trust you." Then I thought, oh shit, and I waited for her to say it.

"Our time is up," she said, "see you Wednesday." We walked downstairs to the parking lot. "Hooray," she smiled, "I'm off the clock. Have a good rest of the day."

Oh well that just did it, I thought my fucking head would blow off. Have a good fucking day? What the fuck did she mean by that? I'd been in therapy with her all these months and hadn't had a good anything yet. What the fuck did she think, that I could switch it on and off, that when I left therapy I felt free like she did instead of feeling like shit? Did she think it was so easy, easy like it was for her to leave and have a nice day? If it was so easy, I wouldn't be in fucking therapy. And what I heard was her saying, have a good rest of your life, sucker. She didn't have to seem so eager to get away from me. I know it's no picnic spending even fifty minutes in a room with me, believe me, because I spend all my time stuck inside myself, but the extreme happiness of the back of her head zooming away in her car really hurt my feelings. I started to cry. Don't tell me to have a nice day, I thought, I'm from southern California. People used to tell me that all the time. It doesn't work.

I decided to slash one wrist to see how I liked it. I needed something new in my life and figured I could either slash my wrist or get a puppy. The wrist idea was better, I wouldn't do it vertically but horizontally, and one of the smaller veins, so that if I didn't like it, I could change my mind. Just one wrist. It would be okay. Then maybe my internal voices would see how desperate I was and rally together to tell me what to do. They didn't say, your time is up. They would save me, they would stop it, we would work together, I wouldn't need that lousy shrink anymore.

But some friends from school called and wanted me to have a drink with them. They were going to be near where I lived, which was unusual because no one goes to Laurel for God's sake, and I couldn't get out of it without admitting I was totally anti-social and crazy. So I was having a beer, they were talking about their dissertations, I felt so distant from everything their voices kept fading out, and I thought, let's get on with it, I have to go home and slash my wrist. But looking forward to it cheered me up, like I had the power to change something. I can do one wrist and just try it, I told myself again, it might be nice. It might make me happy.

When I got home it was late, but I went upstairs and put alcohol on the razor blade to avoid infection. I felt hypocritical doing it, like if I were really serious about slitting my wrists I wouldn't be concerned about infection, but it seemed safest to cover all the possibilities. If I didn't like it, I could bandage it up and no one would know. But I had to be careful to cut it just right so I wouldn't

get caught. I imagined having to go to the emergency room because I needed stitches or a tetanus shot and having everyone look at me accusingly like I was some sort of psycho-case. They'd want to make me see a shrink, then I'd have to tell them I already had one, and it would get really embarrassing. They'd probably want to call her, and I'd have to give them her name and number just to get out of the psycho-ward, where I wouldn't want to be. Not that I think I don't belong in one, I just don't want to be in one.

I had just made a small and so far satisfactory incision when the phone rang. I didn't know if I should answer it but thought, oh hell, maybe it's the cosmos calling up to say, don't do it. I wrapped toilet paper over my wrist and went to the phone. It wasn't anything more cosmic than a friend of mine, saying, "There's a midnight showing of *Thelma and Louise* out near your house and I thought we could psyche ourselves up for one more day of struggle against male domination on this planet."

"I don't know about tonight," I said, watching blood seep through the toilet paper and kind of dabbing at it. "I'm having a kind of allergic reaction to therapy." I knew she was in therapy too and sometimes got weirded out over her own shrink.

"Sure," she said, "I understand. What's going on?"

"Nothing, really, I'm just tired." I thought I had made the tiniest of incisions but my stupid blood kept coming out and I needed to get off the phone.

"You don't sound okay. You're not going to crack up on me, are you?"

"Don't worry," I said. "Anyway, if I really crack up, there's always big-sister God."

"Who?"

"Shrink-city," I said.

"That's a great image," she said, "very down-on-your-knees. May I use it?"

"Please help yourself, just don't credit it back to me."

Unfortunately all I had were stupid Minnie Mouse band-aids that didn't stick very well. I thought, Minnie Mouse is no sister. I'd bought them for the container, which had a brown and green hologram on the side showing two hands pulling open a band-aid, and an assurance on the back that Minnie Mouse was my best friend, providing comfort when I was hurt. Oh sure, just like my shrink. I put a band-aid carefully on my wrist, then crossed another

one over it. God, I thought, when the blood soaked through and I folded toilet paper under a fresh band-aid, this is so fucking obvious, what am I going to do about therapy tomorrow?

The next evening I put on a shirt with long sleeves and buttoned the cuffs even though it was almost a hundred degrees. When I drove to therapy I noticed they had changed the messages on I-95 and the Capital Beltway again. There are these stupid blue signs that stretch from Maryland to Virginia with little traffic safety poems on them. I started writing them down so I would remember why I preferred living in Maryland instead of California.

"Defensive driving means arriving," "Stay alive, drive 55," "Room inside share a ride." California is just as stupid a state but in a more pretentious way. If we'd had signs on the freeway where I used to live they'd probably say things like, "Relax and transcend, your destination's just around the bend." Or, "Enjoy the ride, have your chakras aligned." Okay, maybe it wasn't that bad, maybe I'm bitter because it's where I was raised. Or erased. Whichever. Last month on the Beltway, all the way from my apartment to therapy, I could read, "Advise to heed don't speed," until three weeks into it someone figured it out and changed it to "advice."

Today the signs choking off our nation's capital read, "Disabled car stay where you are." No wonder we have to go all the way across the world to bomb things, I thought, we don't know how to spell in our own language. I don't know why that analogy made sense to me. Maybe that we didn't know what to do with what we had, we couldn't car pool so how could we share the world? Maybe that we hadn't bothered learning how to communicate with anyone.

But that was the job I wanted, poet laureate of the Capital Beltway. "If you're driving anti-choice today, I'll run you off the old Beltway." Because those anti-abortion bumper stickers are hazardous in traffic. It's dangerous to be flipping off those people while you're changing lanes.

I was early for my session and while I waited, I tried to think of what I'd change those signs to if I could.

- You've just cut off a lesbian, better think again.
- You've just cut off a lesbian, prepare to meet your end.
- You've just cut off a lesbian, now you know why we hate men.
- You've just cut off a lesbian, I'll get you but you won't know when.
- You've just cut off a lesbian who isn't into Zen.
- You've cut off a lesbian who cuts herself.



## What You Say

You do not say you were battered, only that she hit you.

In the face, that's right, after 2 hours of her terrible screaming and your worse patience, repeating the same words over and over, it has no effect, she keeps screaming, until finally she hits you.

You keep getting smaller but no one sees. You keep trying to tell but they won't hear until the quiet inside is a kind of winter. She gets hysterical, A concurs. She's hypersensitive, B agrees. She's cruel, C says, after a pause.

I'm trying to destroy you, she tells you herself. I don't know why.

Two years.

This is how the story gets told, because you have the same friends except they were her friends first. A hard relationship, they all agree. It takes two to fight. You're defensive, they agree, heads nodding, this is a political critique you understand, to make you a better revolutionary of course, you are defensive, and she keeps screaming, calling you names, round and round hours on end until you are crying and she hates you worse, such contempt, your novel is wrong and your music is essentially boring and you aren't reading the right books for the right reasons and you aren't doing theoretical work — though you're good at restating other people's ideas — but there's nothing original in it and your political judgements lack maturity (though it turned out the FBI wasn't after us for spray painting after all) and you're defensive, they agree, heads nodding at the correct revolutionary angle.

Did no one see or did everyone? A lived with her. B was her best friend.

Victim. You valorize your victimization, she said. To me. But watch her with her other friends, more compassion than you could imagine, a fucking fountain of sisterly love.

(Are you sneering now, as you read? Do you snort in disgust? Curl your lip in contempt? I don't give a shit, she hurt me.)

Don't tell anyone, she made me promise. We didn't mention it

again until finally I did and it was only one incident, A decides, though not to your face, no, no one speaks to you. B agrees. It could have been any of us, C responds, but not to you. It only happened once, D points out, when you push and keep pushing.

("You and your brother don't get along.")

"Incest, mom, the word is incest.")

She has been held accountable, E writes, at your provocation. And it's the horrors of patriarchy, and in the end she's my friend and she has been held accountable...

So why don't you shut up.

Because I'm the one she hit and she has not been held accountable. She has not. To me. She has not. Two years. Accountable. Me.

Who else are you going to tell? she wanted to know. Not how deep she had hurt me, but who I was going to tell.

Because I'm a writer, she said, I'm going to publish. Important Theoretical Work. Lesbianism As a Revolutionary Subjectivity. I don't deserve to be trashed.

The rest say nothing, not to me. No one wants to know. The water seals up so quick except I'm the stone. My great revolutionary friends. My fucking radical feminist comrades who organize speak-outs and work in the battered women's movement.

Sisters, remember love, no matter how much you want it, the kind made to hurt and I'm not saying I was battered, only that she hit me.

## King Victoria

"Fuck the Casbah," we sang raucously. Club E's was sure packed tonight. Can't believe this place actually played the Clash — of course we requested it several times. The d.j.s must be doing some heavy kind of drugs tonight; they rarely acquiesce to playing something other than disco shit. The d.j.s always do coke behind the neon sign, though, I know that. At any rate, we're contented this Friday night. Everybody in the Third World Gang is here — Corey, Del, Justin, Louie, Toyboy, and a few others. The Third World Gang is what we're called by the white people who run this bar, out of their ignorance. See, we dress sort of wild compared to most of the working class folks in this place. They're very straight looking, and we have fun hairstyles and wear big black boots. But not everyone in the Gang is a person of color, which was why we scoffed at how ignorant they were to call us that. They called us Third World not knowing what it meant, just thinking it meant different from them. Like, they said we seem like we were from outer space. And so we adopted the name.

We got a big round table and we're drinking gallons of beer. Little Kings on tap, two bucks a pitcher; what a bargain. I'm feeling on the edge, though, 'cause I saw Vicki — she's King — just last night and she said she might come downtown, here, tonight. Vicki's my king. I know kings are supposed to be men, but I figure she can't be a queen, 'cause queens are gay guys in drag, and that she's not. So since Vicki rules, I call her King. King Victoria.

Last night, it was Thursday, I ran into her at the mall where she works. I hate malls, 'cause I never have money and people stare at me for my clothes — all black and vintage, much different from the average blue collar worker's — and my hair which sticks straight up in a long flattop. But I knew Vicki would be there. So I breezed through, pretending to browse. Then I feigned surprise to see her. She appeared upset about something, so I asked if I could buy her a beer after work.

Vicki was trying to decide whether to move to Cincinnati or not. Her parents didn't like the idea. But hell, like I told her, she's

twenty-six and lived on her own before, out in L.A. yet; she can move to Cincinnati, Ohio, if that's what she wants. It's what she wants, she told me.

We drank beer and she told me stuff about her family; heavy things. After a few hours we trudged out the door into an ice storm and said goodbye. I'm in love with her, no doubt. Could barely believe I was sitting alone with her, talking to her. Blew my mind wide open. She's handsome and slick — chiseled features in an olive-skinned face. Wears an old thick leather jacket, too.

So now I'm watching the door this Friday night, thinking about Vicki's hands, looking for her to walk in. Like she really will.

And who walks in but my first lover, Krissy, without her husband. No way, haven't seen her in months. We say hello; she tells me I'm looking good and buys me a drink. Krissy darts around the bar, talking to people, flirting with men. At a gay bar, yet. Makes me ill to see her submitting to men, blatantly denying her love for women. I'm over her anyway, I tell myself; I met a real Lesbian — Vicki — and I won't be getting tangled up with women attached to the sides of men like shadows. It's the damnest tragedy; Krissy's a gymnast, fixes cars, and cute as hell. Lost to men, I sadly think, she's lost.

So many people at the Club tonight. I walk around and cruise, attempting to find excitement. My friends begin to bore me — I can never sit in one place for very long anyway. It's winter, and I'm wearing my pale orange '50's pants and a black and grey argyle sweater. With my Hanover boots; they look like combat boots but they're easier to dance in. These boots are original work boots that people used to wear in the factories, circa the '40's, so my dad told me and he would know. He's worked in factories forever. I bought all this wear from Goodwill in Mazletín; can usually find good stuff there. Since it's the end of the week, I'm sporting my favorite togs. And cruising around, like I started to say.

And who walks through the door next but the King herself, Vicki. I suddenly have the sensation of a small bird walking inside my stomach as she hugs me and thanks me for helping her out last night. What do you mean, I ask, quite honored. And Vicki says that I helped her decide, she's leaving tomorrow for Cincinnati. Oh, I try to answer with glee for her, but really I'm devastated. Now she won't be around here. She tells me she's got a present for me, and asks, Trista, you have a straight edge? A straight edge, like a razor,

I don't have a razor, I reply, confused. No, Vicki laughs, like a driver's license or i.d. card, something like that. Let me buy you a beer, Trista, Little Kings okay?

But of course, I say, and then we talk awhile. I tell her Krissy's here. They were in high school together ten years ago. Weird to me, a decade they've both been out of high school, and I only got out a few years ago. I bring Krissy over to Vicki and they slap hands and rap that it's good to see each other and stuff. I admire Vicki from my chair.

Then Vicki sits back down and asks me if I ever did coke before, and I say, no, never. I never did it 'cause it scared me and I think I'd flip out, I meekly explain. She says she wants to share some with me 'cause I helped her out last night. And I think, why don't we roll around and rub each other sweating instead, why don't we just fuck, I'd like that better, but I don't bring those thoughts outside my head.

We go out to her car and she chops the coke up fine like sand and I do a little but, frightened, I mainly fake it. Vicki tells me she'll be there for me if I freak out, and that the coke will just make me feel awake. Which it does.

Vicki and I slamdance for a bit, talk to some people and each other, and then say good-bye. She leaves.

I feel empty, despairing, wound up; can't believe she left. I don't want to talk to my friends, they just don't compare and besides, they wouldn't understand this huge loss. The Gang invites me to afterhours adventure but I can't tolerate doing anything, being anywhere, being with anyone 'cept Vicki and now she's gone. I want to die, my head hurts and my mind is racing.

I go to my apartment alone, put on music, sit in my living room in a tunnel of anguish. She's gone. I have only a few memories now, and her image, now in fragments, imprinted on my brain. Fucked up and hurting, I bang my head against the wall to stop the pain. I can only cry a little. King Victoria is gone. Leaving tomorrow. No more Friday night slamdancing with her. She's gone away and I feel dead like a void, and restless, agitated as hell.

I finally fall asleep — I don't know how. It becomes light outside and I feel grey enough, too sore to move. My body numb, I leave my clothes on and sleep.

Sharon Lim-Hing

## I Was Looking for You, I Was Looking Good

I checked in the rear view. My hair — perfect. Just the right strands out of place. My sides had been buzzed two days ago. The hairs were still sticking up. Looking prickly but soft to the touch, like human velvet. On top I had some gel shit in, and the whole thing held like a superglue Empire State Building.

I felt great. A little excited like I wanted something to happen but scared nothing would happen.

I walked in. The place was a firetrap. Underground. No windows. Only one exit as far as I could see. I set myself up close to the door. There were lots of white college babydykes. A serious black butch with black leather half-gloves to match her outfit was accompanied by her blonde girlfriend sporting a gold lame miniskirt. Some shaved heads. A couple of polo shirts doing a sloppy tango. Hanging casually from hands that didn't know what else to do with themselves, cigarettes sent up grey strands into the general haze that hung in the club and was sucked up by everyone's lungs. A free passive nicotine fix.

Sexual tension was thick like soft butter, oozing over every object in the room, lubricating every utterance, glazing over every eye and layering every gesture. Was it just me, or was it the full moon outside that was pulling the blood of the women in the subterranean bar, sending us into a collective heat? Maybe it was just me.

I was sucking on a Sam Adams, smiling at the rush for the dance floor because the DJ had just placed that song that everyone wants to dance to. I felt the pull myself. I looked over my shoulder.

That's when I saw Nandana. That's when I fell in love with her. In that moment with strobes illuminating convulsive tobacco clouds, bass line inspiring pumping legs, dykes grabbing up the last of the rapidly disappearing dance floor, I turned around smiling and she was smiling at me and I knew and something like a clear bell rang and resounded in my body.

Did it matter what we said? What pretext, what line? Nope, it dint matter one specka lint. A script that was already written was

being unfurled before me and all I had to do was take a step. So I asked her if she wanted to dance.

Everyone was at the demonstration. There was a lot of community building going on, that is dishing, and not a small portion of cruising. What cartoonist said that demonstrations are the Left's cocktail parties?

My buddy Romi was there. I lost sight of her but heard her wheezing, old accordian laugh, hissing through her teeth like a radiator that threatens to spew hot water. Most of the time her raspy voice delivered clipped statements or punched out cynical one-liners, then her mouth would droop doomlike down. As if sadness was her dominating emotion and that laughter just a faded dream interrupting her real life. Since she quit her dead-end job and got together with Lynne, more of that wheeze had been squeezing out of her lately, and even sounded happy.

Romi was going to massage school, and yes, her foot massages were making my feet feel better by hops, leaps and bounds. I don't know about massage on other parts of the body. We're just good friends, after all. I guess Lynne is getting all the good stuff ... Swiss, deep muscle, hot oil. You know, that sort of stuff.

Someone walked by carrying a sign. "Celebrate Lesbians Pining for Peace." Huh! With a sign like that she won't be celibate for long.

"Is Our Lifestyle Worth Their Lives?" bobbed by, a scraggly beard and predictable ponytail. If he was a woman, you know he wouldn't let so many split ends congregate on his head.

Mariko was chanting her hairless head off against Texaco. She and Liz had broken up last year after five blessed years of cohabitation. It was a big shock to everyone, who considered them an old married couple, which they had been. Romi called them her role model, but that didn't mean they were happy.

Mariko was so broken up about the break up that she dropped out of law school. Says she's going back one of these days. Since then she's shaved her head and stomps around in combat boots. Very cool looking.

Anyway, Mariko took up with this boppy French chick Sophie. They seem to be very much the hot item this season. They look good together too. Mariko on the butch side, small, and dark. Sophie, definitely femme, even more petite, and blonde with dark

roots. They are constantly doing PDA. Kissing on the subway and in straight restaurants and bars. Sometimes it's embarrassing to be with them, but they're oblivious. A couple of exhibitionists.

"I can't help it," Mariko whines, "I can't keep my hands off her."

"The French love to touch," chirps Sophie in her cute French accent, clinging just the right amount.

We glare at them in envy. Even today, while making signs together, they would stop every so often to tongue each other with an occasional grind thrown. Kind of sickening, really. Especially if you don't have someone to stick your tongue into.

By this time we had exchanged names. Nandana kept looking over my shoulder. Finally I turned around. I saw a reflection of us and a line of assorted liquor bottles guarding the mirror's edge.

Nandana's dark brown eyes were surrounded by a panoply of long, black, curving lashes, that filtered the I'm-too-good-for-anyone arrogance and let some of the do-you-really-like-me? vulnerability seep through like honey from a comb. Her lips were a little chapped that night, but boy did I want to suck on them. I wanted to smear scented oil, my lips, and more softness over those chapped lips.

A pockmark dug into her right cheek; it looked more like a dimple. This slight imperfection seemed to fix her beauty, to personalize it, to make her more real. A nosering perforated her left nostril, and this decoration balanced with the pockmark on the other side of her face. They created an asymmetric equilibrium, between the accidental traces of a childhood illness and the deliberate, esthetic injury, between the natural marking and the imposed metal. A vision of beauty.

"Do you ever feel like you've met someone and were lovers in another life?" I asked.

"Yes."

"But how is that possible? If you were married to someone in sixth century B.C.E. Egypt, what are the chances of you both showing up in North America during the same half-century? Someone might be late by a couple lives. Or be born on the wrong continent."

"Maybe we pursue it."

"Wow!" I sighed. "That is *so* profound." She beamed at me from behind her Rolling Rock.



Her hands were long and elegant. As she spoke, they moved about in a peculiar, almost pedantic way, seemingly now in prayer, now in a double karate chop. It's true, I only thought this later. At the time I was busy tracing her fingers' future movements on my body and inside it.

"Hey, this reminds me of that song that goes, 'I was looking around your neighborhood, I was looking for you, I was looking good.'"

"Never heard it," she said. "Who's it by?"

"It's from before your time. A group called Romeo Void."

One thing bothered me though. She said she was 23. I remember the last time I tangled with a sweet young thing. They jerk you around like a stir fry without even knowing what the hell they're doing. Then they call you ageist. I still had bite marks on my hand from robbing the cradle. They are especially vicious when teething.

The demonstration was the place to be on a deep blue and orange fall afternoon. "Bush Honey, Pull Out Now" looked like she might be more at home in a shopping mall, but she was here.

I looked tough. Had on my black cowboy boots that I got in Dallas. Worn in, creases cracked across the toes but not too deep, they still gave off that dead animal perfume. Last night I had shined them up with spit — three coats of Kiwi shoe polish and saliva. That's the secret of a high gloss, the kind you can see panties in. Had my jeans on. It's gotten so I don't wash them very often, because they're the shade I want. True, I make more dog friends that way, but I don't mind. *Au contraire*.

I had just enough of a cowlick to look casual. I make it in the mirror, then take the can of hairspray I keep in the back of the closet and render it rock rigid so it stays and I look slightly windblown. And that cowlick has power, believe me. Could poke someone's eye out with it.

Had on my leather jacket. There's a story behind those pieces of cowhide. You know I knew I would get shit from my animal rights household. So I just had to lie. I waited till I went to Philly to visit my sister and her hubbie and my little niece who loved the hightop sneakers I got her. When I came back I said I found this great second-hand leather jacket at a flea market for only \$40.

"One skin for three animals. It's recycling," I said feebly. Since it wasn't even broken in, I wouldn't believe me. But no one called me on it, and one of my housemates even wanted to try it on under the doleful eyes of a PETA poster on the fridge.

Leather. Makes me feel like James Dean back from the dead and with a vengeance. Feel like a good-looking version of Marlon Brando. Like a thousand other images, strong, independent, unshakeable. Like when two mirrors face each other at a slight angle, but instead of reproducing the same image make a thousand variations, of which you are just one.

Funny what a piece of clothing will do for your mind. To your mind.

So I was there, I was looking good, the hair was in place. But I was really shitting concrete blocks. Ow.

Nandana. Fell in love with her. In love. How can you fall in love at first sight? I can't explain it because I don't know what love is anymore. Is love desire, a glance that makes you wet, a delicious spasm in your womb, a shiver that runs up your torso and stops thought? Is it respect for each other, like when you scream obscenities and throw dishes and then beg for forgiveness and promise, *promise* you'll change? Is it habit that kills growth and traps two people like a couple of Pompeian statues? Is it fear of losing her because the last time you were celibate for what seemed like a very long time lesbians all around you were having one-night stands at Michigan, two-week sad-eyed affairs, or three-year work-a-day relationships? Is it romance, like when you exchange gifts you can't afford and don't need yet are so sweet and show you're thinking of each other when you should really be getting on with all the other parts of your life? Is it chance? — the same type of coincidence that makes your current girlfriend Toni's ex-lover Fangfang the best friend of your former housemate Nadia who hangs with your acupuncturist Tanh's first true love Giang who also happens to be a former lover of a woman in your writing group, Selena, who signs as if she were performing an abstract, seductive dance, which you know she is. Or is it the kind of luck that puts you in the right place at the wrong time, when your eyes meet?

Take your pick or all of the above.

On the platform, a woman was addressing the crowd.

"Why does Bush want a war in the Middle East?"

"First of all, he wants to project a show of masculinity. With his long missiles and big bombs, he wants the American people to fall for his macho, strong leader act. Second, wouldn't it be great for Bush if a war did break out? I'm sure he believes a war is good for an ailing economy. And whether armed conflict breaks out in the Gulf or the threat of military action drags on for years, it sure would provide a handy distraction for the recession that has been going on for years, for all the domestic problems, legacy of the Reagan era, that Bush wants to cover up. And let's not forget the root of so many U.S. wars, officially declared or not, against people on the other parts of the globe. Racism. Vietnam. Korea. El Salvador. Grenada. All people with brown skin. Their lives don't mean as much. They want U.S. help to get freedom and democracy, because they're too stupid to do it themselves. This is the mentality that has financed wars. Now we are being asked to go to a war against Iraqis. Since the oil crisis in the 70s, the press and other media have been building a stereotype of the crazy Arab who spitefully refuses to sell the U.S. cheap oil. Refuse to be brain-washed into killing other human beings for a wasteful, polluting American way of life!"

"She is *hot*," said Lynne. Romi cut her eyes catlike at her lover, then craned her neck to look at the speaker.

I thought about the coffee table books that hadn't been dusted in weeks. How long ago had I washed my sheets? The black bean soup I spilled on the kitchen table, did I clean it up? That wouldn't make such a great impression. Well, her housemate was away on vacation, so we could moan as much as we wanted to, if it came to that.

Nandana offered to give me a back massage. If she hadn't used that line, I would've.

We lay shirtless on her futon.

"Hey, what about AIDS?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't think I have it. In fact, I'm pretty sure I don't."

"Me neither. I got tested last year. That doesn't mean anything, though." A brief silence. "Okay," she said lightly, and we continued kissing.

Crazy thoughts flooded my brain. Don't leave me. I'll do anything you want me to. I love you. Those words just popped into my head, and I tried to pour them from my mind into her mouth. The electricity that moved from my mouth to between my legs was so strong that I was sure it was moving through her too. When I opened my eyes and we looked into each other's eyes, I felt it jumping across space, as from the storm cloud to the mountain rock. Sometimes it got so hot our front teeth crashed, gnashed, and meshed.

I sucked on her tongue. She moaned. I was amazed. I was soaking. Where does this passion come from? I didn't even know her.

More to the point, where does it go?

The next morning we had breakfast. I used her toothbrush. We both wanted to see each other again, to work something out, to make something. We said we'd call each other. I left.

That's when things got offtrack. She jumped off the pathway that wound through valleys and mountains in my mind. I had mapped it all out. An intense but open relationship, see each other about twice a week, lots of sex, lots of poetry. But she started pulling strange shit on me. Like, said she was writing me a letter that never came. Pretended to be out when I called. Yup. Weird shit like that.

There was a lull in the chanting as we marched up Boylston Street. Our attention wandered.

"It just doesn't look like come. It's too watery." Romi was adamant. "Besides, it's coming out of her urethra, not her vagina."

"Okay," countered Lynne, "so she really doesn't come on camera. But I met a woman at the Clit Club who said she'd had two lovers who ejaculated — and really squirted her in the face too, she said."

"God! Unknown mysteries to be delved into," sighed Mariko.

"Very occasionally, I do too," said Sophie in a small voice. Four heads pivoted and stared. Mariko was fairly drooling at the mouth, and at other places, I speculate.

"You must show me sometime," she cooed.

"Mais non. We aren't going to do it anymore. I decided that two weeks ago."

A stunned silence. Everyone was suddenly absorbed in reading signs and scanning the crowd. Then Mariko marched Sophie off to the side where they could have a more private discussion in the midst of thousands of demonstrators.

Two weeks! That meant that the happy, publicly unquenchable couple hadn't been doing much more than what they'd been forcing us to observe — and wouldn't be, according to Sophie's unilateral embargo.

Why? Who knows? But why did she announce it to Mariko like that? These French. I don't get it.

Come to think of it, about a week ago Mariko was obsessing about not feeling ready to go back to law school.

"What do you care?" I felt frustrated by her complaints. "You're too busy having all that great sex with Sophie anyway!"

She didn't say anything, just emitted a noncommittal "Hmmm," and looked away. I should've suspected something was amiss at that point, terribly amiss. But the free sidewalk show that she and Sophie were always putting on fouled up my radar like a ripe red herring.

I looked back at the shattered couple. Mariko's great lover smile lay crumpled on the ground. She looked like I felt. Fear was pickling my armpits. I felt like a piece of kim chee. If I saw Nandana, what would we say? My mind whirred away, inventing a dozen permutations. Most of these home movies ended with me sweeping her off her feet and us making passionate love in a pile of leaves while hundreds of demonstrators cheered us on: "Make love, not war!"

"Just forget about her," Romi advised, guessing who I was looking for, who I wanted to avoid. "She's a vicious bitch on wheels."

"Who?" I pretended.

"Find someone else. Someone who deserves you. Look at all the cute dykes here. And they're all politically aware, too. Either that or they're looking for a date," she burst out laughing, her accordian folding and unfolding like a trick deck of cards.

"Looking's what got me into trouble in the first place."

A dream of a perfect love. You don't just replace it. Cast off its loving, absent hold from your sleep, its sticky, milky traces from

your mind. Forget the last word you utter before dozing off, the image that splashes you when you're buying groceries, the sugar jumping in your muscles when you walk in the autumn sun, the way she's made you look at all Indian women differently. Looking for traces of her when they are in your mind. The waking web of dreams, an endless fence of fantasies traipsing across a prairie, a canyon, a desert, past the half-burnt wagon wheels, skeletons and cacti of real life.

I remember the waterfall sound of the sheets, the bottle of massage oil falling on the wooden floor, the smell of her that had teased me like a scarf winding round her body, now released in the air.

I looked down. My boots were dusty. All of a sudden I felt silly in my leather jacket. Was I so tough I didn't care about the mammal that had been slaughtered, whose breathing, bleeding skin was torn off muscle and fat to make me a make-believe costume?

But a chill wind was brushing my throat like a threatening glance. I wasn't tough enough to take it off. I was afraid I'd catch a cold.

I took a deep breath of the wind that was slicing wool into shreds. I was making it through another day of not calling her, not seeing her. Another day spent nursing my illusions and selected memories. Waiting for her to call.

No. You don't just replace a dream of perfect love. Even if you don't know where it comes from. Or where it goes.

## Boylston Street

Where her hips curve into the vertical edges of buildings, the grey horizon is surprised: her hands take off like disturbed birds of anger, flying up, opening, then coming back to rest, curled and ready. People walk around us avoiding the sudden, cocky flight, assessing breasts, eyes: *Are they a couple of dykes swaggering their way up the street?* They snicker, whisper, and one of us spits or dances, maybe we laugh out loud and mimic their twittering. Maybe I stop and kiss her neck, lightly. What they don't see is my shivering skin: tiny birds rustling, aching for her hands.

## Weight

I don't understand why this woman likes crushed ice better than the cubes, adds sugar to her tomatoes, then offers me a sweetened bowl, or whistles so self-consciously when she feels me looking at her suntanned face and turquoise eyes.

And I can't fathom what she thinks is worth the staying around for after the dinner is done, after the trip to the Dairy Queen for strawberry sundaes, after the love-making.

But the urgency for stays.

Blue jays bark in the bushes,  
the sunset sifts down over the city  
and this pale salmon-colored light  
lingers so subtly.

I get the monstrous urge to quit while I'm ahead  
take the car and go varoom, varoom out of her room  
around the corner  
fast  
before I shatter from  
the fear that this won't last.

But this time, time fills me up  
She fills me up  
Adds weight.



## Betrayal

Hélène held a dinner party to which she invited all her ex-lovers. Her most recent ex-lovers. I was the only person there who hadn't been to bed with her. Unfortunately, I was late. Thus, when I arrived, there were three faces shimmering with jealousy, arranged around the table. The post of Hélène's lover, usually occupied by at least two women who were never allowed to meet, theoretically out of respect for both but in fact to avoid broken crockery and nasty scenes, was currently held on short-term renewable contract by a ravishingly beautiful ballet dancer with supple encircling arms and a back like a concrete curtain wall. She was hindering Hélène's cooking by administering torrents of kisses. The three other women watched, furious.

"Hello everyone," I cried, realising that the only lover I knew was the ballet dancer.

I tried to create an amiable diversion. I was the only person not close to an outburst of hysterical murderousness. I unloaded my box. I was carrying alcohol, oranges and eggs. All the different colours looked charming on the table. Everyone smiled and clapped. The tension ebbed.

"Do you know Louise?" accused one of the jealous faces as the ballet dancer coiled herself around me.

"Oh yes, we've met," I said cautiously.

"Today is my birthday. I can do anything," cried Louise and involved herself sexually with casseroles and cooking pots.

I sat down to look at the row of ex-lovers. One was very fat, one was very thin and one was very small. I decided that I was under an obligation to become an ex-lover as I am very tall, in order to complete the row. They were all creative interesting women, their faces twisted with jealousy. Louise made love to the herrings, then we got two each, bristling with butter and parsley. Hélène enjoyed every moment of our discomfort.

"And how is Anna?" asked one of the ex-lovers, suddenly turning very nasty as we melted our square sugars in tiny cups. Anna is the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. Anna is Hélène's other lover. Anna has tenure in the post.

"Ah... ça va," said Hélène uneasily. Louise rumbled like Etna. All the ex-lovers looked pleased. Hélène and I looked at each other shiftily, like suspected conspirators.

The ex-lovers pushed off at midnight. I discovered that they were all staying together like the three musketeers. Louise was dancing in front of the mirror in the bathroom. H el ene and I smoked at the bottom of the garden. Her city seems unlighted in the night; the only spotlit monument is the cathedral, a massive red-brick fortress in which the local Protestants were massacred. It is full of famous fifteenth century sculptures attributed to an Italian master of Giotto's school. All the women look shifty, with ambiguous eyes. The Magdalens cover their pots, the Virgins pull their robes around them, Judith is no better than she ought to be. H el ene loves the cathedral. This is entirely suitable.

We watched the red turrets burning in the warm night. It was my serve.

"H el ene, I know that this is going to sound silly as you obviously had a scenario of some kind in mind. But why on earth did you invite them all on the same evening?"

She stared at me resentfully, like a child being bullied.

"Chantal did that to me. Invited all her ex-lovers. And they were all friends. Friends! Can you imagine? They got on. And I was the only woman there who was a cauldron of jealousy. I thought I'd explode."

I looked at her. I was about to say something patronising and brutal about petty vendettas and revenges that ruined good dinners. But I thought better of it and smiled wearily.

"Let's have a beer," I said.

I have never been in love with H el ene, but I am very fond of her.

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Do heterosexual people permit themselves the luxury of breaking up, then hating each other forever — with impunity? Do they just vanish into that great safe sea of other heterosexuals and never see one another again? Martin tells me that gay men sometimes never know who it is that they have just sucked off. I said that it must be odd to kiss only cocks, not faces. He said that he liked the mystery and that cocks were often more honest than faces. And then again, I do know gay men, Martin among them, who have devastating love affairs, every bit as horrendous as our own, and storm out of rooms smashing glasses against potted plants. I have seen poets pinned against radiators, facing accusations of infamy which revealed the Tolstoyan dimensions of the accuser's imagination. Or perhaps the astonishing sexual talents of the accused. Jealousy magnifies, distorts, like a fairground mirror. It turns the lover and the beloved into monsters.

With us it is not possible to run away from the past. Your ex-lover is your present lover's ex-lover but one, which is when she was with you. And if you try to escape the enchanted castle by advertisements in another area you'll find that the woman who replies was lovers with your first lover after she was married and before she came out for real this time and hasn't she changed? The silk twist that binds us is unbreakable, invisible, eternal. It is like God's love: theoretical, ever-present and stifling. We meet what is actually just one of the facts of life in small communities with a barrage of ideologies — Lesbian ethics, significant friendship and political continuity. Sometimes this works. As it did with Chantal's ex-lovers who all but formed a collective. More often it is simply a veil for resentment, insecurity, violence and hypocrisy. Real feeling, brutal but honest, is channelled into decent behaviour in a fashion worthy of an English village church flower committee. Mind you, I'm not an enemy of decent behaviour and when I lived in an English village one of those nice tight-curlled, blue-rinsed old ladies drove one of the others on the flower rota to a nervous breakdown. I told my mother all about it. "Oh yes," she said, "they're all Lesbians."

Well, H el ene and Louise got up and went off to work the next morning. Not particularly early. I heard them making love in a welter of shrieks and cries. It sounded fun. I stroked the cat. She's an interesting cat. Multicoloured, and she dreams. God knows what about. Sometimes in the night she turns circles at the bottom of the bed, spitting and growling. H el ene told me that one rare night when she was sleeping alone she took the harlequin cat to bed with her. In the grip of a nightmare the cat bit her ear and she had to have an anti-tetanus injection. "How did you do that?" asked the doctor. "My cat bit me in her dreams," said H el ene and the doctor went away shaking his head. "You could put an earring through it," I suggested.

I walked round the town. It was quiet, sunny and free of tourists. The British and the Dutch arrive in July. By the time they get this far south they've already caught the sun. The British have become pink shrimps with densely packed freckles. The Dutch are a magnificent toasted brown. The British have thermos flasks and are carrying melted plastic sacs of freezing fluid for their picnic boxes. The Dutch wear anti-nuclear T-shirts and new trainers. I watch them going into their hotels. This time of year the terrace under the cathedral is empty. So I sat down with a coffee, my blue note book and a sense of well-being. I was still writing when H el ene's Mercedes cruised round the corner.

Hélène is not rich. She inherited a bit of money last year, but she spent that on a laser photocopier and a new computer. She's always had the Mercedes. It's one of those 1968 models with fins, leather seats and a walnut dashboard. She loves it so much that I always say it's her other lover. The third lover, who is never in danger of becoming her ex-lover. She's put in seat belts, even at the back, and she has a mechanic who loves it as much as she does. Early in the spring she got all the rust done and gave it a respray. It's the original colour now — luxurious, strokable cream.

"Get in quick," said Hélène, "we'll pick up Louise."

"Where are we going?"

"The Conquistadora. You wanted to see everyone, didn't you?"

"Hélène. Do you know what you're doing?"

"Of course I do. It's all arranged."

Anna runs the Conquistadora. With her ex-lover. The one before Hélène. Mine not to reason why. I felt like declaring that she could certainly do as she liked, but that I was just an ordinary person who poured acid on her verrucas every morning.

So we drove away across hills, past fields rampant with poppies, banks overflowing with wild daisies. The corn was rising fast in the May days. I cheered up as the Mercedes cruised over the hills like Aladdin's carpet. Sunk in leather and cushions, my feet on wool mats, it was like driving along in a private club. The sun laid little warm kisses all along my arm. Louise was doing the same thing to Hélène. Nobody had premonitions of disaster.

It's always exciting arriving in cities. Even the obligatory ten kilometres of horror, half made roads, dank canals and pink-brick high-rise blocks were interesting. I looked around, enjoying the mixture of flash investment and decrepitude. The Conquistadora is a discreet private club in a back street. It's surprisingly light inside. They don't have a license to sell hard liquor, but they do beer, coffee and cocktails. They serve food. The cook is Spanish and she's called Maria. Her food is worth fighting for and so is she. Anna says that Maria is courted with flowers every evening, by the woman she had chatted to the night before. She's employed to be nice to everyone. So everyone is in love with her. I once asked for her photograph. She gave me one from a stash she keeps under the bar. We were early. So only Maria and Anna's ex-lover were there. Both of them were cleaning glasses and smiling at each other.

I bought everyone a drink. Anna and her ex-lover are on Weight Watchers, so they only drink Vittel. Nobody here believes in learning to love their natural body weight. The dominant ideology, as seen

on TV, says that we all have to be as thin as pencils; so we are. And if you aren't you join Weight Watchers and diet. We were all pleasantly relaxed and the bar began to fill up at dusk. Then Anna walked in.

A woman who is brazen enough to hold an exclusively ex-lovers dinner party should not flinch when her two current lovers, both of whom are quite aware of the situation and who the other one is, actually, finally, eventually meet. Anna knew it wasn't me, so it had to be the other one. The tall one with the back like an engineering construction and the arms like fluid tentacles. Anna kissed me. Hélène slunk into a corner. Louise looked into her drink.

Anna is very, very beautiful. You'd think she's older than she is. She has black hair, cut like an Italian page boy, and wonderful brown eyes. She's the sort of woman who poisons your wine if you don't make love well, but covers you in roses if you do. She's tireless, dynamic, organised. Other women grow in her soil as if she were pure fertilizer. She stays close friends with all her ex-lovers.

"Well," she said, smiling at Hélène, "aren't you going to introduce me?"

Hélène hid guiltily under a table. And so it was I who introduced Anna to Louise. They kissed each other very cautiously, three times, one cheek after another. Then they stepped back. Anna smiled. I told you, didn't I. Anna is the most beautiful woman I know. Louise thought so too. I could tell that she did. They liked each other. That was dreadful, it really was adding irony to injury. And so the evening began.

In some ways it went well. Maria's food was spicy and peculiar. Anna's ex-lover was pleased with the situation, played soft music and was charming to her customers. All our friends came up to join us. We sat at a large table, argued about politics, the war, books, moaned about money and unemployment, gossiped about the past. We ordered more wine. Christelle came in at around ten o'clock. I abandoned my self-appointed post as amiable distraction to talk to her, just us, at another table.

"How's it going?" I asked her.

"Oh, fine. Really fine. I'm just starting my third year at the hospital and I'm off on a 'stage' next Monday. Pediatrics. A hospital in the Pyrénées. Just three weeks. I'm looking forward to it. Ça va changer mes idées. I've had a bit of a problem. No, not with Isabelle. She's not a Lesbian, you know. She's straight. But she's still my best friend. Well, yes, at the beginning she had all the usual prejudices. She actually said that she couldn't stand Lesbians. So I said, well, do you like me, parce que moi, je suis comme ça. I know

it's taking a risk. But it worked. She was really shaken. She realised that she was quite wrong about women like us. And she didn't drop me. She started asking questions. We came here once. She really liked it. She liked the way that the women were all dressed up. And that we chatted about ordinary things. Funny, isn't it, the ideas people have. She did have a boyfriend, but it wasn't going too well with him. He wanted it all his own way; so she packed it in and told him to push off. Then suddenly, when I was round at her house, her parents — it was her mother at first — started in on me. Really nasty. Saying how I wasn't welcome there as I wasn't the kind of person they wanted to have around. But nothing explicit. Well, I went away at once and I wouldn't go into the house again. I just sound the horn at the gate and Isabelle comes out. I asked her what on earth had gone wrong as her parents had always been so sweet to me before. God, they've known me since the sixième. I've always been her best friend. And she said that she'd tackled her Dad and he'd said that he wasn't born yesterday and he could see that I was *comme ça* and he didn't want his daughter being led astray by women like that. Is it written all over my face? Or my clothes? Do I look like a Lesbian? What does a Lesbian look like? We all look different, don't we? Was it that I didn't talk about boyfriends? Or bring one round? *Merde*, I had to tell Isabelle straight out. She's my very best friend and she hadn't noticed. So what's so special about her parents? My parents know. They accept it. But I wouldn't want my mother to hear people criticising me in the street. Or getting phone calls. It's all caused problems for Isabelle. She won't drop me. She's too loyal. I know, I thought that too. And it's because of that honesty and courage that she's still my best friend. Even if she is straight. But she's quarrelled with her parents and she's very upset."

"Did her boyfriend know that you were a Lesbian?" I asked. She looked astonished.

"Yes, he did. He must have done. I think Isabelle told him."

"Look no further than the ex-lover," I said.

Sometimes we betray each other unforgivably, giving away kingdoms, selling the pass to the enemy for a lot less than thirty pieces of silver. But sometimes we betray each other in tiny ways. Over very ordinary things.

All was not well within the eternal triangle. Anna had noticed something which she did not like. It was eleven o'clock and the room was full of smoke. The meal was over and tempers were bottoming out. The bar was overladen with women, leaning inwards

like chickens over their millet dispenser. Someone chose very loud music. Louise got up to go to the loo and Anna immediately asked H  l  ne to step outside. A deadly hush, worthy of the moment when the saloon door swings open and the gunslinger walks in, descended over our table. But some little part of us was excited and delighted. We all turned white as daisies. Louise came out of the loo and saw at once that Anna, who had been looking dangerous, had gone. Nor was there any sign of H  l  ne.

"Let's dance," cried Louise, seizing my arm with her double-jointed tentacle. That was the signal I suppose. The room suddenly erupted with pure joy. We waltzed, we tangoed, we smooched. We even did a Russian dance, bobbing about on our buttocks, flinging our legs out with maniacal enthusiasm. We menaced the floorboards, thumping out splintering rhythms. The entire caf  -restaurant joined us. Someone started taking photographs. Someone mean bought two rounds of drinks and paid for it with a 500 franc note. Anna's ex-lover cellotaped it to the bar mirror as a trophy. We yelled for more wine. I must have given myself a hernia. Louise danced with every woman in the house, bewitching them all with her strength and grace. We clapped. We cheered. We wanted more. We were all young and in love. We didn't notice when Anna came back into the bar, her face silent and blank.

Exuberance subsided into stupor at about two o'clock. Louise and I waltzed down the street and stumbled into the glistening creamy Mercedes. H  l  ne was weeping over the steering wheel. Huge heart-rending sobs pouring over the upholstery.

We put the car into the Lavage at Intermarch   late next morning to wash away the trauma of the night. I stood beside H  l  ne watching the rainbow dervishes glitter and whirl. We were hollow-eyed, hung over and depressed. It was not a moment to bother with tact.

"So you didn't tell her you were still sleeping with Louise?" I said bluntly.

"How could I?"

"Well, you told her that you were still sleeping with that other woman last year, didn't you?"

"Of course. We have no secrets. It's very important to be utterly honest."

"I see."

"I would have told her."

"But she noticed before you had the chance to do so."

H  l  ne shrugged remorsefully.

"I'm in a dreadful state," she said.

We stood watching her 1968 Mercedes becoming gradually whiter with foam.

A week later H el ene rang me up and said "Hello" in a very shaky voice.

"I've finished with Louise."

"Oh God, was it awful?"

"She shouted and cried and made a scene in the street."

"Did she come round to see you at the house?"

"Yes. Once. And Anna was there."

"Oh my God."

"Anna sat at the bottom of the garden while Louise blacked my eye. It's still yellow round the edges."

"Oh no," I groaned weakly, "she actually hit you."

"And then she came round the next morning to apologise and that was much worse. She sat on my lap for three hours and we both cried ourselves into hysterics. Then Chantal came past on her way to her judo lesson and she started crying too."

"Listen," I said, "don't go anywhere. I'm coming down to see you."

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But H el ene's eye recovered its usual sensuous lustre and our community re-established its equilibrium. Louise still wasn't speaking to H el ene; and so we all waited patiently for Louise to get over it and come round. Wounded feelings are a luxury most of us are unable to afford. Pride is never a cheerful long-term companion. You get lonely after a while. But Louise didn't come round. H el ene sent her a little note. Louise sent it back. I sent her a card. Louise rang me up and said that she didn't feel like dancing anymore. It's very hard being someone's ex-lover. We all are. But that doesn't make it any easier.

The days were getting colder when I pulled in at the petrol pump by the Lavage. The boy on the pump looked at me hard, then lit up with instant recognition.

"It was you wasn't it? Who put the car into the Lavage. And left all the windows open."

"No. Not me."

But someone with a really nice old Mercedes had done it. Paid for a 40 franc wash and had the mousse foaming all over the leather seats, hand stitched cushions and into the shopping bags. She had stood there screaming as the water poured in through every pore,



into the body of the car. Screaming, but powerless to stop the dancing rainbow whirls.

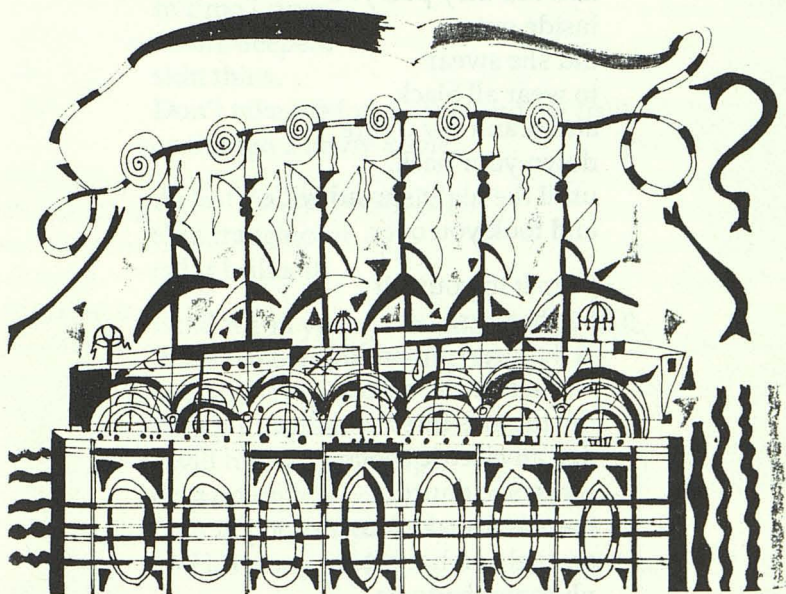
Only one person in town drove an elderly Mercedes. I walked thoughtfully down the cat food section, peering at cans of Gourmet and Sheba. Suddenly a woman's arm snaked around my waist and I abandoned my trolley in a waltz. Louise took the lead, guiding my steps, her eyes glittering like fencing rapiers. I hugged her and she laughed.

"You did it."

"I never did."

"You're dancing."

She smiled.



*Calliope*  
pen & inks  
Lotza Luck

scorpio

When you loved her  
did her red tongue  
propel you to magic.  
were her colors like an omen —  
everywhere you looked  
was it bursts and bursts  
of autumn,  
percussion your heartbeat.  
could you guess how every secret  
lies between her legs,  
a sign like summer thunder.  
did she bare her magnet eyes  
and did they pull you  
inside out.

did she swear  
to wear all black  
and brand her figure  
down your back,  
until the night spread wide  
and took you over.

keep it to yourself  
but her aura  
is the siren unwinding.  
and when she enters  
the room is filled with her  
like an electric shock.  
when she dances  
there is a snake loose —  
an eagle on her head  
plutonic shadows  
where she moves,  
and few will ever dare  
to go the distance.

## Persimmon

Small and hard I bloom from bud  
to tight orange orb.  
grow slowly,  
sucking sap,  
soaking sunshine,  
usurping brilliance.

Later, taut and tough,  
my thick skin sleek and shiny,  
taste me and  
your mouth will pucker,  
dry and bitter as bile.

In time I ripen,  
colors deepen,  
skin thins.  
Don't take me for more mundane fruit,  
as though a lowly apple.

At last I'm soft and pliant,  
skin translucent  
color brilliant.

Hold me in your palm and feel my heft.  
Place me between your teeth  
and suck me slowly,  
slither tongued.  
I will moisten your lips,  
drip down your chin,  
melt in your mouth  
and leave my perfume on your fingertips.

Karen Erlichman

## The Sex Journal

18 August 1990

### A. The Lover

My girlfriend and I have been together for almost four years. The passion between us was very strong from the beginning. For many months she seemed to want to *do it constantly*. I'd come home from work and she'd be waiting, naked against the brown sheets and batik quilt, that look in her eyes. Looking hungry, empty, impatient. And in the beginning, I was always excited to come home to her. But lately I seem to need at least an hour to detox from work before I can even eat dinner, let alone fuck. I usually sit in front of the TV and let my brain cells sizzle. Then, after I've eaten, by the time I approach the bedroom she's already sleeping. Shut down.

I have to admit it — sometimes I have to *make* myself get in the mood, y'know, set the scene. We're talking intense mental foreplay here. We have to go to a particular movie, go dancing or go to a party so I can get juiced up. But when we do have sex, I feel like she's not completely there with me. It's as if she wants me to want her, but not to expect anything from her. So it's easier for her if she pursues me, except she says I don't seem to like being seduced. I've always gone for the "do-me-queens," you know the type: talk dirty to her, touch her, squeeze her, suck her, fuck her. Then if I'm lucky she'll roll over, make a quick trip to the bathroom and give it back to me. But with this woman it's different now. The do-me-queen game seems to have failed us lately. Especially since she started having the flashbacks. Have we fallen prey to the "lesbian bed death syndrome"? It's those damn flashbacks.

It's been a long time since we last made love. A couple of weeks ago we tried, but as soon as I touched her nipples she disappeared. She was still lying there next to me, but *she was gone*. She seemed so empty and far away. When I kissed her it felt like she was pulling away from me, like she was going to gag or something. The truth is, it hurts me, and I miss her.

It's me, baby, just me, I tell her. I'm the one who loves you, I'll take care of you. I'm not going to let anyone hurt you. There's nobody else here, I promise. She needs me to talk to her while I touch her or she imagines it's someone else, the ones who hurt her. Everything was fine before she started therapy again. She says this is part of her recovery. Part of me wants to help her. I wish I could go back in time. I wish I could protect her. I wish I could erase all the things that were done to her. But I also feel lost. Or I wonder if it's me. I really hate this! Recovery, shmcovery. I miss my baby.

I want to be with her. Lately we've been talking about how to redefine sex. I like to lounge in bed on my days off late into the morning, reading my sex books and getting myself off. Maybe we can do that together. I'd be willing to try that. I don't want to be too demanding, but I just know there's some middle ground here. A safe place for both of us. A clearing in a tangled forest.

## B. The Other

Somewhere inside my head lust lurks like a quiet drumbeat. It's buried under the shame. In order to find it I have to get through the shame. It's like learning to swim first before jumping off the high dive. Before, I just closed my eyes and jumped, but now I'm so scared of the water. I'm afraid I'll drown. I'll be choking and gasping and there will be no one there to save me. But she's there, in the water, begging me, urging me. "C'mon honey, it's okay. I'm here. There's nobody else." The fear of diving is much worse than the reality itself. I stand there, shaking til I'm blue and cold, nearly bug-eyed and immobilized with pure terror.

This is what sex feels like lately. I wish I could feel the desire *in my body*, but for now it's only in my head. Intellectual recognition of the importance of sex is there, but the wanting is buried deep. I can't bear the thought that we have become another lesbian statistic. Another long term, asexual lesbian relationship. I can't stand it. I thought it would be different this time.

In the beginning, I was always the one who wanted sex. I fantasized about sex, I craved sex. I couldn't keep my hands and mouth off of her. But I was always given a *NO* in response. Eventually, I stopped wanting it. I couldn't bear another no. And then the flashbacks started. We'd be kissing, she'd bend down to

suck my breasts, and suddenly he's there. I've gone back in time sixteen years. She is gone and he's there. I open my eyes to look at her, to remind myself that it's my lover who's on top of me. It's *not* him. No pussy juice for this girl. I'm dry as cotton, and my cunt feels tight and locked up. No one in the world can crack this combination lock open. I tell myself, this is an act of love, not an act of sickness, incest. But it's too late. Before I even realize it, I'm already gone. My spirit has left my body like a morning fog. Burned off, disappeared. Roll over and I'm gone.

Today I think, there must be another way. I can't promise her or myself that these flashbacks will stop anytime soon. I don't know when it will be over. I know things won't go back to the way they were. But it doesn't mean we can't have sex. It just means we have to do it differently. It's kind of like baked chicken. Eventually you have to find new ways to cook it or you get sick of it.

So how do we do it differently? I'm asking the universe for the answers. Just because I don't want to be touched right now doesn't mean we can't have sex. Especially since I've been what she calls the "do-me-queen" all this time. She's no stone butch, don't get me wrong. But in the past when I've wanted to be the one in control, the one touching *her*, the one talking dirty and asking what *she* wants, she can't deal. So maybe this is karma. Maybe it's time for her to be the do-me-queen. It's time for me to ask what turns her on, and if she doesn't know, then we figure it out together. It's not about all or nothing; it's about change. It's about the unknown; I never thought I'd have the option to do this differently, to do love differently. I'm not only talkin' about sex. I'm talkin' about roles and rules and creating a new paradigm for intimacy. Uh oh, the intellectual slut is at it again. If only I could get out of my head.

## Cemetery Rules

I've had a camellia dying in my car since the last time I visited Grandma at the cemetery with Mama.

"Don't pick that," she says, frowning.

"Why?" I ask, tracing crimson petals, soft and cool, with my thumb.

"I don't know." Her hands tighten on the rake she's brought along. "Mama always said 'don't pick the flowers in the cemetery.' It's a rule."

Women in my family know all the rules. The stem of the camillia is tough between my fingers. It won't be easy to break.

I remember Aunt Anne lying down on that grave with the angel statue. Mama and Grandma stood silent, mouths open and eyes wide. Even at twelve I knew you didn't walk on graves, much less lie down on them. I heard Leslie, Aunt Anne's roommate for ever since I could remember, chuckle softly behind me. We all watched Aunt Anne focus her camera up at the angel and tombstone looming over her.

"Different perspective," she said and snapped.

I wondered what it looked like from her angle.

The cemetery was our favorite playground. While the grownups napped or rocked on the front porch in the heat of the afternoon, the kids would retreat to the heavy silence of the cemetery. Soldiers from all the wars, baby graves, the plague grave with its list of 25 — bones all jumbled together down there —, the family plot which Grandma insisted we rake and weed regularly ... these were our haunts while the tree frogs screamed for rain and moss hung still like Grandma's shawl on the hook by the back door. We liked to walk the crumbling stone wall separating the black section from the white, but we never crossed over.

Mama and I rake the sand of the family plot into a curving pattern of lines. She sweeps the granite with a hank of moss. She

wears the shawl she grabbed off the hook behind the front door. She catches me up on the family news: cousin with cancer in her toe, great uncle with a broken hip, second cousin's daughter pregnant at 14. Aunt Anne and Leslie are "fine, fine. They seem to be happy," Mama says and shakes her head as she looks back at the neat family plot.

When I pick the flower in the cemetery, I say, "Mama, I'm gay."

Now I find a beautiful dried camellia in my car.



*Diamonds*

pen & ink

Lotza Luck



## Dormant

“‘Dormant’ she says we are.”  
Stagnant with fear of losing her,  
fixed in stalemate, I ask,  
“What does ‘dormant’ mean to you?”  
as you set more wood in the stove.

For answer you lead me out  
along the frozen stream  
to listen to water flow  
beneath the lull of ice —  
where liquid shadows,  
waterfalls under stalled surfaces,  
exchange muted forms.  
Laced edges of melting pools  
remind us of motion at the heart  
of this standstill.

We slide across the pond  
to the half-frozen hole  
in front of the beaver shack  
waiting for the beaver to chomp  
her way out again.

There, your thin form chubby  
with insulation, your blue eyes  
sheltered between red cap  
and purple muffler, you peer  
at mysterious bugs gliding  
in languid suspension  
beneath the thinnest pane  
while I inch along,  
news of accidents  
brittle in my mind.  
We hear the ice shift and crack  
beneath the huge drum of pond.

On shore we discover  
a dried hydrangea bent  
whole and static on her stem  
over a solid rock.  
We speak of the latency  
of stars at noon.

During this intermission,  
in our footsteps crunching  
across the crust of snow,  
in percussion practice  
among the many eggshell shades,  
in crystalline forms dripping  
and refreezing, we hear promises:  
songs of winter turning into spring.

Beyond the pond, on the crest of the hill,  
frost on treetips rests  
in the refrain of a pausing sun.  
As chickadees nod off, buried seeds shiver,  
stars emerge, we return to embers  
slumbering in the cold stove.

## A Ring To Feel Loved

Scotland — February 1990

Standing in the constant Glasgow drizzle waiting for the # 62 bus. Grey sky, grey street, grey tenements. I'm not sorry to be leaving it. A forty minute journey. Time to scribble a postcard to Jutta. I need to feel in regular contact. The insecurity always there. I wonder what it'll be like when I'm there. I'm all set, only six weeks now. I've made all the arrangements. Handed in my notice at work and rented out the house. I'm definitely going.

I decided when Jutta was last in Glasgow. I could be with her and not just seeing her a week here and there every few months. I smile, love-of-my-life. I'd been practicing controlling love. So I fell in love with a woman who lives a thousand miles away. Controllable passion. But now I've taken the plunge — ignored the voice that says don't change your life for someone. Can I do it? Suspend disbelief and be in love? I'm the one who looks cynically on as friends fall in love, set up home, become a couple. Never again I said, it's not for me. A flash of panic. How am I going to cope with being partnered, feeling part of a couple?

Jolted back to reality as the bus comes to a sudden halt. We've been shot at — not an unusual event. Boys will be boys and Glasgow boys adapt their hunter instincts to urban life and aim their air rifles at the big orange buses. No one hurt but upstairs window shattered — all change.

Germany — October 1990

Eight months later, remembering that, I'm most shocked at my lack of reaction to the bus being shot. It passed me by as just another event of mindless male brutality.

How important honesty is in a relationship and how hard it is to be truthful and avoid the power games. I tot up the achievements of the past year — learned to ride a bike, tend a garden, chop wood and light a wood stove, speak enough German and plait the threads of love and trust into a bond with Jutta.

I've been living on an emotional merry-go-round. Not wanting to weave a web of entanglement. Wanting to love and feel strong and independent, whole and partnered and loved. We're struggling

together to match feelings to beliefs. I miss her if I don't see her every day.

The framed photo of Heather and Marion was a leaving gift. They're gazing adoringly into each other's eyes — they always did. The present was so I didn't forget the slagging I gave them about it. And there I was running away to be with Jutta. Marion ran away too — from the bombs and bigotry of Belfast — the mountain of patriarchal programming crushes down on us as we carve a space to love each other. They've gone the whole hog — bought a house together, set up home, a couple. The programme now goes on to having a baby, and who knows?

Heather was sitting on the edge of the settee constantly fiddling with a ring on her finger. Eventually I took the hint and asked — "What's with the ring?" They'd exchanged rings she explained — blushing, smiling, glowing — isn't love wonderful?

Germany — May 1990

I'm in the Strassenfest. Feeling the need to have Jutta's arm to hold onto as I push my way through the crowd from stall to stall. I'm feeling lonely and the tears prickle as I gaze at the beautiful handicrafts. I want to ask the price of something but the effort of speaking German is too much. I push on through the crowd. My eyes light on a ring — a beautiful handcrafted ring. A ring to feel loved. A luxurious feeling of warmth rises from my belly to fill me out. A band on my finger as a constant reminder of her love — a symbol of being cherished to carry with me everywhere. We can buy each other rings. I feel stronger and more confident already.

That night I ask her. Lying wrapped in her arms, legs entwined, kissing and gazing adoringly into each other's eyes. I'm feeling shy as I hold her, rubbing noses, lips brushing, stroking her hair, her face — wanting to ask and eventually do. "No" she says — very gently. Her arms never slacken their hold, the rhythm of her caress never falters — her love stays firm but the answer is clear — "No."

See what I mean about the emotional merry-go-round? Looking back now I think she was right. It has crossed my mind that being in love is not good for me. I daydream and weave fantasies of romance, but my imagination is bounded by the images of patriarchal "love."

Germany — July 1990

I've been difficult all weekend. I don't get on with her friends, I don't like socialising with men and I can't keep my mouth shut.

They all speak German and feel comfortable together. I rely on Jutta to translate — not only the words but the social world that feels alien to me. I feel I'm a responsibility for her, a social embarrassment. So I withdraw and become rude and unfriendly.

I make a cup of tea and we try to talk. I make a joke about monogamy and she says she wants to rediscuss it, she's not sure patriarchal concepts like monogamy have a place in lesbian relationships. I try to remain calm but in my head I'm screaming, "Who is it?" I rack my brain, mentally going through her friends and acquaintances convinced it's the beginning of the end. She soothes and reassures but I'm wary. I search her eyes for the truth. I hate myself — the jealous lover — and can see she hates it too.

What's wrong with me? I prided myself on not being jealous and possessive and now the mention of nonmonogamy has me in a fury. I withdraw into bitterness, suspicions and smouldering resentment. I blame her for my decision to come to Germany. I feel betrayed. I grieve and make plans to leave, to move on. I wonder what to do with my life.

A thin thread of communication sustains our relationship. She's alarmed and can't understand my reaction. She doesn't realise she's demolished a fantasy world I'd created and occupied in the last months. (So much for honesty in relationships.) She doesn't know the right-on lesbian feminist, the hardbitten cynic had lazed in the summer sun weaving fantasies of domestic bliss. Living together in cozy harmony all smiles and warmth, cooking together, eating together, you wash/I'll dry. She reminds me I was already married and hated every minute of it. Eventually we laugh together and I know she's right.

It was months before we were close enough to talk about how two big strong independent women could love and feel loved. And try to figure out what we wanted. That's the hardest. The structures of patriarchal wedlock have to be challenged but I'm still not sure if or how nonmonogamy works.

There are women with whom I feel an unbreakable bond of love, who have loved and sustained me through many roles. They are my friends, why should sex make a difference? Together we can create another way of loving.

Well — it didn't work out that way. It's months since I've had any contact with Jutta. Isn't it amazing how quickly someone can emotionally withdraw? It's a lonely feeling. I made plans to move

on in the new year to a university town an hour's drive away which had an active lesbian community. I had great hopes for our relationship in the future. But Jutta was not so optimistic, which I felt was reflected in her unilateral declaration of celibacy. Of course how else can anyone decide to be celibate? It had to be her decision and she had every right to make it. I tried to understand and be supportive but in terms of our relationship I couldn't help but feel I was being punished.

Scotland — January 1991

As I hurry through the cold wet Edinburgh streets I'm excited and happy. I said I'd be in at 10 and she could phone me. I'm sitting by the phone when she rings. I'm pleased to hear her voice, how wonderful it'll be to see her again in only a week. She sounds terribly down but says she's just tired. I go over the arrangements but she's unenthusiastic as I remind her of the goodies I can bring. I keep asking, what is it, what's wrong? Nothing, nothing, nothing, we can talk about it when you're here. Talk about what? I make a joke, "Don't tell me you've fallen in love with someone else." A long silence; I clutch the receiver and feel myself falling, somewhere inside I'm doing backward somersaults in slow motion. I don't know how long it is before I find my voice, "Oh."

I get off the phone as soon as possible. Rejoin friends in the living room and tell them. They rally round, hugs, kisses, sympathy, support and alcohol. Lots of alcohol. I don't know what to think. We'd never got round to discussing the details of nonmonogamy, how it would work in practice. I'd assumed celibacy canceled out nonmonogamy, but obviously I was wrong. Very soon I'm drunk and working myself into a jealous rage. My worst fear is that they're talking about me, laughing at me, sitting together maliciously gossiping or, worse, pitying me. My friends gently draw me back to reality. Soon I stagger off to bed, numbed by alcohol.

Three hours later I'm wide awake again, staring into the darkness of a sleeping house. That's the problem with alcohol — it's an immediate but temporary anesthetic, and facing the pain with a hangover is worse. I have to speak to her — never mind the distance, the time, the cost — I have to speak to her. She's sympathetic, reassuring, loving and eager to tell me that her lover wants me to know she's terribly sorry I'm so hurt. It's exactly the wrong thing to say. Within seconds I'm in a screaming rage.

The next week blurs into one long sleepless night. I said I'd cope, said I'd be reasonable. And look at me I can't even manage

basic self-maintenance. What a state I'm in. Eventually I give up trying to be reasonable and phone her demanding that she give her new lover up and promise never to see her again or else! She's sorry but there's no way she can agree to such demands. I realise she means it and am instantly reduced to a snivelling pathetic mess. My humiliating neediness is repulsive to us both. She says she'll phone.

I wait and wait and wait. Friends come and rescue me from the phone. But I'm on edge, totally preoccupied expecting her arrival every second. In my desperation I convince myself she hasn't phoned because she's on her way. I calculate how long it will take her to get to me. If she leaves immediately she'll be here now, or now, or now. Eventually, despair turns to rage, they're the only two emotions I'm capable of. At least rage gives me energy to move. I won't let her ruin my life, I make plans that don't involve her and I'm pleased that when she eventually phones to say she can come in two weeks' time I've already arranged to be gone.

Germany — March 1991

Light another cigarette from the stub of the first, eyes still on the wine bottle. It's only 8 a.m., I can't start drinking yet. Less than 12 hours into spending a nice weekend together and I'm sitting alone in her kitchen in moody silence, chain smoking and already considering opening the bottle and numbing out.

This nonmonogamy stuff is doing my head in. I feel such a pressure to be fun to be with, stimulating, interesting, amusing, attractive, good company. We go to the women's cafe and catch up on each other's news. Except its my news she's catching up on, she says little of what she's been doing. She doesn't give me information she thinks will upset me and I try not to ask questions I can't cope with the answers to. I watch what I ask, and keep up a cheerful facade to cover the silences that speak volumes. I don't want to be unfavourably compared to other lovers.

But now I've blown it, I've broken my own rule and asked a question and right enough I can't cope with the answer. She can't understand my feelings. Love isn't like a cake to be divided up, more for her, less for me. Love is a bond, a line between you and another person. I know, I know. "There are women with whom I feel an unbreakable bond — they are my friends, why should sex make a difference?" I wrote it, I believe it, I wish I could understand why I can't feel it. What I can feel is that I'm losing her and she refuses to acknowledge that this is happening. She tells me that

the problem is me, I'm imagining things and creating difficulties. "You're just jealous," she says, and with a wave of her hand dismisses it. She can't help me, she claims never to have experienced feelings of jealousy. I shut up and keep my feelings to myself. The silences between us grow and grow.

We conclude the weekend with an absurdly rational discussion re-establishing our ground rules for successful nonmonogamy. Throughout this discussion I'm calm, cool and rational and steadily I drink my way through the bottle of wine. Afterwards I'm desperate to feel close to her, to make some contact. But it doesn't work. I dress and leave for my train in a daze of desolation.

A week later I get her letter: how lovely it was to see me, how much she enjoyed the weekend, when can we get together again? I sit and stare at the letter for a long time. I can't decide whether to just let our relationship fade quietly, the silences spreading until there's nothing left, or start sending her hate mail. I'd been so frightened of losing her that I'd felt any compromise was worth it. But now I realise I've nothing left to lose. We're miles apart now even when we're together.

We struggle through a couple more miserable meetings. I give up pretending everything is OK, and my pent up feelings erupt in anger. She's shocked and hurt, she feels I've been lying to her and doesn't know how she can ever trust me again. Everything I say is taken as a personal attack on her other lover. It isn't hard in the end to just decide to stop seeing each other. Neither of us has any energy left.

So that's that then. At first not contacting her feels as hard as giving up cigarettes. I follow all the good advice: don't sit at home brooding, get out and about and involved in things. And she is always on my mind, an acute sense of loss is constantly with me, frequently reducing me to tears. If we can break free from compulsory heterosexuality, we can break free from compulsory coupledom. I have my friends, I am not without love in my life, I am not alone in the world.

I'm still not sure if or how nonmonogamy works. Given the difficulties we have in creating lesbian love I think it's hard to avoid manipulation, using nonmonogamy as an excuse to avoid the risks of intimacy or as a way of keeping a lover on her "best behaviour" and under control. Honesty in relationships is the most difficult thing to achieve.



Germany — July 1991

We met yesterday for the first time in months and spoke. About the fact that I still love her and I'm still in pain and I want to have contact with her and is it possible to build a friendship from the rubble. It was hard, the whole day feeling choked with emotion and trying to talk and trying to be honest. Part of the problem is we don't have a language for this, for honest contact between women.

I'm still running after her. It took three letters from me to get her to phone and agree to meet. She said she couldn't do it sooner, didn't feel safe enough. Perhaps she needed the protection of her new love before she could meet me. I would have felt stronger too being able to say yes, I'm in love again. Why does it feel so competitive?

I know this is something I need to deal with. I feel I've been towing a trailer filled with hurts for years. I need to try to do something about it myself. But how and what I've no idea, except good mothering — eat well, sleep well, get plenty of fresh air and exercise. Basic advice for the invalid. For the in-valid what? The in-valid woman who needs someone to authenticate her. I remember a young woman proudly showing off her new engagement ring — look, look, someone loves me, I'm real, I exist, I'm worthwhile.

I'm happy to reject all that. So why am I left with such a painful feeling of aloneness? A friend suggests another way of looking at it: as an awareness of our own amazing uniqueness, and seeking out like-minded souls with whom we can mutually celebrate our wonderfulness. The trick is to find the balance. I see the deadening pattern I'm caught in, one I see acted out all around me. She wants me and I'm off, distancing myself to protect my amazing uniqueness. She distances herself from me and I'm forever pursuing. There must be a way lesbians can avoid these power games in relationships.

Why does sex make such a difference?

I have friends with whom I share love. We belong to a community of lesbians and together we must be able to find a way of loving free from the patriarchal games of possession and ownership. I'm struggling to believe that the woman who can make my life worthwhile is me.

I've bought myself a ring — a beautiful handcrafted ring — a ring to feel loved.

Kate Taylor

## Love Hangs on the Line

Once heads were removed  
and left on the kitchen  
table to  
prevent listening

Once battalions of storks  
bombed cottages with  
bundles of  
destiny.

Once words went to market  
in tiny rows  
like ants on  
a battlefield.

Today love hangs  
on the line, crisp,  
colorful linen, flapping  
in sooty air.

## Brownstones

If I hadn't come back around my way, I'd never have found my way home. My Crown Heights neighborhood in Brooklyn is a whole other story than the tales told on Manhattan's Lower East Side. The Brooklyn Bridge just doesn't span the pages between my hometown and the borough they call the City.

I couldn't find an affordable apartment after leaving Leslie. Some of the story is called gentrification: real estate investors high-fashioning the neighborhood with pricey shops and restaurants, luxury housing skyrocketing the tenement rents and edging the poorer people out for good.

The real truth is that I just wasn't pulling together my pieces fallen off from that badly-broken love affair. I'd opened my heart wide for Leslie and foolishly ascribed the highest motives to her every act. I sometimes think, had she been Black, I could have known better. I didn't trust myself alone and I needed familiar ground until I could get back on track. As much as Mother disapproved of my going out so much with women — "I didn't raise my child to become a bulldagger" — she welcomed me back home.

I didn't tell any intimate details, but she could sense my sadness and probably knew the reason why. Mother's no slouch and has told me often enough, "If you knew one tenth of what I've forgotten, daughter, you'd be in much better shape."

Almost a year passed before I did anything other than come home from the library, buy groceries and hide from myself in a book, looking up only now and again to weep. Slowly but surely, my balance started to return. When you give yourself time to do nothing, a lot of lost sheep come home to rest.

One May evening I heard the Mr. Softee truck tinkle its siren song under my window and the children gathering around it. A whole new bunch of kids swear they own St. Marks Avenue and I don't know a single one of them who ride their bikes up the alleyways into the backyards to play handball, running bases, or jump double dutch.

I put down my novel to go outside and sit on the stoop where I could watch the kids and hear their laughter. I'd try to see who'd

favor butter pecan, pistachio or banana-chocolate swirl from the ice cream truck.

Mother was down there, talking to Mrs. Singleton, but I didn't join them. I'd never been very responsive to our next-door neighbor's prodding me for talk of myself or her efforts to seduce me with allusions to luscious gossip. I had a reputation for being shy, but the greater truth was that I didn't like her nosing around, sniffing out juicy tidbits that she'd parade like a trophy to draw acclaim to herself.

Not that I'd ever interacted much with other people, for that matter. If my report cards read "A" in all subjects, what they left out was "Michelle does not play well with children." I'd learned to put a bookish and foggy air about me to keep people at a distance. This worked better on adults than with children.

But something did pierce me when I heard Mrs. Singleton say to Mother, "So here she comes, just as proud as can be in her construction boots. You'd never know it now, but Renée was the most feminine little baby you ever did see; such a dainty little girl before her mother passed. In my day, no woman would want to become a common laborer."

"Well now Joyce, times have changed. The women today do all sorts of things they didn't used to. Of course there were always a few doctors and lawyers, but now they're common place. What's news is the women police, those girl car mechanics and the like. And no reason why not. I like it when I see the lady bus driver or hear the female subway conductor."

"Well, jobs is one thing, but I want a man taking my daughter out on a Saturday night," Mrs. Singleton pronounced.

Mother said nothing to this and I called out, "Hey Renée. How you doing?" as she waved hello to Mother and Mrs. Singleton, not seeing me sitting on the steps to the stoop.

"Michelle? Well look who's here! What brings you back to the block? It takes all these years for you to come visit your poor old mother?" She winked at Mother who put hands on her hips approving Renée and looked down at me with a "Hmph."

"Mm hmm. My child gets her degree in library science, moves to Greenwich Village and I don't see hide nor hair of her for months at a time," she sniffed to Renée. "But now she's back under my wing, where she belongs," she raised her eyebrows to me.

"Well, dag, Mrs. Walker. You should let the girl out for fresh air every little once in a while. I left the block when I was 17 and came back to live when I was 23 and I never knew Michelle had even gone or come back," Renée joshed. I didn't let on that their tandem teasing delighted me.

"So what are you up to these days, Renée? How you been?"

"Time goes so fast, I just don't know."

"Before you two get started: Michelle, don't forget to pick up my clothes from the cleaner's before Evelyn's closes. I have to get dinner ready."

"All right, Mother."

"I'm heading that way, Michelle. I'll walk you down the block and we can get caught up."

I told Renée that I worked at New York University's Bobst Library and took literature classes for recreation; that I'd left my apartment, no longer wanting to live with a roommate; that I was staying with Mother until an affordable situation came up. She told me of her apprenticeship in the electricians' union and her job on a 50-story office building with men who in their more sensitive moments said, "Oh shit, look at this! It's a girl. How ya doin, hon?"

After stopping off at the cleaner's, we crossed the street to her building, reminiscing. When we were kids on the block, Renée had been best friends with Terry Signore, Evelyn's granddaughter, and had played more with the gang around the corner. She had more to tell of who got married, got a city job, got arrested, overdosed.

She snorted, "You, Cheryl Marks and Debbie Richards were in that college-bound league. By junior high we were in different worlds. But even before that, I could never touch you. You were always so stuck on Yvonne Hicks."

I smiled at her summation and nodded "yes." It was true that Yvonne had been my best friend through our elementary school days at P.S. 83. "Everyone else seemed too rough and tough for me. Come junior high, Mother sent me to Tilden, that mostly white school out in Flatbush." Taking on Mother's accent, "If I can't send you back to Jamaica to get a real education, I'll have to settle for second-best and put you with the white kids who'll at least get something."

I remembered how I didn't want to teach as Mother was encouraging me to do. I'd cringed at the thought of all those little people expecting so much of me. "But Michelle, you'll be older and

far wiser than they. Teachers get a good salary with retirement benefits. It's a secure city job." Well, to me children were much worse than adults. I felt burdened with responsibility not to hurt their feelings as mine had been. But the bottom line was they were people; and too many at one time for my taste.

Library science, however, appealed to me. While I was at Hunter College to major in a career in public books, the athletic girls began to interest, then distract me, especially in spring when the warm air made everyone giddy. At times, I'd felt dizzy with desire. A little searching through the card catalogues for entries under "Homosexual" and "Lesbian" confirmed my worries and told me everything I dreaded knowing.

As usual when memories came up for air, my conversation slowed down. As if to keep us talking, Renée spoke of going to Brooklyn College to study physical education and become a gym teacher. "I put more energy into smoking herb and drinking wine than studying physiology. At the time, it just seemed like a better idea to do the rent-a-cop full-time, ya know?" she trailed off with a sad chuckle.

"I was a guard on this job that they'd mostly finished building and the furniture was moved in. I got to talking with this sister who was an electrician there. She practically hounded me into getting an application for her union's apprenticeship training program so I could make some real money. I was pretty foggy from all the reefer I was doing, but the money sounded right and she had a trade. That's knowledge nobody can take away: I wanted that."

Renée looked at me as if taking my measure for all of her dimensions and I think I passed inspection. "I also knew I needed to stop getting high to have it. I decided to come back home and get clean. My father had passed and this brownstone was the best place for me to begin to grow into whatever I could be without the drugs. You know? I used to think it was cool and strong to always keep my feelings under wraps, to look like I was absolutely right and not admit I made any mistakes. Now what makes me strong is that I can show some emotion, set things right when I screw up and learn something useful from it. I see myself like a river. One drop doesn't seem like much, but all the water moving together in one direction is where the power comes from."

I was listening to the tide of emotion behind her words, fascinated by the spirit animating her. Neither of us had mentioned

any boyfriends. I was pretty sure about Renée, but could she tell about me?

"Dag, its 9:00! Your mother must be worried about you, Michelle. Do you want to call her to let her know you're okay?"

"She knows I'm okay, Renée. I'm a woman now." I looked into her eyes as I spoke, hoping she picked up the scent on my trail.

"Why don't you come by for dinner with Mother and me tomorrow if you're free?"

"I have a meeting with my clean and sober support group tomorrow, but I'm clear for Friday."

So that's how we began, or rather, picked up, mid-stream.

Curiously, Mother welcomed Renée. They had a mutual interest in current events and shared indignation over racial politics, which I gladly left them to discuss and solve without me, thank you. 1972 was an election year, so Blacks were important.

Monday and Wednesday evenings Renée went to school as part of her apprenticeship training. Tuesdays and Thursdays she met with her clean and sober support group. I'd started volunteering to read stories to children two times a week at the library on Eastern Parkway and Schenectady Avenue. We'd touch base sometimes on the stoop and exchange stories of our days at work on those evenings.

Friday night dinners became fairly regular for the three of us. Renée's family was from Virginia and she loved Jamaican dishes, so I made my variations on Mother's recipes for curried chicken, codfish, coconut peas and rice. Mother would usually leave us to ourselves shortly after the meal. We'd talk in my room or go for a walk or to the movies. We'd been children together and could connect from those core selves and then appreciate the layers grown over the years.

Once I was sure of my rising feelings, I set to work. I was subtle: a sprinkle of perfume, an open-throated blouse, a better cut of slacks on Fridays.

And Renée was working her side of the street. She brought flowers "for the dinner table." She'd go to the gym before coming by and was pumped-up when she arrived. Her shirts were starched and her pants pressed, fresh from Evelyn's Cleaners. When we went walking, she took the outside lane, let me go through doors and narrow passages first and got very vocal in return when men threw rude come-ons our way. I felt valued and cared for with Renée at my side.

One Saturday, we were strolling up Eastern Parkway towards Prospect Park. Renée smiled towards the white truck with the red and blue trim. The Mr. Softee jingle was the same as it had been in our childhood.

"He should be around our way by 7:15. He probably has a route mapped out."

"How about a cone? My treat."

Several children were ahead of us, eager, laughing, begging their mothers to let them have some ice cream.

"What do you want, Renée?"

"I'll take a pistachio cone."

"Umm, nice choice, I'm having a maple walnut cup."

We resumed our stroll.

"Thanks, Michelle, this is great."

"Can I have a taste of yours"?

"Let me wipe this off first." Some ice cream had melted from the cone onto her hand. I wanted those drippings. "No, here," I said, and guided her wrist up to me. I lapped from her fingers onto her palm, tongued the grooves between her fingers. I licked the sensitive area on the back of her hand, ostensibly to get the sweet taste of ice cream, but hoping to stir some feelings in her.

"Hold still, I'm not done yet." I scolded.

We were both near laughing.

"Want some of mine?" She nodded like a young girl, not sure her mother would allow her what she really desired. I was about to spoon some into her mouth, when his voice intruded.

"C'mere sugar. I got something for you to lick only a real man's got. You too fine and foxy to go to waste like that." Before I could give him a piece of my mind, Renée was shouting, "Look you stupid broken-down, raggedy-assed, ugly motha fucka: she's not even looking at no useless low-life scuzzy piece of nothing like you. She's with me. You got that? You got anything to say about it? 'Cause if you do, I'll kick your ass from here to next Tuesday."

I had to step in front of her, "Baby, don't. He's not worth you getting upset. We're not even about him."

Even if the waters between us hadn't been simmering for weeks, they were ready to boil over now. As suddenly as she had raged at him, Renée yielded to me. She quieted her words, but her eyes echoed my own anger, frustration and longing. I hurried us up Eastern Parkway.



I took us to the Botanical Gardens. We found a bench under a tree dripping a pink and white cascade of leaves. Renée's face was drawn tight, then she broke. "I hate those guys when they say shit like that. Where are their heads at? Do they really think you'll go running up to them and say, 'Yes Daddy, I'm yours?' I wanted to beat the living daylights out of him for talking to you like that."

I was still astonished from having said "Baby." Had she even heard it? Did she know how I felt for her? Could she tell from the way I stroked her back, smoothed her forehead, and hugged her as she wept into the palms of her hands, elbows atop her knobby knees? She worked with the worst of men every day, why did this one fool's taunts make my baby cry?

I felt the afternoon breeze bathing my face, the wind cradling the leaves as I sought to soothe Renée, waves of desire surging through me. She seemed calmer now, her eyes still sad and dewy. I kissed the soft ebony roses unfurling from her cheeks, her perfect slice of moon brow, the pouting oval of her mouth. And then, I slipped my tongue between those plumped petals.

Greenwich Village is one place, but Brooklyn is quite another. Even under cover of the curtain of leaves, we didn't feel safe to be close, to touch, to kiss and I was streaming, ready to suckle her every body part.

"Let's take a cab home, to your house." When we got there, Renée seemed disoriented after closing the door and I was no longer so swift and sure. She said, "I'll be with you in a minute." She stopped briefly in the dark living room. It still had the furnishings her parents had put there in the 50s: the large RCA Victor console in front of a plastic covered couch, lacy doilies on the arms of pot-bellied chairs.

I made my way upstairs into Renée's light blue bedroom. The book shelf lining the far wall held electrical texts. On the floor next to her bed were old, worn paperbacks by March Hastings, Joan Ellis, Randy Salem, and newer, worn ones by Jane Rule, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison.

I called Mother to tell her I'd be staying the night over. She hesitated a moment, then said, "All right, dear ... Give Renée my love."

It was early evening by then. The way I was feeling, the whole night wouldn't be long enough, but we could at least begin. Renée came in and lay down on her bed.

"You're not seeing anyone else?" It was more a request than a question, and only a shadow of the demand I wanted to put to her.

"Ever since I found out you were back home, I haven't been able to even look at anyone else," she said, which sounded quite reasonable to me.

I traced patterns on her hand and told her about meeting Leslie at Hunter College and going to Gay Activists Alliance meetings and to Bonnie and Clyde's, then settling in with Leslie in an apartment on East 5th Street. "I suppose I should have cultivated friends other than assuming Leslie's, but I just didn't have the personality. I took the rest of my acquaintances from the literature classes I went to after work.

"Leslie had a broader social network and found she wanted to see other women and be sexual outside of our relationship. I couldn't handle that. We had argued the issue for weeks, and when she confessed she had been sleeping with someone, I lost it and said I was moving out."

"You truly are your mother's daughter," Renée chuckled. "And your own woman, too."

"Maybe now I could negotiate it better, but what I want is my lover's complete attention. I'm basically a home girl. I expect people to tell me the truth emotionally. I need that kind of responsibility towards me."

Renée nodded, taking it in. She'd been smiling at me throughout, listening with an ear tuned to the ebb and flow of my sensibility. It was like snuggling with a best friend with our parents gone for the evening. As she caressed me from shoulder to thigh, I felt safe to open all my doors. I'm embarrassed about the fact that I develop strong attachments to people I let put their hands on my private parts, the physical and emotional, but that's just how it works for me.

"Well, while you were in Gay Activists Alliance meetings and going to Bonnie and Clyde's, I was keeping to the Brooklyn side of the bridge, going to The Hut and The Outer Limits, being an after-hours club party-butcht. Sometimes, I'd go uptown to the Hilltop or André's. I stayed high and talked trash and couldn't figure what it was all about. I knew I wanted a wife and to settle down, but I couldn't see how to have that and stay high, so I stayed high. And when that started hurting too much more than it was worth, and I didn't even have much say in the matter ... well. I knew I'd better get help to change my ways or die."

Now it was my turn to give silent witness. I'd only seen Renée straight and sober, but I could sense it was a big deal and not a small task for her. Much like me coming back to Brooklyn, this is what returned her to life. I too had had to live according to a simple, rigid plan of behavior. Once the pain eased off, awarenesses could come through. Even then, it took a while before I could direct my life from the inside out and figure what streets would best take me home.

From down the block we could hear the Mr. Softee truck jingle its seductive call and the children gathering in excitement. Laughter floated in from the street. This wasn't the roar of Manhattan traffic — trucks, sirens, rush. I could afford to live in Brooklyn.

There was nothing more I wanted to say. I reached for Renée with my mouth as eager, my body as excited, my heart poured as open as laughing children, as sweet as ice cream, finally at home in a Brooklyn brownstone.



*Stephanie Byrd, Lesbian poet, in Pinkney Park,  
Michigan, June 1989*

Terri Jewell

## The Size of the Bed ... Matters

### The Single Bed

We were two Venuses of Willendorf—big, round bellies, luscious rotund breasts, moon faces with expressive eyes, and ample thighs supporting soft spherical asses. We both had deep contagious laughs and husky voices. We held our bodies with pride and strength. You were Black and I was white and I loved the textures of our naked skins held close to each other. Our friends saw us as an awe-full sight when we were together — which in the end, wasn't very long.

We each only had a single bed. I stayed at your house most of the time because of the kids. And late at night, after they were finally asleep, we'd make our way to your bed, a very small bed for such full-sized Amazons. We didn't get much sleep. It was hard to get comfortable. Not that sleep was our objective. We'd lie awake and hold each other, and whisper and talk and stroke each other, developing a tender sweetness. We'd hold our arms next to each other and marvel at the contrasting colors. Our breasts and bellies would fold into each other in one continuous mass of erotic fleshy fullness.

But we'd have to hold on to each other tightly to prevent falling out of the bed. Eventually, I saw this to be the way of our relationship—desperately holding on to avoid falling and hurting myself. Every turn, every breath, every kiss and caress, every movement carefully calculated and executed became a source of consternation. I couldn't help clinging while you pushed me away, demanding, wanting your space. We were too claustrophobic.

And it became clear. Two well-endowed strong-willed Venuses should not share a single bed.

### The King-Size Bed

I am always puzzled by how much a woman's good looks play into my attraction toward her. I would like to think of myself as someone attracted to a woman's self and not only her handsomeness. I suppose it has to do with not understanding how a lesbian can have sex for the sake of itself without a context of love or emotional relationship.

But, oh, how I lusted for you even though I didn't really know you. I have such a weakness for middle aging women with gray hair. And you had a marvelously strong Amazon body topped with a head of short thick silver-gray hair. And your eyes — I don't remember their color, because they were deep wells of intensity. I fantasized what it would be like to be held by your strong arms, to feel you, to taste you — never thinking such a possibility would occur, but trying to put myself in situations where it might.... I thought I was in love, though my friends assured me it was lust.

You invited me to your house in the country for dinner. I was awkward and embarrassed, tripping over my lust, which I tried unsuccessfully to keep out of the way. Yours was a world I didn't know very well. Drinking beer and smoking pot, we talked about musicians I didn't know but with whom you were enraptured, about people and places I didn't care about. You talked about the insecurity of your future and spoke philosophically about who knows what. I felt lost trying to float above the booze and drugs while struggling to control my giddiness and rather obvious desire. What did any of it matter, as long as I could have sex with you?

Then it became far too late and far too far for me to travel home. Ah, the classic set-up. I had only heard of such things and had never actually seen one! The distance between us in that bed sobered me. I laid quietly staring at the ceiling, convinced that my hyperventilation was audible if not vibrational. You rolled closer to me.

"Is this all right?" you asked.

"Yes."

I rolled — in order to be on my left side — but closing the gap further.

And again you came closer — almost touching.

"Do you have enough room?" you asked.

"Yes, I'm fine."

"Would it be alright if I held you?" you asked.

"Yes ... yes, I would like that."

Settled again in a new position. Silent. Waiting. Simultaneously, by chance, we moved our faces into closer proximity — almost touching lips.

Finally. A tentative brush transformed into a deep full-mouthed kiss with breath that reeked of booze and smoke. I still remember the smell of your hair. It was very distinct, as if it contained all the remembered fragrances of the places you had been.

But the sex was short. My body too numb to sense or respond. My expectations much too high to be real, my desire giving way to impatience, so that I couldn't slow down and take time. It was quick and unsatisfying. Sex. It is perfectly natural, but not naturally perfect. You were humoring me, doing it because you thought it was what I wanted. And it was. Only later did I realize that my lust was on the surface — I wanted a gray-haired Amazon within context, relationship, mutual interest, respect, and love.

There was a lot of room in that king-sized bed. We returned, each to our own side, and slept — alone.

### The Queen-Size Bed

I realized I was cold and cramped. Like swimming from the bottom of a deep pool, I surfaced enough out of sleep to realize that you were huddled close to me with *all* the covers, again. That's the disadvantage of being a natural heat source in the winter in your double bed. Before sleeping, we'd tickle and tease over who was on whose side of the bed and hogging all the covers. It's a regular game we play, usually ending up with us snuggled together somewhere in the middle. But as the night gets colder, you inch closer and closer to me to keep warm in my body heat. For my part, I get too warm and try to inch away. Toward dawn, I'm teetering on the edge — almost falling out of bed, while you sleep in blissful warmth. I never got much sleep at your house. The double bed was just too small.

We spent several months talking about talking about living together. Then we started talking about living together. Then we decided to live together. There were many points to negotiate, but our major fear was losing ourselves to the other. We're both independent spirits with our own sets of friends, interests and activities. We recognized we had the potential for getting mashed together, but not the desire for it. How were we to maintain our individualities, our own "space," yet still be intimate? We didn't want to dominate each other or be dominated. We saw too many friends who broke up because each felt she had lost her own identity. We wanted to be conscious from the start.

In addition to our attitudes and feelings, we realized our physical space would have much to do with the outcome. How big an apartment? Could we afford a house? How many rooms? How big? How located? Who had the most stuff? Where would it go?

What would we buy in common? And most importantly, would we share a bedroom, and use whose bed? (You had a double mattress. I had a futon Queen.)

From the outset, we each assumed we'd share a bedroom — after all, isn't that a reason for living together? Isn't that what most everyone does? Our friends did and they seemed quite content with it. But then the minority reports started coming in. A strongly outspoken group advocated separate bedrooms. The position went something like this: if we each had our own rooms, then we'll have our own space to get some distance from each other, especially if we're fighting. We could take turns in each other's beds but always have the option of sleeping alone. It seemed that they would snuggle with their lovers, but then each sleep alone. Besides, wasn't it a heteropatriarchal assumption that lovers needed to share a bed and bedroom together all the time?

Another friend said, yeah, she understood that and, in fact, always had a separate bedroom from her lovers. But, inevitably, they'd end up always in one bed — the other slowly becoming a storage area. So, in the end, it never made much sense.

So we talked about what kind of space we needed. We had spent a year and a half schlepping across town and it was wearing on our nerves. On the nights we slept alone, we'd talk on the telephone before falling asleep, always longing for the intimacy of touch. The thought of living together and snuggling together on a regular basis was inviting. The thought of snuggling then being on the verge of sleep only to get up to climb into a cold bed and get comfortable all over again was not. Neither was the idea of nightly negotiating whether to be together and in whose bed.

In the end, we found an inexpensive three bedroom house to rent. We each have our own room in which to think, meditate, work, read or whatever. After all, alone time while awake proved to be the priority. We share a sleeping room together.

I am still a rotund Venus and you a very round, smaller version, and oh, how I love you. I cherish the feel of your body next to mine. You lie with your back to me, fitting your behind into the valley between my stomach and thighs. I cradle your neck and head on my arm, my hand able to caress your breast. I kiss your feathery hair, your neck, your cheek. You sigh softly, and move closer to fill the air-space between us. You are voluptuous, and I delight in the feel of you. Slowly, intently savoring every sensation. I slide my

hand over the length of your body, the hills, the valleys, the luxurious curves, your wonderfully rounded belly. It's all very innocent. I want only to feel you. But soon, you respond with sensuous moans and rub the soles of your feet on my shins and ankles and toes. I suck the back of your neck and gently brush the tops of your nipples. You groan deeply and push closer to me as if to climb under my skin. You lean to your right so that your breasts are uncovered by your arm. With only my index finger, I start at the outside of your breast and slowly, slowly circle around and around, coming ever closer to your nipple. You hold your breath in anticipation until I gently brush my finger across your nipple back and forth and back and forth over and over until your nipple is a hardened pebble, and only then do I take it between my finger and thumb and gently squeeze. Your exhaling moan shivers down my spine causing my own throaty moan of pleasure. I do this all over again with your other breast, heightening our pleasure. I rub my fingertips down the length of your stomach to the top of your mound. Again, you move to your right and open your thighs, hoping for my hand between them. But not yet. I circle up and down, coming ever closer to your clit. You appreciate this teasing and start to raise your mound to my hand hoping, hoping, hoping this time I'll touch you. And finally, I do. I enjoy the feel of softness when I rub my palm slowly over your fur. Gently I slide my finger through your sticky wetness and onto your sensitive clit. And I stroke gently, then steadily, then firmly, until your breath catches and you orgasm with raucous noise. I love the sound of your coming! We kiss and kiss and cling to each other tightly. We hold each other for quite some time and finally sleep creeps over the horizon. As it does, we slowly move apart, nestling into a comfortable position on our own sides of the bed. We have enough room for ourselves. But we are close, our fingers touching. The queen bed offers what we need — that is, enough room in our intimacy.

You see ... it's the size of the bed that matters!



Morgan Grayce Willow

## Scylla and Charybdis

*thank you June Jordan & Laurie Anderson*

i

and so the male/gods  
said  
at their conference: how  
can we keep them  
from loving each other  
and cupid  
eager/smiling  
raised his pudgy hand  
and he said: i know i know  
take their bodies  
from them  
teeheehee teehee

ii

one of my lovers loved me  
rocked me all thru  
the night/her body ample  
supple and wise  
as an earth/mother/fetish  
you might see in any  
women's bookstore  
then she quit smoking/then she gained weight  
soon my lover didn't love  
me/couldn't rock me/couldn't take  
me  
wanting her heavier  
body  
another  
of my lovers danced for me/pranced

for me statuesque as a bronze/tempting  
as an ath-  
lete strong/and/lean/and recov-  
ering from buli-  
mia i told her  
she was pretty/she said:  
really? soon  
my lover couldn't love me/  
though she really teased  
me i couldn't touch  
her/but i should  
want her/should come and get  
her/should want to wet  
her but she wouldn't come  
for me

another of my lovers let me  
love her  
she let me  
hold her/  
rolled open to me  
and once  
i was deeply in-  
to her climbing-her-ladder  
like-a-spine love-  
ing her then she said:  
you must be dis-  
appointed in  
my breasts

one  
of my beautiful lovers  
saw  
another of my  
beautiful lovers  
and she  
ran/hid  
and she said:

how

could you say no

to her/

could you say

yes

to me

iii

mean/

while

i

feel fat/feel short/feel

pimpled/feel

mean/

while

i'm not/

in shape/loose enough/tight

enough/long

enough/strong

enough

and i

don't want my

lovers

to see me

naked

iv

and so

they held another

meeting

and cupid said:

so,

zing

sting

it worked

teehee

teeheehee

## Reviews

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*Cancer in Two Voices*, by Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum (Spinsters Book Company, P.O. Box 410687, San Francisco, CA 94141, \$12.95)

*1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic*, edited by Judith Brady (Cleis Press, P.O. Box 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221, \$10.95 paper, \$24.95 cloth)

*Cancer as a Women's Issue*, edited by Midge Stocker (Third Side Press, 2250 W. Farragut, Chicago, IL 60625-1802, \$10.95)

Even the cover of *Cancer in Two Voices* is achingly beautiful, with its suggestion of both flowers and blood. Barbara Rosenblum and Sandra Butler have written an intimate, intelligent and moving narrative of a lesbian couple struggling with cancer.

Barbara was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1985. She and Sandra each kept a journal until Barbara's death three years later. The resulting book is a great love story — about the love of two women for one another, for family, for community, for ideas, for life itself. To read it is to partake of that love, and of each woman's bravery as she struggles to clearly experience and understand all that happens. Barbara and Sandra's clarity is catching; the days I was reading this book I felt clearer about my own life.

Cancer is devastating. When it enters your life, you look for someone to blame. Even Barbara and Sandra, two politically savvy women, fell at first into the self-blame so encouraged by our culture. Barbara blamed herself for relying on assembly line health care at her HMO; Sandy also blamed herself for not urging Barbara to have a private doctor.

Then the HMO admitted *it* was to blame for Barbara's tardy diagnosis, which denied her any chance for early detection and treatment. The HMO settled out of court for close to \$300,000. The money proved to be a mixed blessing. It meant they could travel to New Zealand, to Florence, to London. It bought freedom from financial worry, gave them time to reflect and write. Barbara could even buy previously unaffordable luxuries, like green leather European shoes.

But it also felt like "blood money." "It rings horribly of a Faustian pact with the devil. This money in exchange for my life. \$1,000 for every vomit," wrote Barbara. Sandra felt pain over the meaning of the money, more than the cash. Sandra understood Barbara wanting to leave the money to various important people in her life. But Sandra also felt less loved and less coupled because Barbara saw the money as her own, not theirs.

It shook Barbara's sense of reality to live in an unstable body. "You are bombarded by sensations from within that are not anchored in meaning." Sandra found herself living with Barbara's body more than her own. She exercised less, gained weight, cut her hair short when Barbara's fell out from chemotherapy. "It felt impossible to enjoy or delight in my body — an act of disloyalty."

Both women's passion for understanding shines through on every page. They wanted to tell their story because it "made us visible to ourselves as we were living it." Writing gave order and meaning, and even became a kind of lovemaking after Barbara's desire for sex had gone. Still, I wonder, didn't living this experience with a future audience in mind ever complicate things? Didn't either of them just once wake up some morning and think, "I don't want to feel *this* feeling, because I'm going to have to put it in the book."?

Barbara wrote that she wanted to live and die in an exemplary manner, and both authors clearly wrote to teach us all something. I'm more comfortable with the tone in *Cancer as a Women's Issue*, where the authors share their diverse experiences in a spirit that implies that theirs is but one approach, that the reader's might be different, and that we're all in this together, learning from one another.

But this is a minor problem; the book is a major gift. The image that lingers is Sandra's description of Barbara, outdoors, dancing, her lone breast flapping, astonishing another lesbian couple into stopping their weekend-long quarrel with her "life force."

The shadow of the AIDS epidemic looms over two recent anthologies about women and cancer. Cancer has been killing women — many in their prime — for decades. But working on the frontlines in AIDS organizations has thrown the politics of illness into stark relief for many lesbians and other feminists, too. Cancer used to be a personal tragedy. The connection to feminism seemed

to be only that it robbed us of some of our wisest voices. Now, cancer itself is becoming an arena of feminism.

While neither of these books focuses exclusively on lesbians, both have strong lesbian voices and a clear feminist slant. These are often absent from the many mainstream books about women and cancer.

Judith Brady's *1 in 3: Women with Cancer Confront an Epidemic* is a collection of essays and poetry that inspire, encourage and empower. The writers — women with cancer — have done their research and looked deeply and honestly at their own experience. They don't shy away from pain and sadness, instead, they transform them into outrage. *1 in 3* left me ready to go out and *do* something about it all.

Factual essays full of statistics are juxtaposed with poems laced with rage, disbelief and fear. It's powerful and jarring, which is entirely appropriate when discussing cancer.

It's one thing to know, in a general way, that minority women die sooner after a cancer diagnosis. It's another to read the wrenching stories of those whose survival is cut short by sloppy health care. Farmworker Reina Diaz tells of being misdiagnosed for a year while her body melted away from stomach cancer. Zinna Epperson, a native American, poisoned by radiation from the Hanford, Washington nuclear plant, describes being told her miscarriages, premature babies, cancer and lupus were due to "nerves." For decades.

Both these women's stories also underscore editor Brady's overall theme: that 90% of cancers are caused by environmental toxins. Most cancer is preventable, but the "cancer establishment" — the American Cancer Society, the National Cancer Institute, the medical profession — prefer to hunt for an elusive cure. As Jackie Winnow says in an excellent essay that previously appeared in *Sinister Wisdom*, real prevention would mean changing fundamental social structures.

*1 in 3* squarely confronts the victim blaming that occurs even in the lesbian community — the belief that women with a "cancer personality" somehow cause their own cancer. With well-researched scientific information and moving personal testimony, the authors here debunk this approach. "As long as we believe that we ourselves cause our cancers, then the real perpetrators of our cancer epidemic are off the hook," writes Brady.

In focusing on the social causes of the epidemic, however, I believe the authors dismiss "changes in personal habits" too casually. There's good evidence from population studies that a low-fat, no-meat diet could drastically cut the incidence of breast cancer, and other types, too. There's no guarantee for any individual woman (because some women in the populations studied still got cancer). But cutting the odds could save millions of women. The medical profession recommends low-fat diets halfheartedly, and often doesn't know how low to go (20% of calories or less). The cancer establishment defers to the meat and dairy industries. Cancer activists should educate about low fat diets, just as AIDS activists have educated about safe sex. When lots of people change their personal habits, it can have important social and political consequences. Just ask the tobacco industry.

*1 in 3* avoids the most common fault of anthologies; it is consistently well-written. So is *Cancer as a Women's Issue*.

Editor Midge Stocker is less interested in a coherent political message than in sharing a varied feminist approach to cancer. The authors don't all agree, which makes the book less focussed than *1 in 3*, but also more refreshing. There's a sense here that we still have lots to figure out, and that it will take thinking from many viewpoints.

There's investigative reporting. Rita Arditti exposes the ovarian cancer-in vitro fertilization connection, using Gilda Radner as an example. There's fiction. Portia Cornell's touching story tells of a woman struggling with conflicts over caring for her sister. There are wonderful personal essays. Naomi Glauberman manages to be both honest and funny writing about metastatic cancer and her gradual realization that her support group leader is an emperor with no clothes. Helen Ramirez Odell ponders the value of being able to choose among alternative treatments, an option only available to middle-class women with private health insurance. She decided not to have a mastectomy; later, when her cancer returned, she felt her decision had been wrong. *Cancer as a Women's Issue* also overlaps some with *1 in 3*, with essays grounded in politics and calling for activism. One essay (Jackie Winnow's) appears in slightly different form in both books.

I can't imagine a gay man learning he has AIDS then going around telling all his friends the astonishing statistics of AIDS in

his community. We all already know. Yet when lesbians learn we or our lovers have cancer, we immediately begin telling everyone the surprising numbers we've discovered. 45,000 American women die each year of breast cancer alone. 175,000 are diagnosed. If 10% are lesbians, that's 4,500 deaths among us, 17,500 diagnoses. We live in the midst of an epidemic, but we're not aware of it until it strikes someone close to us. That's why I recommend all three of these books to women who haven't had cancer, even more than to those who have. Odds are, this is going to be in all of our lives. We'd better get educated about it, and fast.

— Judy MacLean

## Books Received \_\_\_\_\_

About the Books Received List: We list (almost) all the books we get in the mail. Unfortunately, we never have room to review everything we think should be reviewed. I tend to list books here by books/authors/presses I think are important (although all books from one press are listed together), with an emphasis on lesbian-owned presses. If I've read all or part of a book I may add subjective qualifiers like "read this." While the presence of adjectives can be interpreted as editorial endorsement, the absence of them only means I'm going by the publisher's press release. — *Elana*

*Piece of my Heart* — *Lesbian of Colour Anthology* contains exciting work by 60 Canadian and U.S. lesbians — rush to get this collection, anthologized by Makeda Silvera. 1991, \$19.95, Sister Vision Press, POB 217, Station E, Toronto, Ontario, Canada M6H 1H4.

*InVersions* — *Writing by Dykes, Queers & Lesbians* is 24 of 'em writing about how they have invented their writing selves and how they view the contexts in which they write; includes many dykes who have graced the pages of SW; edited by Betsy Warland. 1991, \$15.95, Press Gang, 603 Powell Street, Vancouver, B.C., Canada V6A 1H2.



*The Two Mujeres* — two Mexican Jewish women wrap their minds and legs around a 14 year age difference, class, family, and scandal to have a compelling, intense relationship in this wonderful, multi-layered novel by Sara Levi Calderón, trans. by Gina Kaufer with the author. 1991, \$8.95, Aunt Lute Books, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

*Another Love* — an unusually deep detective tale of lesbian life in the aftermath of the Soviet occupation of Hungary in 1956, by Erzsebet Galgóczi, trans. by Ines Rieder and Felice Newman. 1991, \$8.95, Cleis Press, POB 8933, Pittsburgh, PA 15221.

*Rebellion: Essays 1980-1991* — the clear, thoughtful, challenging, honest, reflective and rebellious writings of Minnie Bruce Pratt can't be highly recommended enough. 1991, \$10.95, Firebrand, 141 The Commons, Ithaca, NY 14850.

*Out In The World: International Lesbian Organizing* — a pamphlet with group descriptions and suggestions for linking up with lesbians almost everywhere, compiled by Shelley Anderson. 1991, \$4.95, Firebrand.

*Cecile* — a series of well-written short stories that describe complex lesbian lives and a long-term relationship, by Ruthann Robson. 1991, \$8.95, Firebrand.

*Free Ride* — a free-wheeling tale of a lesbian rogue on the move by Marilyn Gayle. 1991, \$9.95, Firebrand.

*Dykes To Watch Out For* — 1992 Calendar will be into April by the time you read this, maybe you can still find a copy for 1/2 price at your local lesbian bookstore and catch up on the great cartoon lives Alison Bechdel creates. 1991, \$9.95, Firebrand.

*Cancer in Two Voices* — Sandra Butler and Barbara Rosenblum created a new form of collaborative writing while dealing with Barbara's cancer and death and their lives together. Reviewed in this issue. 1991, \$12.95, Spinsters, POB 410687, SF, CA 94141.

*Being Someone* — eleven years in the "life," a dyke relationship by Ann MacLeod. 1991, \$9.95, Spinsters.

*Love & Memory* — a lesbian novel exploring the interconnections of life by Amy Oleson. 1991, \$9.95, Spinsters.

*Lesbian/Woman — Twentieth Anniversary Edition* — the classic, with a 140-page 1991 update by Del Martin & Phyllis Lyon. 1991, \$25 (cloth), Volcano Press, POB 270, Volcano, CA 95689.

*Fascination and Other Bar Stories*, a funny and hot collection from the smokey heart of the Montreal bar beat, by Jackie Manthorne. 1991, \$9.95, Gynergy, Box 2023, Charlottetown, P.E.I., Canada, C1A 7N7.

*Tide Lines — Stories of Change by Lesbians* — 27 stories by mostly Canadian dykes, where change is a lesbian-fueled engine, edited by Lee Fleming. 1991, \$10.95, Gynergy.

*Trimmings* — a small, beautiful jewel of Stein-inspired writing overlaid with African American rhythm by Harryette Mullen. 1991, \$7, Tender Button, POB 1290, Cooper Station, NYC, NY 10276-1290.

*In The Game* — a long-awaited Black lesbian mystery, set in Chicago, by Nikki Baker. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad, POB 10543, Tallahassee, FL 32302.

*The Daughters of Artemis* — the fourth Caitlin Reece mystery by Lambda award-winning author Lauren Wright Douglas. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

*Clearwater* — an erotic tale of mystery, romance and political intrigue by Catherine Ennis. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

*To Love Again* — in which a lesbian abortion clinic director and straight nurse face jail and seduction together. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

*Murder is Germane* — mystery and adventure, set in Panama, by Karen Saum. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

*Stranded* — beings from another planet inhabit lesbian bodies to stop a fundamentalist/alien plot to take over the U.S. in Camarin Grae's seventh novel. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

*Avalon* — a Celtic fantasy involving the baby destined to become Lady of the Lake, by Mary J. Jones. 1991, \$9.95, Naiad.

*Kiss & Tell* — the back cover reads like a dyke Geraldo fantasy in this bound-for-best-seller potboiler by Robbi Sommer. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

*Still Waters* — while trying to heal their relationship at a luxury resort, our heroines discover a familiar corpse and they're off in this new Helen Black mystery by Pat Welch. 1991, \$8.95, Naiad.

*The Straight Mind and Other Essays* — the first English collection of theoretical writing by Monique Wittig, this is a crucial if difficult text, one that may literally change your mind. 1992, \$12.95, Beacon Press, 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108.

*Grandmother of the Light — A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook* — a collection of stories from the native peoples of North America, a series of sources that feed the mythic hearts of women, by Paula Gunn Allen. 1991, \$19.95 (cloth), Beacon.

*Double Stitch — Black Women Write About Mothers & Daughters* — 48 lesbians and straight women explore this territory in a complex anthology edited by Patricia Bell-Scott, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Jacqueline Jones Royster, Janet Sims-Wood, Miriam DeCasta-Willis and Lucie Fultz. 1991, \$19.95 (cloth), Beacon.

*Gender Shock—Practicing Feminism on Two Continents* — a comparison of how feminists actually change things (or don't) in North America and Australia, by Hester Eisenstein. 1991, \$18.95 (cloth), Beacon.

*And the Bridge Is Love — Life Stories* — a reconstruction of a Jewish Depression-era childhood and activist (straight) adult life, by Fay Moskowitz. 1991, \$17.95 (cloth), Beacon.

*The Dancing Goddess: Principles of a Matriarchal Aesthetic* — German feminist theorist Heide Göttner-Abendroth envisions a fluid, non-commercial interchange between "art" and "life," trans. by Maureen T. Krause. 1991, \$17.95, Beacon.

*Perfect Pitch — Lesbian Feminist Fiction* — an intriguing collection of 15 stories, edited by J.E. Hardy. 1991, £5.95, Onlywomen Press, 38 Mt. Pleasant, London WC1X 0AP, England.

*Pride Against Prejudice: Transforming Attitudes to Disability* — analysis and activism by Jenny Morris. 1991, £6.95, The Women's Press, 34 Great Sutton St., London EC1V 0DX, England.

*Past Due — A Story of Disability, Pregnancy and Birth* — what is a disabled woman's right to choose? by Anne Finger. 1991, £6.95, The Women's Press, England.

*What I Love About Lesbian Politics Is Arguing With People I Agree With* — a good diversion excursion of cartoons and essays by Kris Kovick. 1991, \$7.95, Alyson, 40 Plympton St., Boston, MA 02118.

*Leave A Light On For Me* — a reprint of Jean Swallow's first novel. 1991, \$9.95, Alyson.

*Trying Hard to Hear You* — a "young adult" novel in which a teenage theatre group reacts to two gay male members. 1991, \$7.95, Alyson.

*The Crystal Cage* — a sequel to *The Crystal Curtain*, in which the psychic detective must take action against another lesbian, by Sandy Bayer. 1991, \$8.95, Alyson.

*Looking for Livingstone: An Odyssey of Silence* — a Black woman travels through time, Africa and unnamed lands, in a quest for the "discoverer" of Africa, blending poetry and prose, dream and parable, by Marlene Nourbese Philip. 1991, \$10.95, Mercury Press, Box 446, Stratford, Ontario, Canada N5A 6T3.

*The Edge of the World* — accomplished short stories on a variety of straight familial scenes, by Carol Malyon. 1991, \$11.95, Mercury.

*Peculiar People: Mormons and Same-Sex Orientation* — an anthology edited by Marybeth Raynes, Ron Schow, Wayne Schow. 1991, \$24.95, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, UT.

*Women of Influence, Women of Vision: A Cross-Generational Study of Leaders and Social Change* — a study of power and difference; neither "lesbian" nor "homosexual" appear in the index, by Helen S. Astin and Carole Leland. 1991, \$25.95 (cloth), Jossey-Bass, 330 Sansome St., SF, CA 94104.

*Elizabeth Bishop: The Biography of a Poetry* — a deep account of the lesbian poet's life, including previously unpublished poetry and letters, by Lorrie Goldensohn. 1991, \$29.95 (cloth), Columbia Univ. Press, 652 W. 113th St., NYC, NY 10025.

*A Lure of Knowledge: Lesbian Sexuality and Theory* — an analysis and critique of the rhetorical use of lesbian sexuality in mainstream and alternative texts and films, by Judith Roof. 1991, \$40.00 (cloth), Columbia Univ. Press.

*Plotting Women — Gender & Representation in Mexico* — asks where the common ground exists for feminist theory and Latin American culture, by Jean Franco. 1991, \$15, Columbia Univ. Press.



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## Contributors' Notes

**Cathy Cade** has been photographing lesbians and feminists for 21 years. She lives in Oakland with her two sons-not-from-a-previous-marriage.

**davida singer:** vermont native, born halloween, long residing in new york city. continue to swim, bike, and lust after country. poems in numerous magazines including *feminist studies*, *little magazine*, *metis*, *passager*, *caprice*. read my work mostly in months beginning with A. journalist/occult keeper. first poetry collection will be published in late 1992.

**Deb Parks-Satterfield**, 40, Black, dyke. Lives in Seattle, WA. Is owned by a pair of "2,000 year old" cats named Bogart and Xanadu. In the U.S. her work is seen frequently in *Evergreen Chronicles*. She has also been published in *Colorlines*, *Sinister Wisdom*, *Hag Rag*, *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives* and *Conditions*. In Vancouver, B.C. you'll find her work in *Diversity*, a magazine for Lesbians of Colour. "A Wedding Story" is lovingly dedicated to her life partner Sandrisa Morgan Lewellyn and to all those brave dykes who have tried to reinvent the wheel. P.S. — *Thank you Sister Jewell for your original edit.*

**Deborah Schwartz** is a White Ashkanazi Jewish Middle-class, Poor, Joyful, Moody, Shy, Writer, Teacher and Lesbian who tries to everyday partake in a morning prayer that might, could possibly bring the fashionably late Messiah.

**Diane Fraser** is an urban dyke living in the best part of Boston, Jamaica Plain. She's a graduate of UMass Boston who earns her meager living working with wild 6- to 12-year-olds.

**Donna Allegra:** I was born in Brooklyn, N.Y. and started writing in a diary when I was 14. For years I wrote in my journals and didn't know how to tackle making literature until I joined Jemima, a Black lesbian writers' group. I began in poetry and am now more interested in short fiction. *Sinister Wisdom* has published me in issues #12, 20, 32, 43/44.

**Elana Dykewomon's** 1972 novel, *Riverfinger Women*, is being re-published by Naiad in 1992 with a new Afterword.

**Elizabeth Clare:** I am a lesbian activist, poet, and essayist, who lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan. I am currently getting my MFA in

Creative Writing at Goddard College and surprising myself by writing sonnets.

**Ellen Oppenheimer** lives and works in Oakland, CA and appreciates fan mail.

**Janet Aalfs:** The more I know, the more I don't, contrary to what I was led to believe growing up in a white, middle class, nuclear family in the 50s and 60s. My writing has been published in lesbian/gay and feminist journals and anthologies. I am head instructor of Valley Women's Martial Arts. A ravenous lesbian, I exalt in learning all that I can about the world.

**Joanna Kadi** is an Arab-Canadian, working-class, able-bodied lesbian feminist with a BA in women's studies and an MA in feminist ethics. She is a writer and activist. Currently she is collecting materials for an anthology of writings by Arab-Canadian and Arab-American feminists. Thanks to Karen Luks for coining the phrase "the lightest hour..." in conversation in December 1986.

**Judy Freespirit:** I am 55 years old, retired for disability, writing and living in Berkeley and spending much of my time these days preparing my novel, "Keeping It In The Family" for publication (hopefully) in 1992.

**Juarez Hawkins:** I am a woman-loving artist of African-American descent, happily freelancing in Chicago. I am sick of silence, and my work provides a medium for me to process and channel the screaming inside of me. I am screaming in response to this country's nasty little "ism's," and to announce to the world that I am here. Computer graphics are a natural outgrowth of a dual passion for computers and art, and reflect my training in both areas.

**Judy MacLean** is a freelance writer and editor. She collaborated with Tish Sommers and Laurie Shields on *Women Take Care: The Consequences of Caregiving in Today's Society*. Her writing has appeared in *Lesbian Love Stories Vol 2*, *The Washington Post*, *OutLook*, *The Funny Times* and other publications.

**Karen Lee Erlichman:** Born 7/18/62, Philadelphia, PA. I am a Jewish lesbian activist, writer and social worker. I have also been living with CFIDS for 6 years. I live in San Francisco with my partner and two cats.

**Kate Taylor** — I am a white lesbian from rural Vermont, presently stranded in a city. I am a poet, who loves to work with wood and play with bikes. My life is finally settling into the proper balance.

**Lierre Keith** has been a radical feminist since she was 16. Her first novel, *Conditions of War*, should be out sometime this year. In her spare time she destroys pornography, confronts rapists and abusers, and generally foments revolution.

**Lorrie Sprecher** has published fiction and poetry in various journals, including *Common Lives/Lesbian Lives*, *Feminist Studies* and *Trivia*. Her fiction appears in *Lesbian Love Stories Volume 2* and *Word of Mouth Volume 2*. Her collection of humorous short fiction about therapy, *Anxiety Attack*, has just been published by Violet Ink, and is distributed by the Inland Book Company.

"**Lotza Luck**" is a name that came around the mountain seven years ago. "Hoop Brow" got hung on like a bracelet charm last week, commemoration of eyebrow piercings? So now the names are coming around the planet ... that is more of a pondering than a saying. Saying is saying. Drawing is drawing.

**Margaret Blanchard**: A twenty-year veteran of the women's movement in Baltimore, I now live in upstate New York with friends, in an octagon home we built ourselves. Other poetry has been published in *Unlacing: Ten Irish-American Women Poets*. For nine years I was an editor of the first national publication of the current women's movement, *Women: A Journal of Liberation*.

**Mev Miller**: I am a fat, radical, lesbian separatist, who sometimes has disabilities. This is my first attempt at short fiction (I usually write essays). Living a lesbian existence is vital for me. Currently, I am helping to organize for lesbian space in my town. I am also a gardener, book collector, witch, ASL interpreting student, writer, musician and activist.

**Morgan Grayce Willow** (under the patriarchal name, Nancy Weber) was a *Runes* collective member in the late 70s. "Scylla and Charybdis" is from her recently completed collection, *The Yellow Memory Wire* (currently seeking a publisher). The poem formed the core of a performance presented by L.I.T.A. (Lesbians in the Arts) at a lesbian sexuality conference in Minneapolis in March, 1991.

**Olga Krause** is a poet and musician living in St. Petersburg, Russia. Her performances and ballads are popular with a mixed audience. Although she is the most publicly known lesbian artist and does not deny her sexuality if asked, lesbian themes in her work are veiled and understood only by her gay audience.

**Patricia** is a 35-year-old radical lesbian separatist, currently living and working in Germany. Having rejected my patriarchal surnames, I still haven't found one I like.

**Patricia Duncker** was born in Jamaica in 1951. She writes fiction and radical lesbian feminist criticism. Her published work includes "James Miranda Barry: 1795-1865" in *The Pied Piper* (Onlywomen Press, 1989). She edited the lesbian feminist fiction anthology *In and Out of Time* (Onlywomen Press, 1990) and is the author of *Sisters and Strangers: Contemporary Feminist Fiction* (Blackwells, 1991) and an essay entitled "Reading Genesis" in *What Lesbians Do In Books* (The Women's Press, 1991). She lives in France and is very proud to be part of the lesbian community.

**Patt Kelly:** Currently, I live in Omaha, Nebraska and teach at a community college (creative writing) in Iowa. I attended the University of Montana in Missoula and write poetry mostly about the experiences of the heart of womyn.

**Renee Hahn:** a 25-year-old working class white lesbian, originally from Ohio. I am a writer and child sexual abuse survivor striving to develop radical healing by working with other survivors through the political lenses of feminism.

**Sharon Lim-Hing** is writing her thesis on francophone Vietnamese novels and is co-editing an anthology of writings and artwork by Asian/Pacific lesbians with Anne Mi Ok Bruining.

**Sonja Franeta** is a writer and translator earning her living as a machinist. In July 1991, she attended the first International Gay and Lesbian Symposium and Film Festival in Russia. Besides translating from Russian and Serbo-Croatian, she has collaborated on a joint bilingual manuscript with Argentine lesbian Ilse Kornreich.

**Sudie Rakusin:** I am a dyke, Jewish, white, 43, an aries, live in North Carolina in the woods with my three dog companions; painting, drawing, working hard and playing hard.

**Susan Hawthorne:** I have edited four anthologies: *Difference, Moments of Desire, The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing from Australia and New Zealand* and *Angels of Power*. My fiction, poetry and criticism have appeared in magazines and anthologies internationally. I am the author of *The Falling Woman*, and *The Language in My Tongue* will be published by Penguin in 1993. I've recently co-founded a feminist press in Australia called Spinifex Press.



**Terri Jewell:** I am a 37-year-old bulldagger writer working as a file clerk for the State of Michigan. I have finished editing an anthology of Black Lesbian fiction and poetry and am completing a compilation of personal essays and photographs for *DreadWomen/Lock Sister*, a book about Black women with dreadlocks.

**T. Stores:** GWF, 33 y.o. Born/raised fundamentalist Southern Baptist in North Florida; married/divorced/reborn happy lesbian. B.A./English for U. of Colorado. Have published short stories and poetry in small journals and have won two prizes for writing. Currently an M.F.A candidate at Emerson College in Boston, seeking publisher for soon-to-be-completed novel called *Getting to the Point*.

**Teya Schaffer** was widowed on September 7, 1991. Jackie Winnow loved life, women and cats, the words "lesbian" and "feminist," and social justice. She liked "I Love Lucy" and "Cheers." She created the Women's Cancer Resource Center and insisted that this be recognized not as personal achievement but cooperative effort. She helped raise a son. She liked coffee. She —

## Announcements and Classified Ads \_\_\_\_\_

### PUBLICATIONS

*POLICING THE BEDROOM* and *how we can refuse it* by Wages Due  
Lesbians examines Section 28, the 1988 British law which prohibits  
promoting homosexuality. \$4 to WDL, POB 14512, SF, CA 94114.

*FRONTIERS: A JOURNAL OF WOMEN'S STUDIES* has changed  
its address to: Room 2142, Mesa Vista Hall, Univ. of NM, Albu-  
querque, NM 87131

*SHORT FICTION BY WOMEN #1* is available for \$6 from Box 1276  
Stuyvesant Station, NYC, NY 10009.

*MAIZE*, A Lesbian Country Magazine. \$10 for 4 issues from Word  
Weavers, Box 8724, Mpls. MN 55408.

WORD WEAVERS, a Lesbian publisher, offers these classics: *Ripen-  
ing; Dreaming; Awakening; Lesbian Land; Spirited Lesbians*. Write for  
brochure: Box 8742, Minneapolis, MN 55408

### CALLS FOR SUBMISSION

*ARAB FEMINISTS*: All forms of writing by Arab-American, Arab-  
Canadian, Arab/Middle Eastern women now living in the U.S. or  
Canada sought for an anthology to be pub. by Kitchen Table:  
Women of Color Press, in order to promote visibility, provide a  
forum and sustain political activists. All forms. For more info,  
SASE to: J. Kadi, POB 7556, Minneapolis, MN 55407.

*TAKE BACK THE NIGHT*, a multicultural lunar calendar seeks  
women visual artists & writers for 1993 calendar. Full Womoon  
Productions, POB 1205, Santa Cruz, CA 95061 for guidelines.

*ANTHOLOGY OF CONTEMPORARY BLACK WOMEN'S JOUR-  
NALS*, ed. by Patricia Bell-Scott & Sandra Murray Nettles. For  
info, SASE to P. Bell-Scott, Dept. Child & Family Development,  
Dawson Hall, U. of GA, Athens, GA 30602. Deadline: July 1, 1992.

North American (U.S. & Canadian) *ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER  
LESBIAN ANTHOLOGY* of Creative Writing & Artwork. Queries  
and submissions to: Mi Ok Bruining, 2316 Vance St., Bronx, NY  
10469-6018. Deadline: June 15, 1992.

DOWN TO EARTH: A LESBIAN TRADITION IN GARDENING — why do you garden? All forms, writing and art. SASE to HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061 by Aug. 1, 1992.

CHILDLESS BY CHOICE: A MULTICULTURAL WOMEN'S ANTHOLOGY — what are the different meanings of this choice for women? All forms, writing and art. SASE to HerBooks, POB 7467, Santa Cruz, CA 95061 by May 1, 1992.

Two anthologies edited by Leslea Newman, to be pub. by Crossing Press: EATING OUR HEARTS OUT: WOMEN AND FOOD, seeks first person non-fiction narratives. HOW DO I LOVE ME? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS: Writings by Women on Self-Love seeks love poems by women to themselves. SASE to Leslea Newman, POB 815, Northampton, MA 01061 by June 15, 1992.

Two anthologies — WRITINGS BY WOMEN ON RITUAL ABUSE and FEMINIST CRITIQUES OF THERAPY. All forms, artwork. Previously published material okay. Deadline Sept. 1, 1992. Send work or queries to Fighting Words Press, PO Box 4, Northampton, MA 01061-0004.

RISING TIDE PRESS, a new lesbian publisher, seeks full-length Lesbian novels. For guidelines, send SASE to: Rising Tide Press, 5 Kivy St., Huntington Station, NY 11746.

PARTNERS ANTHOLOGY: seeking writing/artwork by lesbian partners of incest survivors. Send SASE for guidelines: Cynthia Bechtel, Box 16717, St. Louis, MO 63105. Deadline: June 1, 1992.

### (AD)VENTURES

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## Upcoming Issues of *Sinister Wisdom* \_\_\_\_\_

**#47 Lesbians of Color:** edited entirely by a collective of Lesbians of Color. Out in August, 1992.

**#48 Resistance:** How do we Dykes resist, do political work, find ways to make the planet a better place for womyn, animals and the earth itself? If we don't go to political meetings and groups, how can we still contribute to the struggle? What ways besides going to demonstrations can we be politically active? Why have so many Dykes put emotional/physical/political energy into men with AIDS, and how do we encourage them to re-focus it on the Dyke community? What ways do our lives — our racial/ethnic and class identities, whether we are young or old, live in rural or urban areas, are disabled or able-bodied — reflect in our political work? Do we judge political work by its merit or by the status of those doing the work? How do we define effective? What have we felt to be effective and encouraging? What are our success stories? Deadline: June 1, 1992.

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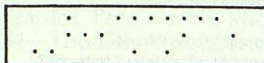
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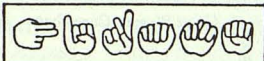
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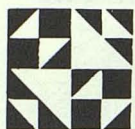
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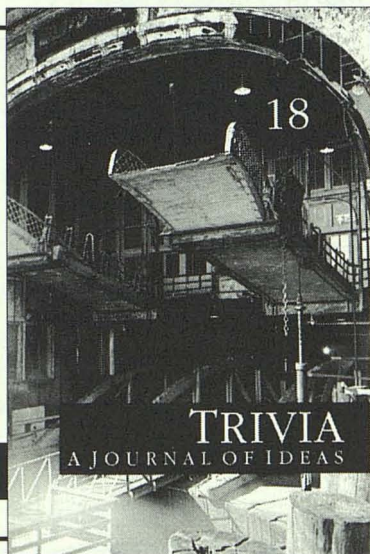
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- Cardea, Blue, Dashu, Marah, Elliott, Lauby, Sorella, Platt, Courtot, Caspers •

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#41/**Italian-American Women's Issue.** Guest edited by Denise Leto & Janet Capone.

- Azpadu, Guido deVries, Tavormina, Capra, fides, Cuomo, Veno, Tornatore •

#40/**Special Focus on Friendship.** Essays, fiction, editorial discussion transcript.

- de la Peña, Hardy, Svirsky, Gray, Stinson, Dambroff, Mi Ok Bruining, Hauptman •

#37/**Emphasis on Lesbian Theory.** With work on consumerism, spirituality, political theory, children, racism, anti-Semitism, lesbians in prison.

- Lee, Tallen, Evans, Pratt, Robson, Quinlan, Livia, Hardy, Gray, Green, Justicz •

#36/**Special Focus on Surviving Psychiatric Assault/Creating Emotional Well Being in our Communities.** Includes testimony, prose, poetry and essays.

- Hope, Aal, Caicedo, thundercloud, Robson, Sien, Moran, Ward, NiHera, Willcox •

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- Jewell, Frye, Pratt, Rosales, Bogus, Ruth, Gage, Barrington, Davis, JEB, Romano •

#34/**Special Focus on Lesbian Visions, Fantasy, SciFi.** Includes work on Disability, Separatism, Building and Transformation.

- Katz, Ortiz Taylor, Hoagland, Allegra, Livia, Louise, Ríos, Danaan, Marah •

#33/**Special Focus on Wisdom.** Lesbians of Color, Non-violence, War Stories, Incest, Leaving a Will, Assimilation, The Real Fat Woman Poems, Coming to Terms.

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#32/**Special Focus on Illness, Death, Mourning, Healing,** the Disappeared, Hunting Season, Dealing with Suicide, Cancer, New Ritual Observances.

- Maia, Allegra, Sears, McDonald, Waters, Hansell, Rosenblum, Butler, Stinson •

#31/**Special Focus on Sex and Fiction,** Coming out in the South, Found Goddesses.

- Smukler, Blackwomon, Romano, Davenport, Dykewomon, McNaron •

#28/ **Special Focus on Women & Work; Body Image, Size & Eating.**

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#27/**Special Focus on Girlhood, Sexuality and Violence,** Office Work, Navy Dykes, White Trash, Women of Color/Women in Israel/Women in Lebanon.

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

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