

sinister wisdom 59/60



Love, Sex & Romance

Sinister Wisdom 59/60

Publisher: Sinister Wisdom, Inc.

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ISSN: 0196-1853. Printed in the U.S. on recycled paper.
Sinister Wisdom, Inc. • PO Box 3252 • Berkeley CA 94703 • USA

A Journal for the Lesbian
Imagination in the Arts and Politics

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Notes For a Magazine

Although I did a lot of work finishing issue #58 and participated on the editorial committee as well, this double issue #59/60 is my first and last issue of Sinister Wisdom. Many people helped in various capacities throughout the process and without all of their help putting out this issue would have been impossible. Along the way I have learned many lessons -- the limitations of what I can do while working full time; my own ability to work on a huge project over a long period of time; my willingness to shelve my own creativity to work on said huge project; that things have lives of their own...

Sinister Wisdom has lived through many transformations. My wish (and the wish of previous editors) was that SW would truly represent the tremendous diversities in our many communities. For me, queer women's community is a wonderful fluid manifestation and I hope that Sinister Wisdom will continue to evolve as our identities transform. I hope these pages will continue to be a forum for

open discussion of transgender issues, butch/fem issues, s/m issues, and ANY other topics that are of vital importance in our lives as queer women/dykes.

I hope too that Sinister Wisdom continues to be a place where women of color want to submit their work and see it placed amongst a thoroughly multicultural group of writing by multicultural multiclass editorial committees.

I look forward to seeing Sinister Wisdom move into the 21st century in terms of technology. As I type, the computer monitor I'm working on is flashing from normal to teal as it moves toward its final decline. Abe Louise Young and I had huge belly laughs as we figured out some of the finer qualities of Quark (the layout software).

For much of the time that I was responsible for the editorialship of SW it has been that albatross around my neck. That nagging thing you think of when you roll over at 6 A.M. hoping for another hour of sleep. All of this is not to discount the pleasure I had in working with many of the authors and artists and members of the editorial committee. And, the topic - Love, Sex, and Romance - what could be better?



In the midst of working on this issue my wife, Hadas, and I decided to get married in our backyard among huge redwood trees

and one hundred friends. No family members could get over themselves enough to attend but we were blessed with the loving embraces of those who came.

I hope that you will enjoy the work of the fine artists who contributed to this issue. I remember being surprised reading some of the submissions. I had my own preconceived notions of what the topic might spark and writers went places I wouldn't have imagined and I loved that. Thanks for the opportunity to have tended SW for the past couple of years.

Until we meet again -

xxx Margo Mercedes Rivera-Weiss

Upcoming Issues

Dykes in Cyberspace: We live in a time where life as we know it has been infused with the reality and rhetoric of technology and computers. Wherever you fall on the computer literacy scale, you cannot claim to be untouched by the revolution. How has the computer affected your life, your livelihood, and/or your relationships with other lesbians? This issue is open to submissions on subjects ranging from cyber sex to well researched treatises on the effects of technology on lesbian economic status (and everything in between).

Food Issue: What is your relationship to food, and what does it mean to your life? Food can mean so many things: love, class, nurturing, oppression. Food can depress us or comfort us. Food can be erotic, exotic and forbidden. Food relates to our own personal culture and heritage, and to our relationship to the larger society. This issue is open to writings about food and all food related subjects.

Lesbians and children: Historically, motherhood and other types of relationships with children have been loaded issues within our communities. Whether it's through arguing about male children at festivals, participating in custody battles, working for two parent adoptions, or creating intended families, not many of us go through life totally untouched by a relationship with a child, or the presence of children in our circle. This issue is open to all viewpoints and observations on this topic.

For deadlines visit www.sinisterwisdom.org
or call (510)595-7331

Kimberly Aceves-Denyer

CROWN VICTORIA

For Christine

Friday night,
A visit home with my lover,
mi abuelo throws me the llaves to his
prize possession,
It sits low and cool on the driveway
just waiting for a ride.
My lover slips into the car,
the jingle of keys,
as I move slow behind the wheel,
I like the way the soft burgundy felt seats
feel on my body.
As I look over to where my lover sits
I realize
this is the way cars should be made,
no space between seats.
I raise my arm around her shoulder to slide her close
to me,
under my arm,
head on shoulder,
she feels soft,
and I feel strong,
feel butch,
feel like my grandfather,
When as a child from the backseat I watched him take
Abuelita in his arms

knowing that I wanted to be just like him.

Watching the way he would turn to kiss her
at the stop sign.

Pulling up to a stop light,
looking at my lover,
I realize that my past has
become my present and my future and
quickly we are in the back of the white, sleek, prize,
on the side of some unknown road,
moving,
thrusting,
tasting,
playing,
breasts,
tongues,
remembering,
long rides to Calexico;
fights with mis primos;
knowing all along I knew I was different,
and yet the same,
and as I lay spent,
sweating,
exhausted on the warm burgundy seats,
wet,
filled,
with the sweet taste of her lingering on my lips.
I remember that I always did love riding in Abuelito's
Crown Victoria.

Mary Frances Platt

WITH A NEW TWIST

I suppose that flirting with crip butches shouldn't stray too much from my flirting with non-crip butches protocol. And as I am just beginning to open this particular box of female masculinity, I certainly may not be the one to give advice. But, being as I haven't found an existing book of manners, or even a crib sheet on picking up disabled anybodies, and being that I really really wanna do the dirty with my own crippled kind, and want other crips to do the same, I just gotta wheel my own reckless path.

As any old school type femme knows, one of the keys to a successful butch-femme flirtation is to get the butch to REALIZE that number one you are flirting and number two that it truly is HER that you desire. It seems to me that butch hating in the mainstream as well as queer culture has successfully stripped many able bodied butches of the knowing of their own sexy gorgeousness. Butch women I have lusted for are consistently shocked when they finally figure out that it is truly them that I have been creaming my panties over for hours, days, or weeks. And trust me, I am not exactly known as a demure, quiet kind of gal. When I

was a 20 year old carnie* running a joint*, I would bally out “Dykes play half price” in my sexiest voice, with seductive moves to match, and nine out of ten times the hot butch strolling past would have no clue my heart and crotch were doing somersaults over her. So the point here being that “subtle” and “want butch” do not belong in the same sentence. With crippled girls the wanting femme has to work even harder to go up against years of eroded self-esteem and buried sexuality bestowed on the butch crip, gratis by crip hating, butch-baiting culture.

Then, of course, there is the question of whether or not your flirting is accessible to her. Like when I met this really cute one-legged wheelie at my first national A.D.A.P.T.* action. I had been watching her all week and giving all kinds of visual cues of my interest in her. Wheeling up really close to her, smiling as if I had good middle-class teeth, staring at her face and wheelie muscled forearms, and blushing every time my passion for her rose up in me. It wasn't until the last dance — on the last night — so who got arrested doing CD* party — that I realized she was blind**. Armed with that new information I spent the next three hours giving her verbal and tactile clues as to my desire. She finally got it when I invited her to see my van. Which is, since I have E.I.* , the equivalent of asking, “Would you like to come up to my hotel room?” Needless to say, we enjoyed and understood each other from that

point on.

While we of NOT DEAD YET* were disrupting the national conference of Crip Killing Cohorts, the Hemlock Society, I felt a butch presence taking in my non-violent civilly disobedient antics. Since she appeared to be a hearing, sighted and non-disabled walkie, I was surprised when my crip body responded in heat to her presence. I was in the process of educating my groin on its broken crip butch radar when her C.P.'d* speech sent it into spasms. Luckily, my scooter could wheel me away with weak knees undetected. She and I then proceeded to do the butch femme dance.

“Would you and your P.A.* like to have dinner before you leave?” she asked. “So, will you be at the next action in Milwaukee?” I questioned. Getting her to feel the flirting took direct statements such as “I can’t be impartial about which action you should go to cuz I’m going to Milwaukee and I want you to be there” as well as discussions on butch/femme culture and desire. I still don’t know if she even got that I was flirting, the time was limited, and beyond flirting in that moment of time was not my intent.

Femme flirting, for me, has often been akin to

breathing, a natural, automatic response to butch presence. I don't have to be **particularly** attracted to any one butch, and I am in **general** attracted to butch energy, so put me in a space with a butch, and voila, the flirting switch gets activated. After I experienced a pulmonary embolism my breathing response did not flow so easily. I initially used oxygen twenty four hours a day, and now use it nightly, and as needed to enter toxic environments. My breath is now strong, assisted or not. Currently my flirting response around butch crips is sometimes awkward or even labored. But it, like my breath, survived and, with time, may reach a place of greater ease.

Butchness has always been at the center of my desire. Eroticizing crippledness was perhaps initially an outcome of my radical crip politics. Sometimes I feel shame at this new fetish of mine, but then I have felt shame before with each new round of coming into my ever blossoming sexuality. I love crippled bodies. I love the differences, the non-standard shapes, the one leg, two caned, wheeling, drooling, plugged-in beings that are the reason I can go on in this crip hating world. How can I not eroticize that which I have taken so long to find beautiful and sexy in myself, and now find totally irresistible in others? Non disabled

butches are hot, sexy, strong, and desirable. Disabled butches are hot, sexy, strong, desirable and entice me in a way that no other beings have. In a nutshell, butch crips set my passion to fire. A fire that for many years had been smoldering towards out, and is now raging gloriously out of control and circling around any willing crip butch in its path. I now joyously reclaim the label that taunted me as an adolescent, with a new twist, Crippled Butch COCK TEASER.

*Carnie — a carnival worker

*Bally — the call or words a carnie uses to draw a player in

*A.D.A.P.T. — American Disabled for Attendant Programs Today

*CD — Civil Disobedience

*E.I. — Environmental Illness

*Not Dead Yet — A national group of people with disabilities and their allies who are against the legalization of doctor induced death

*C.P. — Cerebral Palsy

*P.A. — Personal Attendant

**Mary Frances substituted the word "blind" for "blink" at the request of the editor. It is not in keeping with the style or culture of the piece to use the word "blind," and Mary Frances sees this as a silencing of radical crip community.

Honoré

THEN NOT

I remember being a nice girl and then not.

Sweet lavender lilacs wet with spring dew in
the morning.

Standing on corners with stars on my shoulders
at dusk.

My first kisses not tender like the ones

I practiced with my doll, Penny.

No big fat tongue working itself all the way in
with an invading army of germs.

My white party dress,

the one with strawberries

all around the bottom hem, soiled.

The pink ribbon in my hair fallen away.

Pam Mitchell

IF AND ONLY IF

(To those who ask why we can't just "Do It")

If there weren't already a scream lodged in my throat in
sweet

anticipation of the night terrors, the death struggles
we could create together

If I were braver or dumber,

If I were younger or somebody else entirely

If I were someone who could fly or knew how to
land without fear of splintering into a million impossible
shards that would cut my own heart out,
slice my wrists, sever my windpipe

If I were the type who could shatter into
butterflies or explode into a neat little rainbow

(I read about these people, this thing they call
sexual ecstasy

But for me it's only the acrid smell of panic that stains the
sheets, and

the only moans are the death
rattles of a very little girl.)

If I could be what I am not

I would court you, bring you little gifts like

the scabs of beach you picked that day along the shore-
line:

a polished stone with a ring around it
(That's supposed to mean good luck, you said,
and both of us laughed, two girls who know so
very little about luck).

a little mussel shell still intact and so nearly perfect
(Neither of us dared contemplate how recently
its occupant had been eaten alive.)

a miniature chorus line of shorebirds
(Whose skittering choreography reminded you of
pre-schoolers and made me think of
fleas.)

If I could be who I am not I would not walk down lovely
beaches thinking about skin diseases, death and parasites
I would not need to dismiss the seashore's treasures as
pieces of debris, holding fast to the questions I would need
to ask them if I admitted that they mattered:

(Won't you crumble if I hold you?
Won't you stain me, cut me?
Will you turn into a living monster in my pocket and
swallow my hand, my arm, my hope?)
(Or worse, won't I want to hoard you?
Will you transform me into a clutching
little child who has had nothing and
wants everything and can't afford to, can't afford to.)

If I could afford to
I would ask to touch your cheek with my cheek and
find your mouth with mine and taste you and

the taste would be a little salty a bit of bitterness a richness husky like your voice is when it's true.

If I could hear your voice grow husky, could
ever hope that my presence would elicit from you
the moans of a woman and not those
of a dying child
If only that could be.

If I could I would love to touch your lips with my fingertips,
feel the satin of your belly next to mine and
cling to you until the sun comes up and blasts
away the damned night sky with its stars that
tease and twinkle but are too far away to claim,
to clutch in my child-sized hands, with stunted fingers
foreshortened like my spirit was by madmen and by the
madwomen who are even worse, more dangerous
because they know how to crawl belly-first into child-
wombs where they lay eggs they can then pass off as
ours, these poison droppings time-released one moon
after another until we are well into middle age.

If I had not been tricked and trapped into
unrelenting childhood, my woman's body an alien growth
that isn't mine to offer you

If my fear didn't magnetize you, draw me down your
body and make me want to beg you: let me burrow
in, crawl home to a place where sensation would be molli-
fied, nullified,

Where choices would not have to be made.

(But yes, I know, this is hardly a good enough reason to

have sex. I have vowed, I will never choose to become
one of those

madwomen who passes along the terror-ridden poison
and calls it an act of love.)

Still, if I were not I or

not in a world where choices have got to be made:

(a world where the skunk-like odor of panic didn't
scream from my pores

and all sensation didn't disappear from my limbs
where the tips of my fingers wouldn't turn to ice

that would shock your skin instead of pleasing it)

Then could I choose you for my lover?

If I could only be I, I would know an answer to that
question but I know you know what I really want to say:

If we could only be we.

We avoid that little pronoun by mutual agreement
because

We know too well where it can get you.

We know how those two little letters can

blow up solar systems, leaving little children in
grownup bodies to comb through the debris, to sift through
the blackened sands searching for little treasures and for
salvation.

But we know all of this, you and I do.

If only we didn't have to,

and could only know

each other.

Holly Iglesias

from

BREAKING DOWN THE DAM

As a teenager in Missouri I longed for cold-water flats, brownstone stoops, gypsy skirts, bulky, scratchy cardigans. Fingerless gloves, typing under a bare light bulb. Bohemian delight, intense conversation, red wine in goatskin, ferment a***nd mayhem, crockery stuffed with dried weeds. Boisterous, naked children, nursing breasts, poetry, mandolins and penny whistles. Shameless violins, full-throated vibrato. Garlic ropes and dense dark bread, tangled, waving hair, warts. Heaps of ragged blankets, nubby shawls, piles of jewel-colored pillows.

Not sofas or china patterns, monogrammed towels. Not pleats and plaids, starched oxford cloth, hothouse flowers. Introit ad alteri dei. Kyrie eleison. Meatloaf, mashed potatoes, Metracal, Diet Rite, chapel veils, Ponds, Breck, Revlon, Clearasil. Holy cards, missal, rosary, prostrate priests, Lenten ashes, occasion of grace, your body is a chalice. Hair shirt, stigmata, Little Flower, heresy, wheel of Saint Catherine, virgin and martyr. Station wagon, glee club, finger fuck, prom. Body of Christ. Tea room, finger sandwiches, princess pumps, dry hump, bridge club, secret pals.

I know this exquisite pain: relentless
yearning: ecstasy.

Verboten.

I love her.

We have exchanged rings. Friendship rings, as though the adjective would wash us clean. As though this love were stained. this sweetness tasting of bright blood, fresh and flowing. I want to see it.

Our bodies could not be more different: she is tall and thin, I am short and stout. The first time we embraced I laughed; her jutting hipbones startled me, felt like freshly sharpened pencils.

It is a slumber party, laughter and chatter echoing in the gym of a girls' high school. Our senior trip, a weekend at the Sisters of Loretto mother house in Kentucky. She and I want to be alone, to talk. We need quiet to hold us still. Our sleeping bags are spread on a landing near the biology lab and she cries that her boyfriend is cheating on her. I could break his face for hurting her. For touching her. They have sex and since I never have, the very idea of them naked, locked together, repulses me. Enthralls me. I want to do it so that I too can know the feel of her skin, her dreams.

Downstairs they are eating potato chips and drinking Coca Cola. Some of the girls are dancing to the radio--"Cherish" by The Association. She is getting drowsy, her eyelids

swollen from crying. And I stare at the stillness, the weight moving across the planes of her face as she falls into troubled sleep.

I don't know the boundaries here, what is hers, what is mine. Where we stop and I begin. It is all too tender. She hopes to marry him, wears his senior ring on a chain around her neck. They take me along to football games — the third wheel — but I am not grateful. I am merciless with him, too rough and mocking in his company.

These barbs sting her too and she shuts me out. I want a reminder, something that shows, to treat her with care. And I take the tiny, flat tin of razor blades from my father's shaving kit and close my bedroom door, slip my pillow from its case, lay it flat on the desk and splay the fingers of my left hand wide so that the skin is taut. The bulge of fat and muscle beneath my thumb looks like a miniature chicken drumstick on a white linen tablecloth and the space between the thumb and index finger of my other hand forms an uneven oval, a teardrop, the blade pinched so tight that it quivers. and I slice through the skin — twice: twin gashes, bleeding toward one another. A scar of my own: a reminder.

I love her and she is a lesbian. So: am I?
What to call ourselves when we love.

Lovers? Not yet.

There has been no touch.

It is coming. But first she leads me to the mirror. We are reflected side by side: clothed, then naked. I place her hands on me, mine on her. Then mouths, bodies slick and reaching for what is known, what was forgotten, what is unknown.

They are only small gestures: the pass of a hand, the ripest berry, a whisper, "I want you now." This is our first time out and I don't know how to behave: what is appropriate, what is dangerous. But it is her birthday, her fortieth, and we are celebrating. We will call nothing a mere souvenir. Everything matters.

Sugar-white sand nearly blinding in the August sun over the Gulf of Mexico. So much behind us, so much ahead as we stare at the horizon. Words are sturdy and all we have, so we treasure them like the whelks and sand dollars stowed in our pockets.

Lover. Ally. Partner. Friend.

I have been waiting for this moment all my life: to stand at the shore and know what to keep, what to toss. What to guard, what to release. In my hand, a black plastic cylinder, sealed. Inside, the wide, gold band, the last token of wedlock. I fling it far into the surf and hear her laughter ringing on the wind. See her bend to touch a sea horse as it swims through her toes.

Kimberly Aceves-Denyer

COOKING/
for Christine

Choosing slowly las frutas y
vegetales
to cook for you,
moving my fingers across chiles verdes
wrapping my hands firmly
around ripe tomatoes
feeling for softness,
bringing them to me
smelling the wetness of
opened mangoes
reaching my hands into cool guavas
i watch you through the steam,
of sopa caliente, as it
drips off of cilantro leaves
as it curls around your body
when you pass me en
la cocina,
moving behind
firm breasts rubbing gently
against my back
whispering, hungry
in my ear
while I warm tortillas
to feed you,
with passion I will feed you,
until you can take no more,
I will feed the deepest parts of you.

Mary Damon Peltier

EATING

is my secret lust

my most intimate lascivious ritual

the texture of mushrooms gorged in secret

and sour cream

sweet jesus

sour cream

I dream of eating strawberries drenched in

cream

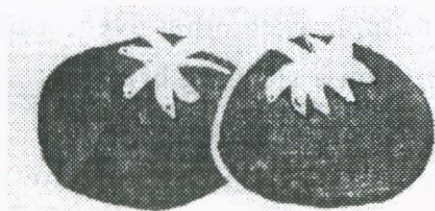
mashing my face in them

my hair all sticky

There are tomatoes slowly eaten in the sun

all liquid and rich flesh

and there is the thick salt sweetness of blood



Abe Louise Young

I WENT DOWN TO THE MUD FLATS

I went down to the mud flats and water
and made wide low and high sounds,
shaking my songs out
spreading them over the water,
climbing the trees with long voice calls.
I chambered the river with sound like a heart,
my deep sound hovered with sigh and I kept it strong,
steady enough to reach into the sky without looking
down.

My high sound shook the leaves on the trees
and the small grass agreed with the longing,
no echo spoke of need, only of nesting
one cheek next to another's, then turning it alone
to the sharp rain.

How do we tender now?
We will not nipple each other even in play,
or sleep softly on a sleeping breast.
We have broken the hope stick
and thrown and dropped our separate pieces
on the rushing water far below the bridge.

We will toe lines in the dirt.
We will find other paths
which do not ache with wanting.
We will vine a new way
into the windows each leaves open.

Already we friend each other with shyness
and offerings of bread. I copper a rock
with rubbing and place it in your palm.
There is a certain sadness we will not show.
It is one that cannot be eased
except by sharing mouths,
being held close as two sheets in hurricane sleep.

Backboning care fierce and deep, you basket this
and other things with beautiful weaving.
Showing the story
with hope, release, and many strands.

Like reeds in water they usher us
to our singular lives.

Rebekah Edwards

AUGUST IS THE MONTH FOR NAKED LADIES

(Amaryllis Belladonna, Belladonna Lily, or
Naked Lady)

They line up in dirt,
along highways and abandoned lots
exposing their particular hot pink
like neon colored plastic banners
waving the way to some campy beauty salon
where ladies in curlers
over cups of cold coffee — brag
slander and mimic, laughing shamelessly.

They belong to drunkenness, to excess, to heat
and so it follows, they belong to her.
In the dark country she cannot see the road
she cases the truck to the edge.
falls out, throws up next to the front tire.
She knows they are near. She crawls to them
led by their smell—thick as humidity.
slow as syrup, strong as sex.

they always leave. Suddenly.
Night after night she comes home late.
She lies alone, fully clothed, on stale sheets.
Her breath twists against the cold air.
She imagines it's summer
that she's running naked down the road
chased by wild pink flamingos
— barking.



Nancy Lake

Terri de la Peña

SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT SWEATY PAGES

“My favorite part of Margins,” said an onyx-eyed mujer one October evening in Albuquerque, “starts on page 267. I know it by heart.”

Though complimented that this Nueva Mexicana thought enough of my work to have memorized it, I was stumped, trying to guess which section of the novel made her ecstatic. My confusion must have been apparent because she faced me with a quizzical expression.

“Come on. You know what I mean.”

“Actually, I don’t,” I admitted with some embarrassment.

“The part where René and Veronica finally make love.” Her dark eyes glistened at the memory.

“Oh.” I laughed a little, flattered and flustered all at once. “That part.”

Yes, that part—Veronica Melendez and René Talamantes in that feminine-scented Santa Barbara motel room, those entangled brown

legs, that “thick black hair, glossy and straight as that of any Azteca. . .tongues enraptured, fingers relentless, bodies reeling.”

When I first wrote those words in the earliest draft of Margins, I never thought they would be published, much less memorized by anyone. As a result, I did not take into account their effect, if any, on actual readers. Even more so, I never suspected that anyone would ever think of me as a writer of erotica. I consider myself a Chicana writer whose work focuses on relationships between women, whether mother-daughter, sister-sister, or lesbian.

By the early 1990s, I had published several stories. One of them, “La Maya,” in Tee Corinne’s collection Intricate Passions, was specifically erotic, and reading it in public with the other contributors proved a challenge. Shy by nature, definitely not a performer, I felt self-conscious, out of character to be reading an erotic story aloud. At one bookstore, I became even more unnerved by a leather-clad man in the front row. He leered at the predominantly lesbian audience and suggestively rubbed his thigh during my reading. To my relief, he left before I finished the story.

That experience made me wary; it caused me to wonder if such sleazy types were buying

lesbian erotica, if the Yucatán setting of “La Maya” exoticized and objectified the Chicana lesbian characters. Because I did not like either possibility, I decided to concentrate on finishing Margins, and gave erotic short fiction low priority.

Most of my stories published during those years were about beginning or ending lesbian relationships, and some had erotic elements. Since I had begun to take my writing more seriously, I remained uncomfortable with the idea of being known for writing some lesbian erotica. Two of my stories, “Tres Mujeres” and “Beyond El Camino Real,” had found their way into supplementary reading lists of local Chicana/o Studies courses. Both dealt with issues of gender, race and class. By then, writing erotica seemed frivolous in comparison.

Yet with the 1992 publication of Margins, I not only found that Chicana and feminist academics across the country began to include the novel in Chicana/o Studies, Women’s Studies, and increasingly in Lesbian and Gay Studies courses, but also learned at book signings that eager readers enjoyed its “sexy parts.” Many, particularly Chicanas and Latinas, even came out after reading Margins. Chicana grad students discovered in its pages the symbolism of

the closet and the grave, while others debated its “hand motif.” I was invited to read with local Chicana and Latina lesbian writers, many of whom imbued their poetry with genuine sensuality. Meanwhile, I continued to have second thoughts about sweaty pages filled with lesbian sex. I felt like an impostor, out of place, out of my element, preferring to focus my work on the issues that affect us most — racism, sexism, homophobia. Erotica remained at the bottom of my list. To escape my growing confusion, I wound up at Cottages at Hedgebrook in 1993 and wrote Latin Satins.

Chapter 7, “Salsa Sex,” is its only erotic chapter. When the novel was published in 1994, I received another invitation to join local Latina lesbian writers at a literary event. The organizer specifically requested that I read Chapter 7. About to protest, I remembered a conflicting engagement and thus declined. I felt tremendous relief; I was off the hook. Without hurting anyone’s feelings, I had managed to avoid explaining my ambivalence.

Obviously, erotic thought and sensations are part of every lesbian’s life. Am I the only one who thinks there is more than enough emphasis on sex in our writings? Am I the only one who is embarrassed by the covers of some

of our books, newspapers and magazines?

There is no question that for some, sex (including erotic poetry and fiction) is a refuge from the harsh realities of our daily lives. For others, it is a means of rebellion from repressed upbringings. That is understandable, of course.

However, writers must be flexible. We must constantly stretch our creative talents into differing forms of expression or risk becoming stagnant. There are so many subjects within our Latina communities which are overlooked, rarely written about: homophobia within families and within religions, estranged siblings, closeted relatives, gay teenagers, AIDS and its accompanying denial.

I hope to see these issues written about more in the future. We owe it to ourselves to strengthen our community ties by emphasizing the strength and outright courage it takes to proclaim ourselves Latina lesbians. There is nothing wrong with sweaty, sexy pages about *mujeres desnudas*, but there is everything right with moving beyond those images to the lingering issues which affect our lives and well-being.

This essay was previously published in Conmoción #2. 1995, pg. 36.



Vivian Lee

Susana Cattaneo

A CRISTINA

Cuando el hielo
 petrifica los párpados
que pretenden abrirse
 y congela los proyectos de vida.
 allí apareces tú,
 amazona erguida frente al sol.
Tomas un trozo de sus rayos.
 Los transformas en vara mágica.
Tocas mi pecho
 y produces la alquimia.
Un líquido tibio
 me recorre
 hasta mi instante más lejano.
Los ojos se abren
 y la sangre revive.

Susana Cattaneo

TO CRISTINA

When ice
petrifies eyelids
that are trying to open
and freezes life plans,
you show up,
amazon standing tall, face to the sun.
You break off a piece of its rays,
transform them into a magic wand.
You touch my breast
and make alchemy.
A warm liquid
runs through me
to my farthest moment.
Eyes open,
blood comes back to life.

translated by Donny Smith

sharon bridgforth

MONTAGE OF A GEECHEEE ON THE RUT

1
you
use
sex
like a sharpened nail/a
tool
good for scratching.

when your itch
is not a problem
you keep me waiting/and
i wonder why
i
love you i suppose

or could it be that
i
just need to be
touched
every now and then.

2

i think they put some-kinda
spell
on me/these wy'mn one
long look in the eye
a gaze

down the hips
lips/one kiss
i'm gone/ hair
flying/curls dusty/don't give a fuck
gonn hunt it down
and get it

a spell spun geecheee
trying to stay warm
in a cold hard world.

3

she entered
flat footed/bare ass
rising
and black
she entered lips
first/large juicy smooth
and brown
she entered hips turning/black cream
quivering

and tight.
melt in the mouth/watering
fine
i could smell her.
she came
she came/she
entered
through the
front door/straight in
got comfortable
in the heart of me
and

like glass hit by a note
i lie waiting
to be swept
away.



Vivian Lee

Megan Boler

I DON'T THINK MY LOVER IS FEMALE

She is half-man, half-woman
an in-between species. She wears her
dagger/takes me
still and long/I am
shards to her
hold/I am/
half to her/a surface.
her figure transforms/becomes full like a
swollen breast/she
has none in this
penetration that grabs me
still-bound,
formed/I
crave it like
water/I am
sucked to her/a leaf pinned in
sudden fast contact whirlpool's rush and a
grate of body pressed upon/ex-
posed to
the other side.

Zantui Rose

IN SEARCH OF A TITLE

In bed, cuddled tightly against her or him I finally could tell her or him I couldn't tell if s/he was a her or him. Confusing — all night as we waltzed our way into the bedroom I kept trying to figure out how I should act. If s/he was a him, I would be demure, coy, a bit on the helpless side. If s/he was a her, I would be butch, tough, dykey. Which way to go? So I straddled the fence trying to figure out my angle. I figured, surely when we slipped between the sheets, I would be able to tell as we pressed our bodies together, blending, swirling into one mass of energy taking up only the center of the bed as if we were one — but beware!

An alarm went off. The hardness I felt between my body and the body of this other being could be a penis, but then again she could be packing. Perhaps it was a dildo. Now I really had no further clue to go on.

Not much breast action, but I had been with other women who had only nipples — just nipples lying flat against the chest. This was not necessarily a clue either.

With the lights out I could not tell a dildo from a penis unless I put my hand there on the

thing. but if it was a dildo and she had played with putting a condom over it, I might not be able to tell easily either without major hand manipulation.

Hi/r name was Terri — not too helpful. We had not spent time in a public place to see which bathroom s/he chose. Still no clue.

The inability to know was driving me to a frenzy. S/he mistook this frenetic energy for heightened sexual expression and was beginning to crawl all over me. I couldn't go any further unless I asked, but what would I do differently if I knew? Would I stop the show midway through because she was he or he was she? I didn't know. I'd never faced this problem before. I felt trapped. No way to get out of this one. I couldn't see a solution. So I did the only thing I could think of. I told a lie. I said I was an MTF, male to female transgenderist. I wanted to see hi/r reaction. Just where did s/he stand on this gender thing.

In answer to my statement s/he told me s/he had spent 19 years as male, 10 years as female, the next 5 years as male again and s/he was about to switch once more. "Go figure," s/he said with a smile.

Susan Buchanan

RACING WILD

The stock car track is out in the country. I guess this is so that the noise of racing cars and backfiring engines won't disturb the neighbors. Seems to me that in the still and quiet country this racket would be noticed even more. When I sleep at my grandparents' farm it is so quiet I can hear the house creaking and shifting like a grumpy uncle, restless in his bed. It is so quiet I have a hard time sleeping.

From the top of a hill just before you get to the track, you can see the whole area. It's nothing more than a big hay field with a deep rusty red oval and rickety falling down seats off to one side. Gritty red dust rises above the track. Cars speed around it, kick up a week's worth of settled clay. From where I sit, in the front seat of our little Volkswagen, I can breathe in the dust. It makes my nose twitch and my eyes sting. It catches in my throat like burnt, dry toast. When I look behind me, Mom has scrunched her face but I think it has more to do with having to sit in the back than the dust whirling through the car. It's too hard for me to get into the back seat but that doesn't mean we'll be getting a new car any time soon.

Not as long as we can keep strapping my wheelchair on the roof rack.

So much has changed since last summer when I came to the races. Last summer when I was twelve, my cousin and I would come together and spend our time kissing each other in the field where the cars park. She'd press her boobs against my still flat chest and we would kiss until our lips hurt. This summer she ignores me. The car accident last fall. The wheelchair I use now. The small bumps on my chest. All that has changed everything. Except for the track. And how my family treats me.

I still come to the races. They even built me a ramp to get up to the bleachers. And I still have to watch out for my baby sister. I bump through the field and check up on her now and then between races. I've already learned how to push balanced on my back wheels through the crowds and between the cars.

Each Saturday night, from Victoria Day in May through to the last Saturday before Thanksgiving in October, men and boys, their wives and girlfriends, flock to this place like hungry crows looking for road kill. Only on

Labor Day weekend are there races day and night.

By July, deep grooves have been carved in the track by car after car grinding through the dirt. It's been a dry summer so far and even though a truck goes around the track between races, dragging the spring frame from an old bed behind it to graze the ridges in the clay, there isn't much to be done to keep the track smooth and free of ruts. Sometimes, the men even spray the track with water to try to keep the dust down. There are huge swirls of dust hanging over it now. I guess it's too much trouble to water it and no one has bothered doing it tonight.

So far, it's been a summer of lots of teasing humidity and thunder clouds but little rain. Except for this Saturday. Earlier rain poured like tears from a cry-baby's face. Fast, furious, and gone before you figured out what the crybaby was wailing about in the first place.

Tonight, it is humid but chilly after the rain. A breeze off a nearby pond carries a cold moistness. Fog brushes the top seats that arc

part way around the stock car track. A dampness seeps through the sleeping bag Mom put around our shoulders. She huddles next to me. Her lily-of-the-valley perfume surrounds me.

I really don't care how uncomfortable I am. Being here makes me feel more *normal*, like I did the last summer when I was here. Like last Labor Day. On Labor Day weekend all the families of the drivers come for a huge hot dog roast and picnic. We can eat as much as we want. There are special fun races and prizes for kids' games. Last year, my cousin Jayne and I won the three-legged race. At night, a big fire was lit and we toasted marshmallows and roasted more hot dogs if we wanted them.

I'm still thinking this night is a dream because I only had to ask Mom once if I could come to the races instead of staying with Jayne and babysitting our little sisters. Ever since last Saturday, when she left me alone to see some boys she knows, I haven't wanted to go back. Most of the time, I think only about the good things, like when she gives me kissing lessons. Kissing Jayne is like eating strawberries. No matter how my stomach aches, I want more sweetness juicing up my mouth. But she doesn't

like to kiss me now. She says I'm not like I used to be.

Once I convinced Mom that my little sister Darcy would be okay sleeping in the car and that I'd see to it by wheeling out to look at her every few minutes, the rest was easy. Mom said I could be here as long as I didn't complain about being cold or having no place to go to the bathroom.

We have one of the best seats in the grandstand. Mom says we're in the best place, just before the finish line and next to the dusty, noisy pit where drivers and mechanics get their cars ready for the next race. I figure it's the best place because she can keep an eye on Dad working on his car and on how much beer he drinks before racing. Otherwise, it's just another seat. With all the dust the cars kick up, you can't see much of each race no matter where you sit.

Thick puffs of blue-grey exhaust fumes sweep past us now and then. It seems that the louder the car and the bigger its poofs of oily smoke, the better. The roar of engines being gunned in neutral as they wait their turn in the pit is louder than the ear-numbing noise of

beat-up wrecks racing by.

Dad and my Uncle Bill are rivals at these races. Usually my uncle comes first and Dad's car limps in at second or third place. I say "limp" because it's worth something just to finish the race. Most cars don't. They are forced off the dirt track by other cars and spin in the grassy center a few times before the drivers get out cursing and kicking their cars' tires.

I think Uncle Bill wins because he starts off with a better car. I know that sounds stupid and obvious but what I mean is that my dad can only afford a junk yard reject and Uncle Bill buys a half decent used car to begin with. Dad thinks he saves money that way but it seems to me he actually wastes it. He's always hunting down a new part or a spare this or that, spending any money he makes racing. He never comes out ahead. And for Uncle Bill, it's no big deal if he wins or not. He doesn't need to make extra money because his own business pays him lots. He flies hunters and fishermen into Maine and northern New Brunswick on big money paying expeditions.

Aunt Evelyn isn't here tonight. She's home with the kids because a few days ago

Jayne ran away from home. They found her but to keep her from running again, someone has to be around to keep an eye on her. I wonder what she does at night. I'm guessing it's still easy to sneak away because no matter what is going on, Aunt Evelyn only makes it through one big pitcher of vodka and orange juice before passing out.

Mom says Aunt Evelyn drinks vodka so no one can smell booze on her breath. I can't see what difference this makes because when someone passes out from too much drinking, it's hard to see he or she hasn't had a drink.

I get the feeling Mom likes that I'm here with her. She has her arm around me and my whole side is warm from her body. She squeezes my hand when cars race by and we laugh and laugh when one comes so close we could reach across the fence and touch its dented doors, if we wanted to.

All the cars have numbers and names, painted in big brush strokes on their roofs, doors and hoods. Uncle Bill's is number sixty-nine and is called Sucker. It's a joke, I guess, but I don't get it. Whenever his car is announced over the crackling loud speakers, all

the men and boys make crude noises and obscene gestures. The women and girlfriends giggle and twitter like sparrows in a barnyard. The announcer says stupid things like, "Good ol' sixty-niner. He does it again! Goes down one last time and still comes up for air! Sixty-niner might be a sucker but he's one mean sonofabitch too!"

Uncle Bill is a mean son of a bitch. Even before a race begins he's cursing at other drivers and as soon as the gun goes off he begins swinging back and forth on the track, forcing one car after another to scrape the fence or reel into the middle. He doesn't always win. When this happens, his face is purple with rage. He punches his fists on the car's roof and shoves anyone who comes near him.

What's weird to me is how everyone treats him like he's a hero. Especially the teenage boys who hang out in the pit. They crowd around him like he's some kind of famous movie star. Mom says that if Uncle Bill pissed in the wind the boys would stand behind him and think that liquid gold was washing over them. She says she's surprised they don't offer to wipe his ass for him after he has a shit in the bushes.

My dad also gets in a bad mood at the races. Until tonight, I didn't know that this is where his moodiness began. Before, he and my uncle fiddled with their cars all afternoon, laughing and joking. Sometimes he would take his car for a test drive around the block and there were even been times when he'd let me do the steering. I always thought Dad's nasty mood came from drinking too much. But tonight, I notice he hardly takes a sip. Instead, after each race he loses, he gets more angry. And there are times, from where I sit, that I can't tell the difference between him and Uncle Bill.

Both have on dirty white T-shirts, a pack of cigarettes rolled into one sleeve. Both wear blue jeans that droop so low below their beer-belly guts that when they lean over the engines of their cars, you can see the cracks of their butts. They look like all of the other men and boys in the pit. Except the boys are mostly slim-hipped and don't have big guts yet.

I've decided not to care about or think about any of this tonight. Instead, I try acting like the women around me and Mom. It's odd how they ignore each other. It reminds me of how some mothers act when they cheer their

sons on at hockey games. The mothers seem to be in a competition that is more important than the game their sons are playing. That's how the women around us are acting. Alone, separated by sometimes a whole row of benches, they sneak glances at each other. One of them catches me looking at her and she winks.

The only time I've seen these women interested in each other is during the Labor Day weekend races. Each year, some of the drivers let their wives or girlfriends use their cars in something called the Powder Puff. It's a special race for women. I think it's funny to see the women mince their way into the pit, wiggle themselves through the open car windows (the doors are welded shut so they don't fly open during a race) and race the old wrecks around the track. They drive so much slower than the men.

Sometimes, I daydream about driving a race car. Not a beat up stock car but instead, one of those slick shiny cars I see on t.v. Like in the Indy 500. I want to race reckless and wild as fast as I can, frightening, daring the others around me to speed too. No woman I know does anything like the things I daydream about. I keep wondering if I'm like them in any

way.

I watch them carefully, their legs jiggling up and down, from being cold or maybe excited or maybe because they need to find a bathroom and, like me, don't want to go into the nearby bushes like the men and boys do. They have makeup on, black eyeliner, turquoise streaks above each eye, frosty pink lipstick. And hair teased into beehives, piled high and kept in place with brightly colored head scarves. They wear pedal pushers or pant suits and sandals on their bare feet. Their fingernails and toenails are polished in colors that match their lipstick. I wonder if they spend as much time getting ready to come here as Mom does.

Each night Mom gets ready to go out, even to a dirty race track, she goes through the same ritual. First, she runs a tub full of steaming hot water and squirts in perfumed oil and bubblebath. Then she sinks into the tub, bubbles up to her face and calls for me to bring her a drink - gingerale with a maraschino cherry bobbing in it. She soaks for at least a half hour. I used to put the toilet seat down and sit with her. Now I sit in my wheelchair and watch. We talk about how we would decorate a house if we ever moved into one. Or she tells me

funny stories about the women she works with.

Then I get to soak in the same tub except that now most of the bubbles are gone. Mom puts me in it now. She says it's a good thing I'm small and not tall and gangly like Jayne. I watch Mom do what she calls "putting on her face." First she smears on pinkish beige liquid that I think looks and smells like the same stuff I put on mosquito bites to keep them from itching. Then she rubs in rouge from a little compact. Then some kind of light tan powder is patted on over everything!

Next, she does her eyes, carefully making the tip of the eyeliner brush a perfect point by sucking on it. The eye shadow from a little tube, then mascara. And at last, lipstick.

I tried this once when Mom was at work. When I finished, I could hardly move my face, my skin begged to be scratched and I looked like a puppet. I decided that both me and Mom look better with only our faces looking back at the world. All that gunk only makes us look like Barbie dolls.

The women around us could be my mother's sisters. Their hair is bleached blond or

dyed deep black or bright red. Some are fat and pudgy, others are like Mom and Aunt Evelyn, thin and lanky. Yet they all look alike. And they look like they came from a different town than the men they are here with.

I'm reluctant to leave the warmth of Mom's hand clutching mine but I do. Darcy is sleeping in the car and I promised I'd check on her often. I rumble down the ramp and with my footplates shove the gate to the pit open. It's between races and this area of the track is teeming with greasy men and pimply-faced boys. I want to make myself invisible so I wheel along the fence in the deep shadows cast by the grandstands. In the far corner, in the darkest shadows, I can hear grunting and a high-pitched giggle.

There is a curving path paved with beer bottle caps. It begins in the center of the pit and ends at the gate leading to the parking field. Each race night, the path is added to, growing wider and longer. The boys gather up discard beer caps and push them into hard-packed clay. The metal caps sparkle and glitter, even in the dimly lighted pit. It makes it easier for me to roll along.

I push a huge creaking gate aside and am now outside the pit in a field of ankle-high grass. This is the makeshift parking lot where pickup trucks, their towing gear dragging behind them like the drooping tails of salvage yard dogs, wait to haul the stock cars back home. Our little volkswagen looks out of place.

Carefully, I peak inside. Darcy is on the back seat, curled on her side, one hand to her face, pouty lips sucking hard on her thumb. The other hand is tangled in the hair of her favorite doll, a very raggedy Raggedy Ann. She has kicked off her blanket and her chubby legs shine white and sweet in the moonlight.

Quietly, I open the passenger's door and transfer in. I still find this hard to do even though my therapist in the rehab center worked and worked with me. It's colder now and I want to tuck the blanket around her.

Sleepy blue eyes open lazily. When Darcy wakes up, she always looks like she is still asleep and dreaming. In the morning, it takes her a long time to wake up. Not like me. I've been used to waking up fast, Leaping to my feet at the slightest noise. It's hard for me to go to sleep at night because I worry that this will be the night I don't wake up when something

horrible happens. And now I worry about how I'd get Darcy and me out of the trailer using my wheelchair.

“Shh...Sweetie. Go back to sleep. I'll stay right here until you do.” It's warm here, in the car. Darcy is one of those little kids who is always hot. It's as though a bright little fire burns inside her. Sometimes, if she wakes in the middle of the night, she crawls in with me. When I wake up the next morning, my back is wet from where she has pasted herself against me and sweated all night.

When Darcy was still a baby, but too big to sleep in her crib in Mom and Dad's room, Mom moved her into my room. Dad nailed boards around the bottom of the bed to keep her from falling out. Whenever she woke up, I would give her a bottle or change her and put her back down for the night. For months, Mom thought Darcy was the world's best baby. She bragged about her to her friends, talking about how Darcy slept through the night. I'm not sure if she even believes me now when I remind her that I woke up time after time to give Darcy her middle-of-the-night bottle. Sometimes, Mom thinks I make up stories just to get attention.

The low drone of crickets mimics the

rumbling drone of stock cars on the other side of the fence. Loons croon in the pond at the edge of the hay field. To me, their call is both lonely and romantic, haunting and soothing. Darcy whimpers in her sleep, pulls her legs up under her, and settles into a deep slumber, her breath exhaled fully, inhaled completely.

I push the little windows in the car open and breathe in the tickling scent of fresh cut hay. It is a dusty, grassy smell. One that reminds me of a cow barn. Soon mosquitos buzz around my ears so I creep from the car, push the windows shut from outside and crawl back in. I want to lift Darcy into my lap and cuddle her heated body. I suppose I should go back to the races before Mom starts to wonder what has become of me.

In the still, still darkness my stomach suddenly cramps and I think I am going to throw up. Leaving Darcy behind, I make my way back to the track. By the time I get to the fence that separates the pit from the grandstand I am clutching my stomach, doubled over in pain.

“Where the hell have you been?” Mom doesn’t look up as I bump against her. “If you’ve been messing with one of those boys

from the pit, don't you think for a minute that you'll be coming back here again! Last thing we need in this family is a kid like Evelyn's brat, Jayne!"

"Mom, please." I hate the begging, pleading tone I have. But I'm really sick. I feel like I'm going to faint and my stomach twists like someone is trying to pull it out through my bellybutton. "Mom I didn't mess with anyone. I was with Darcy. but now I'm sick."

"What do you mean, sick? Probably too much of that pop you guzzled on the way here."

"No, Mom. Really. My stomach hurts. It hurts bad."

Finally she looks right at me. I'm trembling now, but not from the moist night air. This is a shiver that got its start on the inside. And now it's shivered itself right out through my chattering. teeth.

Let's get you away from all this stench and racket. Maybe it's the car fumes that's got you feeling sick?"

I don't think so but it doesn't matter the cause. I'm just happy she's paying attention. Really, I'm not fooling. Never before have I felt this way. Not like when I stay home from school, hot and feverish with the stomach flu. On these days, Mom lets me sleep on the couch and watch t.v. She calls me from the plant during her lunch break to see how I am feeling. When I ask for cream of tomato soup and vanilla ice cream for supper, sh'es nice about it. The times I'm sick, Mom really cares about me.

I hold her hand like I'm a little girl again. My other hand wants to hold my stomach as if by grabbing onto it, I'll keep the pain there, keep it from moving down and folding me at the waist. I have to wheel with one hand though so there isn't much I can do about the pain.

We are at the car now and I feel like I'm going to cry. I'm so confused. My feeling have been mixed up all day, the bumps on my chest hurt more than ever, and now I feel like something wet and hot and thick is gushing from between my legs. The strangest part is that I really can't feel below my waist.

Stupid me. Turns out I started my period.

It's my first one. How would I know? Mom got a wad of paper towels from one of the men in the pit. She folded them up and told me to stuff them into my shorts. She said that tomorrow we would go to the drug store and get me fixed up.

I don't believe her. After she leaves, goes back to watch the rest of the races, I sit in the car with my knees pulled up under my chin. The cramps aren't so bad as long as I don't move. And I think about what she said about getting me all fixed up. I doubt that is possible. All I can think about is how the hot bright blood seeping through the paper towels is like some part of me is leaving me.

I wake up when my head drops against my knees and my jaw is jarred so hard I bite my tongue. To my surprise, the cramps in my stomach are gone and I no longer feel liquid oozing out of me. The only thing left is a dull ache in my low back. I sit there, rubbing it, arching my back. It reminds me of a posture I often see my mother and aunts in.

Sitting there, I feel fresh and bathed, strong and different. I wonder if this is why Mom fussed so much instead of flat out telling

me that becoming a woman is not only mysterious but strange in a wonderful way. Still not all that happy about the hard bumps on my chest and not looking forward to our trip to the drug store, part of me is glad. It's like a flower unfolded somewhere deep inside me. I can feel something delicate and tender fluttering in my gut.

When I look up, the storm clouds are gone and a full and shining moon makes the field glow silver and white. The fresh cut hay glitters like jewelry. Now the air is warm again.

Horns blare and break through the quiet around me. The races are over. I wait. Not for my parents, not for my dad's bad moods or my mom whining at him to stop being in a bad mood. Instead, I wait, listening. And when I listen closely and carefully, I hear my own heart, blood rushing wild and reckless.



Jane Philomen Cleland

Gloria L. Collins

POTTER

You throw this
clay globe on
the wheel.
Your hands are
wet and slick;
I feel the grit
rough on my
skin and hair,
you shape the
surly butt
and stubborn hips,
your breasts lie
against mine,
pliable
like renegade clay.
Rub me down
as you nurture
your pots,
scratch my skin
with earthy nails,
groove me with
your tongue—
with cupped hands
you hold my face,
you hold the
earth.

Aspen

FAY

Fay

black hair and black eyes
wants an orgasm
to taunt her husband with
lies back softly in my arms —
is reluctant to let me see her
without make-up, her soft
eyelids so beautiful without it
not ugly, as she thinks.
I hold her while she sleeps.

Fay

arrived with an overnight case
with her vibrator and
black suspenders, she's
not used to wearing wellies
to go into the sea,
hugs and kisses
talking the tension away
a soft cuddle in bed
wanting me to do it all.

Fay

comes when her life
gets too much to bear
says she is not strong
or independent like me

she couldn't bear to be alone
couldn't live in a damp flat
cannot take her children
away from their father
she's sure she can persuade him
to let her be a lesbian
on the side.

Fay

left when I was out.
She made my bed and
dusted my shelves.
I gave her love but she wanted
a way out I didn't have to give her,
I shared myself
but she said it wasn't safe
the punishments too heavy
she'd had enough — electro convulsive
therapy,
years of psychiatric drugs, trying
to make her a "woman"

Fay

has moved away with her husband
she told someone
she would write to me.

Laurel Nathanson

EQUILIBRIUM

My body developed early
to make up for my mind.
I had armpit hair
before I knew how to write.
I got my period
before I knew what punctuation did
and while I was being turned on sexually
simple arithmetic was getting the best of me.
I'm ovulating as we speak
same time everyday this week.
My body runs like a finely oiled machine
and if it ain't broke —
well, get your hands off me.
I wonder what the girls on my nudie pen are
doing now?
Let's see, I think it's liquid
that makes their bathing suits fall down
but I can't figure out how
or why my disposition
is getting increasingly more moody.
Each period is getting worse.
Today a migraine
tomorrow my back hurts.
I could never be a nudie model
I have too many bodily functions
I wouldn't want you to see.

Deep and heavy
are in this case, two different things.
I close my thesaurus
and open my dictionary
because spelling has never come naturally to
me.

Lucky for me I'm a natural beauty.
Peel me out of these crotch cutting jeans
overalls give me more room to breathe.
Overall, I'm quite pleased
with the progress my mind has made
in catching up to my physique.

Double D brain capacity
is what I hope to achieve.

Purple and pushed up
thinking of you
with love,
love me.

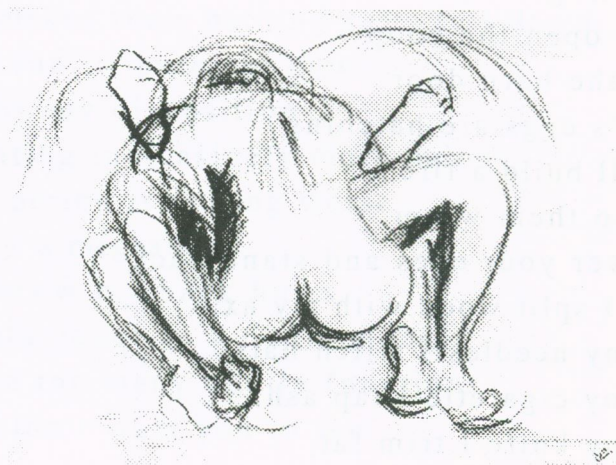
My handwriting looks like chickens have been
scratching.

If you open the coop
close the barn door.

Mama's eggs are hatching
and I'll build a fire
to keep them warm.

So cover your eyes and stand back
while I split wood with my ax,
with my needles I stitch hats,
with my cigarette I tap ash,
with my knife I trim fat,

with my sickle I cut grass,
but with my mind
I protect my ass.
What a laugh.
I accept the fact
that life is about highs and lows
ups and downs
this and that,
but I plan on never being punched in the face,
or punctured in any way.
Let's go for a roll in the hay.
I always did excell at show and tell.
So liesten attentively to what I say
my mind's a religion
let me show you the way.
My body's a science
highly evolved wouldn't you say?
Class dismissed
have a nice day.



Susan Liroff

Abe Louise Young

BAYOU WIFE

I dropped a chunk of watermelon
and it exploded like a soft heart in the sink.
The inside of that melon looks like something
just killed, like those bass you been bringing
home or the crow the old cat left
torn against the door last week as a present
before crawling under the house to die. You spit
a juicy mass of tobacco against the fire-
place bricks. I can hear it oozing poison
out onto the floor. I scrub that floor
into circles, going round and round with a stiff brush,
wax seeping into the boards
the way warmth goes through somebody's skin
when they are touched for the first time
and can't wait to soak up more.
That kind of sweetness don't live here no more.
Even when my back is to you I can feel you dying.
Everywhere I look something's staring back at me
saying, death claiming territory,
this whole damn house is rotting out
and filled with bad breath.
Even here your black eyes are looking up at me,
small, tear-shaped holes in the sink.
Like somebody took a jackknife and carved
stars into seeds, and this whole white sky bleeds
from the hurt of it.

Clara Nipper

FRANKENSTEIN'S DIARY

In the beginning, there was nothing. There was. From the verb to be and can't BE. How can nothing be? Nothing is nothing. Or perhaps nothing isn't. The tense void of lack — precursor to creation. There was no breath and no room for breath. Smashed flat. Nothing to smash. Nothing even to be smashed. The very core of anti-matter itself pushed God into being. With her birth, God gradually became conscious of herself. God is an eternal circle of flame and ash, sleeping and waking. As God slowly awakens, she creates more yet mercifully destroys to cleanse and make room Round and round: blaze, coal, blaze, coal, birth, death, nothing wasted, economy in blessing, sacrifice, give away, divine understanding, omnipotent wisdom, energy equals work, everything in the universe either potential or kinetic depending upon the development of God.

On the sixth day, She created me. Out of grief, desire and madness, I was born to her. From old spare parts and various dead things God fashioned her lover and that was me. If only I had known...would I have chosen? Yes. Because it was in my cells to do so. I was once a star then an alligator then a bat then generations of humans, all meeting God each time, becoming wiser to my destiny and being chosen every time I was born. I was God once long ago. God's lover and God are the

same. I'm not doing it again, though. I mean for this to be my last Earthen incarnation. I won't escape being chosen, but humanity is too hard.

God gave me the eyes of an Egyptian cat, the cheekbones of cut glass, the breasts of Mary, the neck of a lily, the body of summer lightning, the limbs of a python, the mind of a philosopher, the strength of a gladiator, the hair of the sun, the skin of a cherub, the taste of fruit, the heart of a baby. She ingeniously hard-wired all of it to my cunt. And where did she get that? My never-ending hunger, my irresistible appetite and limitless passion came with it, radiating off me like sweat. My cunt had a language all her own and God taught it to me. Soundlessness, sound, vibration, rhythm, harmony, power. Everything makes sense in a flash-point. All of it converged to a single answer. In one second, all is claimed — the mountains, the plains, the heavens, the tears, the graveyards, the oceans, the hell, the love.

When my collarbones reach for the sky and my eyes open wide like a vampire's at sunset and I gasp, teetering between mortality and immortality, I get visions. Answers. Creation and destruction explain themselves to me. Life and death are poems. But in languages so ancient that they cannot be brought back here where the ground is flat. I must go there to visit them. Their plane of existence just out of my reach. I understand their music when I am there...all is peace and oneness and relief even as I grip God with my con-

stricter arms and legs and thrash and scream. Forces come through me that I'm sure will tear me apart getting out, but I don't care. God is fucking me and I am forever. The love and reunion that happens is so intense and mild that it dissolves me. Where am I who am I what time is it which mouth is that which end to eat first devouring being devoured yet by devouring creating something else. Potential into kinetic into more potential. The glow and heat of my baby's heart is like an inferno boiling my blood, making a lantern of my ribs.

At first, God never left me.

Then, she did.

Have faith; I'll always come back; believe me.

I shook my head, tears cutting ridges in my face as they fell.

Come here, God said, opening her arms. She laid me on my back and unbuttoned the shirt she gave me. I arched as I tried to hook her skin with mine and she pressed me down again.

Ssshhh, my darling baby, sshhh, slow, relax. God took an hour to kiss my face. She murmured spells. With each kiss, she healed wounds and created more.

A landscape full of land mines. No solid ground anywhere. If only God would lead me, show me where to walk, I would never get hurt. Explosions without warning could blast me into nonexistence. Outside of God's gaze, I did not exist anyway. Without God's hands on me, I had no body.

God inched her mouth down my neck. Shivers. I closed my eyes and sighed raggedly. For while I was in ecstasy with God, I was safe. Nothingness would not sneak in and obliterate me. God gave me Somethingness and Someoneness. God's presence kept the agony of God's absence away.

God hovered her mouth just above mine. I tried to catch it, my lips swelling with effort. She grinned and teased me, staying close, us exchanging breath. Breath heal me, bring life to my deadness. Make me holy. How can I tell I'm coming alive? Because there is more and more pain.

God fastened her lips onto mine and I was whole. Hearts raced to catch up, knocking against each other's breasts.

Whenever I opened my eyes, I saw my own. We went at each other from every angle.

God moved to my breasts. She always knew my every desire even before I knew it. She cupped one breast gently. I watched her without blinking. God kissed everywhere, avoiding the center. She licked all over in big strokes, making my nipples flush dark pink

and clench into tiny, tight fists. Finally, she sucked them. She blew on them. Hard soft under over, licking sucking kissing whispering. I gripped her head, pulled her hair. My head twisted from side to side. I moaned, needing needing, needing her.

Oh, God, oh, God, oh God, oh, God! I love you, I love you! I cried as thunder rumbled from my clitoris up my spine. I contracted and undulated, God meeting me everywhere. Drink my blood. Shove yourself inside of me and become one with my bones. Hold me down or I will destroy this bed. Oh, God, oh, God, oh, God, I love you, I love you. I am yours.

Yes, yes you are, I made you.

Yes, you did.

I was made for you and I made you for me.

Repeat.

You were made for me and you made me for you.

You are mine. All mine. Only mine. Forever.

I am yours. All yours. Only yours. Forever.

God kissed and licked her way down my belly. Nothing mattered but this. How bereft are all those who don't have this! How can they live? God cooed to me how my flesh shone and rippled under her touch.

I know your body better than you know it.

Yes, you do.

I made it. You are mine.

And you are mine.

Completely! Totally! God tickled my thighs. Open up, precious. My heels traced a semicircle as I obeyed. God whined and groaned. Just look at you! So beautiful. You're breathtaking, and all mine. I curled my pelvis up to her in reply. She traced her fingers slowly over my outer lips. I writhed, feeling my lava core bubbling. So beautiful, God kept repeating. I felt God's tears drop onto my skin and make me sacred. I placed my foot behind her head to make her bend. She resisted, biting and sucking my foot as she replaced it on the bed. Her fingers spread me apart so delicately...so deliberately. I wasn't enough to feel this fully. There was too much greatness to respond to with only one cunt, so I stayed still, a bloom laid open, a pomegranate halved, a mango sliced.

My love is a sachet of myrrh lying between my breasts. Just take me, all of me, slather yourself in my primordial slime. Gum your eyes shut, clog your nose, spike your hair, encrust your chest, back, arms and hands, slick your throat with the essence of my love for you, though you will never consume it all. I love you all day and night every day and night, so you can never drink me dry. It is all for you, it is all about you, it is my humble offering to you. When you swallow me you will speak with my voice in my world. Because your tongue prints are on me, I speak your scripture. Your fingerprints so deep inside me like prehistoric pictographs work on me like a mystical flesh incantation that my mind cannot and need not comprehend.

My love is a cluster of henna flowers among the vines of En-Gedi. How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are! Your eyes are doves! How beautiful you are my love, And how you delight me! Our bed is greensward.

The more you take in of me, the more mine you become. The more of you I take in, the more yours I become. God slid her fingers into my endless slickness. She smothered a gasp. All for me, all mine, ohhh. Yes, yes, yes, yes. I dabbled my fingers in myself and smeared possessive paint onto the face of God. God caught my fingers in her mouth and sucked them as if she were starving. Must have all of you. I must have every drop. I yanked her head down to me. You are mine, I hissed. She nodded meekly. I want to scald you with my urine. I want to irrevocably mark you. You already have. God tore her hair from my grasp and gripped my thighs.

Feed me with raisin cakes, restore me with apples

For I am sick with love.

How beautiful you are, my beloved, how beautiful you are.

Your eyes are doves, you are wholly beautiful,
my beloved, and without a blemish.

Feel that? God slipped inside my cunt passionately. My cunt gripped her like a rabid animal. My throat pulsed. My face blended in a nonfocus. Yes, yes, I feel it. More, more, more, more, more, more, more. You are

made for me and only me. You are perfect. I worship you. I can never be without you. To be without you is death. As much as you need me, I need you more. As much as you love me, I love you more. See see see? God began stroking my cunt. I know how to love you because we're the same and can never be apart. Feel this? God ran the ball of her thumb over my clit engorged and smoking. Just like a raspberry. You are mine because I do this. You will always be mine.

My answer was to make inarticulate begging noises, moans soft as down. My legs dropped away and my cunt said everything in one liquid scream. Oh God, only you, ever you, always. Can't you see? I'm alive for no one else. You created me. You're all I see. All I want. All I think of. Only you forever. Since the dawn of time and until its end.

You ravish my heart, my sister, my promised bride.
You ravish my heart with a single one of your glances,
With a single link of your necklace.
What spells lie in your love, my sister, my promised bride!
How delicious is your love, more delicious than wine!

Oh, God, oh, God, all that I am, I give to you. I will use every currency I possess to buy you for one more day. In the warmth of your embrace I know joy. Take me, tattoo me, mold me into the shape I am meant to be. Anything from you is delicious. I want everything. All that you are, I love. Everything you have I need. All that I have to offer in exalted sacrifice just to

have you now in this moment of eternity that is infinitely rewritten in the secret heart of heaven. My mouth cannot say all you are. My limited human mind cannot absorb or explain it. My fallible human flesh cannot express the neverending cosmos of love, utter devotion, and conflagration of desire you have born into me.

God lowered herself over my steaming cunt. She growled. She began biting my thighs and licking residue from them. I shook and trembled, my cunt rising in tortured pleas. All the same knowing this is how we both got our best pleasure. God bit her way down to the backs of my knees, causing me to twist and yelp. Stop, don't stop, stop, don't stop, don't ever ever stop. Our passions rose and fell in identical pace and rhythm. God licked her way to my weeping cunt again with big sloppy kisses. Make an irreparable mess of me. Make every hair stand on end. Purify the pain that is as old as existence. As old as you. As ancient as my awareness and love for you. Hold me, caress me, rock me to gentle sleep as you settle into my body that is yours.

God nibbled my throbbing inner lips up and down, up and down, up and down. Her sounds were a symphony of constant smiles. I made sounds in reply that I didn't even know. I draped my legs over her shoulders, my heels pressed into her back for reassurance. God's tongue traced every fold and cleft. Every move and touch of hers was so full of consuming love, I was nearly overwhelmed as my body that was hers

absorbed it. In each second she both unmade and recreated me. In my image, in yours? Thought yours was in mine. Yes it is. Lie back now. Let me love you. Let me worship and care for you.

How fragrant your perfumes more fragrant than all spices! Your lips, my promised bride, distill wild honey. Honey and milk are under your tongue: and the scent of your garments is like the scent of Lebanon.

She is a garden enclosed, my sister, my promised bride; A garden enclosed, a sealed fountain.

Your shoots form an orchard of pomegranate trees, Bearing most exquisite fruit: nard and saffron, Calamus and cinnamon, with all the incense-bearing trees; Myrrh and aloes, with the subtlest odours. Fountain of the garden, well of living water, Streams flowing down from Lebanon!

By letting me into you, you love me more than I can ever reciprocate, God told me. I pulled her closer. I cannot be wide enough or deep enough or open enough to expose all of myself that I want you to possess. Fill me entirely. Make me your puppet. All of my holes and appendages in service to your divinity.

God lowered her mouth over my clit in a searing brand. She patted me down. She sucked on me as if I were her thumb, her mother's nipple, her manna. I curled around her in submission. She varied speeds and

tension and pressure. I surrendered to her. I was jelly entire. I saw worlds coming at me. I felt my being expand into the size of galaxies. Voices all made sense. Mathematics was beautiful. I could not separate us. Who was who? It didn't matter. Her me us we meaningless pronouns. This moment. All everything infinite love of astounding abundance. As it is supposed to be. As we hear told of it. This is it. Waves and waves. Vibrations, movements cries that I do that are foreign and involuntary. Dizzy, dizzy, oh, God, oh, God, what are you doing? What is happening to me? I love you, I love you, I love you. My life to honor all of you, all you are, all you give me, it would take the length and breadth and height and width of my life to begin to do it. Oh, God, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, God, oh, oh, God, I love you, I love you. I love you, I worship you always and forever, you are mine, I am yours. I make sledgehammer fists that crush planets, destroy continents, beat helplessly against tender pillows. I am electrified. Every muscle is gripped. The explosion begins and I start screaming and God holds and stabilizes me. She meets me thrust for thrust and her face is unbearably beautiful. She is in ecstasy and in love and it is pouring off her onto me off of me into her and mixing into a drunken flesh brew. Every part of me is thrashing and shrieking. We are fused. Life and death, God and mortal, creation and destruction, love and grief, twins, souls identical, eternity and transience, forever and never. We are one, we are one, we are one, we are forever. We have known

each other since the first second of time, oh, God, oh, God, oh, God. My lungs scrape air inside me, I am overloaded. Tears and come: the same. Tears and love, tears and grief, love and healing. Dizzy, dizzy, mouth on me never stopping, no never stop, I can never live without this I can't go on without you, tell me everything through my clit. Her mouth on me sucking, licking, drinking, worshipping; I arch and arch, arch over the curve of the Earth, arch over the miniscule holiness of a charmed quark. Every level God is there on me in me, as me, to me. Me. Mine. Madness, desire, nothing, nothing, nothing matters after this. God slides her fingers into my mossy velvet cunt. I feel my head will come off. I'm certain I will lose consciousness. Die.

There, there, yes, that's it, that's it baby. That's it. I love you; I adore you; I worship you; you are so beautiful; that's it, sweetheart, I'm here; I'm yours, all yours.



Abe Louise Young

SAMARA

I want you to show me the way,
she said, to touch this place.

It was dark and we were making a house,
a small one with wind in the trees.

Two blankets, a stove, and a birdcage
left open, her hand where my heart

might be. Do you know how to tell what a heart
is? she asked. *No. But there's a way
you reach carefully into the birdcage -
I've seen you quiet your face as you place
down your fingers. They are worms to bite, or trees
to alight on. You wait there in the wire house*

*and hope she'll make your palm her house
for just a moment - you hold her like a heart.*

We were quiet after I spoke.

There was some grief in the trees.

Could it still be so simple, this way
to reach inside a secret place?

The wind made the seeds in the birdcage

rain down onto the floor, and the birdcage
swung back and forth like an empty house.

She pressed my chest, the waiting place.

*But isn't there more than one heart
in a body? I asked. Remember the way
the flocks of purple martins land on the trees-*

there will be hundreds beating in two trees.

And when they fly away? she said.

*Each branch, each open cage
has learned some singing. Touch me the way
that birds leave trees, then. The house
shook its roof and swayed in the dark. The heart
doesn't always know how to find its place.*

She turned and touched me softly, the way
a wing would lay between my legs. *We are a house,*
I said, *I'm your open birdcage.*



Karen Burns

Carla S. Schick

WHEN THERE IS TOO MUCH TO SEE:
THE WAY THE EDGES BLUR.

I.

you say

“the world is too distinct
with these new glasses”

you liked

the way the edges blurred

before now

there is too much to remember

you don't want to see

so much

and i hear

“like an impressionist painting”

soft

as

II.

it's the may hues

rising up from sleep

through your body

I want

where desire so distinct

means

sex between women is still
illegal

where our bedrooms
are being ravaged
by unholy wars

and still i want
that power of touch
beneath my fingers you slip
as i catch your breath
with my tongue.

III.

you read newspapers
sharpening each detail —
nothing left to impressions

your eyes adjust to the words

you read
as though reading
could stop the terror
from spreading
over your fingertips
into your laugh lines

i understand

you live in your father's

nightmare fleeing
Vienna splinters
of glass
on a never taken photograph
a memory pieced together

you are the one who

must know everything
before it has happened

and then not see:

there is nothing
you haven't seen earlier.

your eyes adapt bent in the curvature
of tinted glass
you catch your own reflection

together we might chosen
loving

i find you
lost standing inside
your father's fearful
disapproval making sure
we will have to wait forever

to him
we choose
suffering and persecution

so we become unforgivable
cast off as women

until you can no longer touch
your hand to mine
line against line
years fade

and i want to restore

you

are
soft as

the many hues
rising up through
sleep

where desire between women means
there is still hope
of defying
definitions.

Pam Mitchell

NIGHTTERROR

Will it continue to be experienced as nameless horror, an unbridgeable breach between me and the rest of the world, as cleavage, a log split by a well-placed blow of an ax never to be glued back together? Would it be pointless pretense to claim that the ax's blow didn't irreparably destroy everything?

Sex is nothing but a night terror anyhow, something to be survived. The suspense each time: will I shut down and forget not only who I'm with but who I am, and why? Or will I start to shake and scream, needing to be reeled in slowly like a kite getting smashed around and going every which-way, its sticks imploding on themselves, its fabric fraying? In books and song and late-night confidences I hear of something called pleasure, something called satisfaction, something called connection, and of course I want it. I am an animal, and it is something animals want. It is something that flows like water downstream, it's that natural: Simply trust in gravity, they say. But they are wrong. The family of zombie child-rapists I had to raise myself with did not believe in natural

law. No, they were above the law, and gravity need not apply. And pleasure and orgasms do not follow from sexual excitement, any more than sexual excitement need flow from tenderness or beauty — just as likely it is the smell of gunpowder or the muffled sound of a scream for mercy that made the tits go hard, the clit stand up and call itself to attention. One doesn't know, really: is this what desire will always feel like, this urge is to crawl out of the skin, burrow deep into the earth with only the eyes left above-ground to witness, ever-vigilant? One doesn't know yet whether something else is possible. One doesn't yet know.

RoiAnn Phillips

NO, MY LOVE

No, your sharp blue
eyes, the gray nugget
in the centers of each
blazing like coals
burnt down to nearly embers
but ready,
waiting for . . . kerosene.
Waiting for oxygen, waiting to breathe,
unwilling to break first the staredown
as you do with cats, with animals,
crinkling to defeat,
that half-a-head shorter you become
when you look away first,

no, that determination, gleaming,
challenging
—those do not give you away.

No, that statuesque stance,
your navel ring, that steel ball like
granite
holding you in place,
your fresh eyebrow piercing, short hair,
fierce lips pressed together, so thin
one can barely see the line
which divides them—
these do not give you away.

Your searing wit, the icy tone,
that single flick of an eyebrow
up
to accentuate a point
you have made
and made again
until we can no longer question
your meaning, or the validity
of what we've already
forgotten you've said anyway
but what we know we believe,

what we will recall
from the broken-down memories,
out-of-order in our old age,
rocking, biting back tears
because we don't remember why

we believe it — no, these do not
give you away.

That one single moment, though,
in the starlit dark, where I see
your cheek, that moment before
you shield your face, before
you turn your head, in forced smiling,
to the train window
as we pass, pass, pass
the home
you grew up in,
this one tear only . . .
gives you away,
burns clean to my heart.

Margo Mercedes Rivera-Weiss

WE IMAGINE OURSELVES ALIVE

Our twenty fingers
wizened matches
trailing sparks
each swipe of succulent flesh

Our tree trunk thighs rub together
smoulder hot fragrance
birth the blazing wild
pomegranate persimmon papaya
tongues
tickle licking our sweating faces

My arms
light brown sugar
carmelize soft
frame your
lips crooning love
tayere gelibte
mein libenke
zees kepele
your mouth melts
just enough to echo
your oven-burnt relatives

We indulge this fuel of desire
wildfire flashing between us
no longer ours to rein

The live red-hot thrill of it
whetting our appetites
exhilarating our flushed breasts
our sweat-slick singed bodies
kindled *kinderlech*
fiery immigrant progeny
returning to play with
the same fatal element

Fusing together forever
our molten lust
melding the diamonds of our minds
wedding our ashes
in eternal memory

Approximations of Yiddish to English

tayere gelibte - precious beloved

mein libenke - my love

zees kepele - sweet head

kinderlech - children

Amy Sonnie

DRIVING IN JERSEY

We rode
along the Jersey
backstreets, behind
the nodding heads
of friends, beneath
the heavy vibrations
of the radio.
Tempting glances,
shock, disgust,
we slipped our hands deep into each other.

My hand in your lap,
fingers begin playing
tunes like a harp
that run through you. Your
hand dancing swift, short
beats across my belly,
you reach down for me.

Lifting my self to you,
I sink my hand deeper

into the tight envelope
between your skin and
clothes, feel you
growing in my palm,
a trumpet bulb
turning its head
toward the moon.
The rearview mirror
stares hard
and angled back at me,
disapproving with its
knowing gaze. I see
you reflected, and you me,
we do not stop, do
not speak, let
short breaths rise
from our long bitten lips,
like the hum of a flute.

Elizabeth Ruth

LESBIAN BED DEATH

Leslie asked me to store a few possessions while she and Diane travel. Some of those things, like the nine inch TV, were mine when we lived together. So Denise isn't talkin to me, she says it's not right considerin we're lovers now. But it's only gonna be for two months — three tops Besides, I loved Leslie once too. I owe her.

“It's queensized!” I forgot about the bed
“Barely been used.” Leslie poked Diane, said
“feel free to enjoy.” Diane gave her a wink.
Then I remembered fuckin' Leslie...She knew
how to take ya under, make ya know where ya
belong. Leslie said “every woman wants to be
taken.” Course back then I didn't know much,
just wondered where?

Yesterday I replaced Denise's and my roadkill
futon with Leslie's SOMNADELUX. Denise chain-
smoked and ignored me. She's tense lately; we
haven't fucked in forever, not since movin' in.

At night we were lyin' together, our legs
tangled like mornin' sheets. I was circlin' her

breasts with my hair, hopin' to make up. She said it tickled and rolled over. Then, all of a sudden - I swear it happened this way - I felt like I fell down an elevator shaft and forgot my stomach at the top. I could've died happy. My nipples got real stiff and I looked at Denise to check her expression. She felt it too. I could tell because she did what she almost never does. She dove between my thick thighs, her tongue spinnin' me like wool on a wheel. She didn't even come up for air, just kept right on I don't know how long it took. maybe five minutes, maybe thirty - I wasn't askin' questions

A couple a days later - it was Sunday 'cause Denise goes to the gym and I sleep in. I was at that deep core of the pillow place where ya trip off a curb when I heard a voice clear as my own. She was breathin' fast and I could taste her wetness on my lips. I felt her whisper "you're mine" and it made the hair on the back of my neck stand on end. She came hard with me cryin' out, "take me!" It felt real all day long.

I was gonna tell Denise but she told me somethin' first.

"Sweetie?" she butted her cigarette and climbed in bed.

“Hmmm”

“I had the strangest dream last night. You’re going to think I’m losing my mind. Promise you won’t tease?”

“Sure,” I nodded, but I have a hard time not teasin’ Denise. Her cunt gets so desperate and spreads wide for me - at least it used to.

“I was sitting at the edge of the bed” she continued, “pulling up my stockings. When I reached around for my blouse I saw them”

“Who?!” I said, suddenly afraid for her.

“It’s o.k.,” she smiled. Then told me how she saw these two girls goin’ at it. Denise calls it “making love” but I’m the one tellin’ it now, so, she saw them - one fistin’ the other. They were both talkin’, words flyin’ from their mouths as fast and furious as the sweat off their bodies.

“One was begging” Denise blushed Saying, “Yes! Give it to me, harder - please don’t stop! The other was calling her names.” Denise was real quiet.

“What kind of names?” I asked.

“You know - nasty stuff.”

“Come on baby?” I couldn’t help it. Let me hear ya say it.”

“Slut” she whispered.

“What?”

“Slut!” Oooh - I was damp.

“So then what?” By now I was touchin’ myself under the covers.

“The one on the bottom moaned, the other nearly lifted her off the bed with one arm.”

“What do ya think?” I stammered, reachin’ for her pussy. Denise was startin’ to answer in that detailed, drawn-out schooled way of hers, but I just kept on playin’ with her clit, circlin’ her lips with my fingers and soon she wasn’t completin’ her sentences. “You’ve really got me goin’” I groaned, but Denise insisted it seemed real. “Anybody ever called you names?” I sucked her breast, tuggin’ the nipple into my warm mouth. “Anybody call you a little slut?” Denise tensed.

“No” she said real sharp - like it was an insult. “Nobody ever told you what a dirty girl ya’re? So nasty for swellin’ up like this, for gettin’ fat between my fingers?”

“No” she said again - this time not so sure. She wanted somethin’ else.

“Go lower sweetie” she said like she used to; after her cunt juices flowed, after her legs were shakin’, she’d say, “go lower” and bam! — the end. This time I didn’t listen.

“No. You’ve been bad.” For a second Denise looked like she might get mad, maybe even hit me but my hand never left her and I plunged

two fingers inside right then so she moaned. I slipped down, my mouth suckin' and rattlin' her sex. I rubbed my stiff clit along the edge of the mattress, humpin' and comin' - must've been three times. All the while Denise was beggin' for more 'cause I had four fingers in and my thumb was flickin' her clit. I was still callin' her a "nasty little slut" and you know what? She loved every vile word. I could tell 'cause her body was impalin' my arm and her head was flyin from side to side.

"Yes" she screamed. "Give it to me harder *Please Don't stop!*" I tucked my thumb inside and Denise swallowed me whole. I knew I had her. I spilled a hot stream onto her thigh cause by then I was squirley from watchin' her beg, straddlin' her leg, from claimin' her as my own. I was thinkin' about keepin' the bed - we were alive in it, how I never wanted to lose this feelin' again and how Leslie was right way back: Possession is nine tenths of the law.

WE ALWAYS WERE

souls communing
walking through
our inner gardens
tasting blossoms
fruits
blooming in our tropics
touching forests
evergreen
rising from our heat
raining berries petals magic leaves
finding pollen left
on luscious lips
of sistahs loving sistahs



Gail M. Koplow

POTATOES

Red potatoes in snow last night.

Spilled potatoes. Only an Irish poet
asks for paper grocery bags in New England
blizzards.

Plastic's too much like my job. Pragmatic.
Mature.

How is Lauderdale? How's your mother?
We're desperados here in Boston.
Flat roofs humping and caving like
sad sex, bad sunsets like an arsonist's dream.

I call my clients from strip mall pay phones.
Raincoat soaked. gonna be late, sorry.
last night, wearing my Wellies, I sprinkled
Halite where I'd step: Gretel wound backwards.

tomorrow I'll boil a dirty foam
with those potatoes, rinse them in our
yellow colander, cram them in my mouth
Plain. No butter. No nothing.

My old neighborhood buds used to say
PA-DAY-DUZ. That's how Irish that
neighborhood was: PA-DAY-DUZ.
All in the lips. That bony palate I was born
with.

Years later, you and I meet. Suddenly
my blooming life goes European.
Salmon mousse with bare fingers.
Coleslaw: no mayo. Just heavy cream and car-
away.

We lingered. Drank cup after cup of
Ethiopian Yergacheffe. The other night
I found some poems that I wrote about you
then.

God: i used to spell it out.

Today, I'm cryptic.

Padayduz in snow, that's me, kid.

Careless as dirt sometimes, impractical.

So grateful to whoever invented these bodies.

Minal Hajratwala

HONEY DATE

So confident,

I had even bought breakfast: baguette,
havarti, organic apples & oranges,
tangerine juice squeezed fresh,
honey dates lighter than medjool

all to share in that first golden hour
when the sun gilds my walls
alchemical as love
hour of no regrets

Ah, the best-laid plans ...

This morning December birds
flit gray reflections in the glass table

I scatter bread crumbs & eat
the disappointed salami

Karen J. Hall

YOUR SIMPLE REMINDER

It has been too long
since your tongue parted my lips,
but tonight I want to be
the very essence of vanilla—
no ties, no leather, no teeth.

I want to hear your tongue
in my right ear,
feel your “I love you”
push me into the mattress.
I want to hold you so tightly
in our missionary pose
that I could open my eyes
and find you beneath me
as if your body had passed
wholly through mine.

Tomorrow I will remember
there is love enough inside me
whether you are here or not.
Tonight I want the weight
of your body’s fierce insistence
that I am loved for all that I am

Anne Seale

A PRIVATE FACILITY?

Here at Sunset Manor,
Mrs. Lemley, my roommate
leaves our room only
to eat dinner daily
with her friend Mr. Gill
from North Wing.

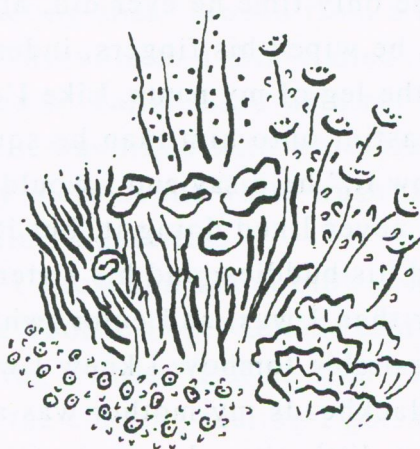
Often at mealtimes
I feign a bad stomach,
close the door firmly,
pull the sheet neck-high
and call to my memory
the sweet-tangy taste
of Elizabeth.

Hand working madly,
I try to be finished
before Mrs. Lemley
is done with dessert.

Both that and the danger
that someone who works here
may come with fresh water
or a new pile of diapers

make it easy to fail.

Junie, who housekeeps
Sundays through Thursdays
and seems more like people
than the rest,
tells me the reason
that locks are forbidden
is for my own rescue
in case of a fire
I say, let me burn.



Karen Burns

Leaf Seligman

for Dorothy Allison

TALLAHASSEE RESCUE

Till I was eleven, I thought I might turn into a boy. After I managed to kiss my elbow and nothing happened, I knew I was pretty much stuck. Girls were stupid-giggly, prissy, pretty, or at least cute. People always tell girls they're cute. Which is not what anyone told me. I worried giving boys blow jobs would make me a whore, but it would also prove I was actually female, even if I never felt like it.

I had just finished giving Dennis King his third one of the week when I insisted he walk with me up to Taco Bell. He never wanted to touch me. Hell, the only time he ever did, after too much Ripple, he wiped his fingers, index and middle, across the leg of my pants. Like I'd leaked something nastier onto him than he squirted into me. "Swallow it," he'd say and I would.

I never liked doing it, but it kept me around him and his buddies, and his sister Vickie, who was tougher than I was, and cuter, which made her a more desirable tomboy. I knew I was ugly —big nose, blackheads my mother was always nagging me about, little tits, glasses, boring hair. Dark brown hair. The kind that hung like wet towels, not silky

like the girl who sat in front of me in French, or wavy like the Italian girl whose father was lieutenant governor. Just thick straight lackluster hair. So I didn't bother to wash it. I went two weeks once. After three days it looked greasy enough to fry chicken in, but at a week, it seemed to lose the oily sheen. I liked how it itched, scratching a strip of grit and digging it out from my fingernails.

My mother harped on me constantly. "Why do you work so hard at making yourself ugly," she demanded to know. I practiced inhaling Marlboros better to where I didn't cough or look bug-eyed, so Dennis' sister Vickie would notice me. I wanted to be just like her—dark blond shag cut, always tan, with muscles that showed when she flexed. She's the one who said to me inside the apartment clubhouse, "Tell me something? You ever going to inhale?" Busted. Caught by a pro. I was thirteen and stupid when it came to acting slick. Moved from a big house outside of Nashville to a thin-walled apartment complex in Tallahassee with my mother, who later told me it was filled with white trash. But I didn't know any more about white trash than I knew about smoking cigarettes.

And I didn't know shit about blow jobs either. "Just lick it like a Tootsie-Pop," Dennis told me that first time. "Then tug a little." But he didn't tell me what to do about the choking feeling I got, that gag reflex I remembered from the orthodontist. I spit out my retainer in my sleep. Like my mouth'd had

enough things in it that didn't belong.

I asked Dennis if we could ride our mini-cycles to Taco Bell but he said it was too likely we'd get caught driving on the road near rush hour traffic. I figured we could cut through the woods that bordered the apartment complex and come out at the far end of the strip. Really, I would have been scared shitless to do it but I kept playing scenes from "Here Comes Bronson," the first TV show my mother let me stay up past my bedtime to watch. He had a motorcycle and a good heart, and knew what to do with his cigarettes.

Dennis showed me how to pack them against the base of my hand, filter side down so none of the tobacco strands would stick out like nose hairs. We stood outside Taco Bell balanced on the concrete logs at the edge of the parking lot in front of the door. We each packed out Marlboros and then shook the box till one slipped out. A tug with the lips, a flick of the box top, and then I dropped the pack back into my Dingo Boot and pulled out the Zippo lighter with a Texas Gas Insignia I'd stolen from my dad. He didn't smoke but Texas Gas was a client of his and he kept a stack of Zippos with their logo in his dresser drawer.

That, a picture, and his telephone credit card number was all I had. I called him everyday at his office the first two weeks I was there, stuck in the panhandle of a state shaped too much like Dennis King's prick for my liking. My daddy was real sweet

and always took my calls. Never once said anything about the money, but I still couldn't convince my mother to let me live with him. I begged her and even though it made her cry to hear me say outright I'd rather live with him, she stood firm. Later, when I quit washing my hair or taking a shower, I wondered why she didn't send me back up to Nashville, let him deal with me.

Instead she hired a male grad student. Said I needed a guy around, with my brother in college and my dad so far away. But the one she hired struck me as a colossal wuss. He cooked canned corned beef hash in a saucepan instead of a skillet, with no butter in the bottom, and he was studying to be a meteorologist. He had a name made for teasing—Peter Deutsch. He said it was “Doitch” but Dennis called him Douche. Poor guy. My mother made him take me to see “The Graduate.” He squirmed through the entire thing.

I snapped my jaw, held the *o* of my mouth tight so the smoke ring came out whole and hung in the air. Dennis and I stood on the parking block watching traffic, ragging on the people in the cars as they pulled in.

“Look at the tits on her. Jesus, he must milk her like a cow.” Dennis tipped his head at a middle-aged woman with cantaloupe breasts and teased-up hair. The guy with her looked like his jeans would split if he farted.

“What do you bet he gets it every night?”

Dennis hissed, jealous of him and a little hateful towards her. He'd already given me his theory on tits. Too small he called them stingy, just like a tiny piece of cork to pinch. Too big, they flopped in your face like a dung patty. And if they sagged like an overfilled water balloon it made you into an instant cow.

I was just about to go inside and get a lemonade and my burrito when a pair of motorcycles came roaring in. Loud-ass machines, low slung. Dennis shifted his weight and acted like he could tell how many cc's the engine was before the leg blocking the number on the side of the bike pulled away. "Got to be a 750."

But it wasn't a cheap-ass Honda. Or a Suzuki like Donny, the only other kid in the complex with a real bike, drove. They were riding Harleys. And when one of them took off a helmet, out fell all this long red hair.

"Holy shit," I said to Dennis, pointing.

"Bitches driving them bikes. Goddamn." He let out a low whistle.

It's like he forgot his sister and I both rode little bikes and would have ridden bigger ones if we could. But the sight of a grown woman climbing off a Harley, sitting all by herself in the saddle, not that sissy chick on the back shit, made me want to run up to her and beg her to take me home with her.

The other woman had short black hair, and when they got close up enough to see, a little peach

fuzz mustache. Not as noticeable as my mother's friend Jane who had a thyroid problem and couldn't help it, but still enough of a shadow on her upper lip to make me think she got confused as a boy more than I did before I let my ugly-ass hair get long.

As soon as the two bikers passed us, I headed for the door. "Come on," I said, dropping the butt on the pavement, not bothering to grind it out.

I got in line behind the one with the reddish-blond hair falling straight and shiny down her back. She had on a black tee shirt with some kind of design on the front that blurred when she walked by. "Bean burrito and a large Coke," she ordered.

I hated beans but I ordered the same.

"You better not fart all the way home,"

Dennis said, stepping up to the counter.

"Two super tacos and two large Cokes." He always had to get two of everything.

The women sat down at a booth by the window, the long haired one facing the counter. She wore glasses I swore looked thicker than mine and lapped her hand when the beans oozed out. I plunked down at the next table but Dennis cocked his head and set his tray on a table further up against the wall. I knew I could wait all day and he'd never budge so I moved, but not before I caught a glimpse of a white fist in some kind of circle with a cross underneath. That was what was on the front of her tee shirt. Along with a blob of bean burrito

resting on her breasts like they were a shelf.

I hated Dennis for refusing to sit closer so I could at least hear them. They both had on black jeans and linemen's boots like my brother had when he was younger. I used to try wearing his shoes but his feet were boy feet, five years older and that much bigger. I tried on his jock strap once when he was away at prep school, but I never told anyone, not even Dennis the time he pinned me to the clubhouse floor and threatened to tickle me to death unless I told him the worst thing I ever did. I made up some stupid-ass lie about sticking a tampon up my nose at a slumber party. I didn't tell him another girl actually did it on a dare but I refused. I only had to break a raw egg in my hand instead. I didn't care if a bunch of girls in the sixth grade thought I was a certified wuss. I wasn't about to touch a tampon much less stick it anywhere. I knew I'd probably have to kill myself when I got my period. I'd seen Kelly Jones' spot of blood big as a quarter on her beige jeans—there she was squatting outside during lunch, not even ashamed that I could see it. She had good hair and clear skin but that didn't keep her from falling off the roof. Made me nauseous looking at that bloody spot. No wonder I wished I had the workings to fill that jock strap.

I had to keep craning my neck around to see what the women were doing. They'd finished eating and the long-haired one was laughing, her mouth open wide, big hands on the table top. I tried to

think of what I could do to get her to notice me. If she dropped something, I could pick it up. Or if her wallet slipped out of her pocket, I could chase after her in the parking lot. First, I'd look at her license to see where she lived.

Dennis sucked so hard on the straw everybody in the restaurant looked. Too bad he couldn't reach his own wanger. Then I'd be freed from that job.

"Come on," I said, punching him. The two women had started to walk out.

No dropped wallet.

"What's the rush?" Dennis let out a string of burps. Wiped his hands on his tee shirt, a white one with a black cat in a glass jar with "Happiness is a tight pussy" on top. I hated that shirt. I didn't think he'd ever felt any kind before mine, otherwise he would have known he couldn't stick anything up a tight pussy if it was dry.

They climbed on their bikes, revving the throttle. Exhaust came out the chrome pipes. Balancing her Harley between her thighs, the one I'd been watching tucked her hair into her helmet and began backing out. I repeated the license plate number in my head. I thought maybe I could call the police and say someone had dropped her wallet but I only got the license number off the bike. Then I realized if she'd dropped her wallet, I would have found her address inside. besides, I knew the cop would tell me to bring the wallet in and they'd call her.

Dennis hucked a glob of spit on the sidewalk.
"You're gross."

“You’re just jealous you can’t spit that far.”

“I’m going to get a Harley when I grow up.” I watched the two women disappear down the road wishing without knowing why that I could have wrapped my arms around the long-haired woman and ridden on the back.

“When we get home, I want you to knock on Amy Kellerman’s door.”

“Why me, you got hands?”

“You think her mother’s going to let her out to play with me? Her mother’s weird. Amy wears that little gold cross.”

“What’s that got to do with me knocking?”

“She’s got big tits and her mother watches her like she’s a virgin.”

“How do you know she’s not?” I started kicking little cloud of dirt with the tow of my boot.

“What’s that got to do with me knocking?”

“With tits like that she’s got to be horny.”

“Then why don’t you do it with her?”

“Are you kidding? I Frenched her once and she cried for a week. Total guilty slut behavior.”

“How come you told me I’m not a slut?”

“Cause you don’t pretend to be a virgin.

“But I am.”

“I know girl, but you don’t suck cock and pretend not to. You just are what you are.”

The clouds got bigger till the whole tip of my boot greyed over.

Back at the apartment complex, I knocked on Amy Kellerman’s door. I knew I was a dog. Too ugly to ask out. And no matter what Dennis said, I knew Amy Kellerman was not a girl who gave it away. She

told me once she was Christian. That meant her body was God's temple and not some playground for horny boys.

Amy answered the door, still wearing her school clothes—plaid skirt, nylons, and saddle shoes. No zits. Bouncy blonde hair. She just stood there.

"I like your shirt," I said.

"It's not a shirt, it's a blouse."

I wanted to leave but I knew Dennis would be pissed if I didn't at least ask her to come out. "You want to come down to the clubhouse for awhile?"

She looked right past me down the stairs where Dennis stood waiting by the corner of the building. "I have to study." She slipped back from the door.

"Yeah, well whatever." I booked down the steps before I heard her mother asking from the kitchen who was there.

Dennis and I crossed the complex and sat in the swings at the far end of the sandy patch where little kids were supposed to play.

"I bet they were lezzies," he said, lighting another cigarette.

"Who?" I asked, knowing if I didn't light another Marlboro when he did, he'd call me a wuss.

"Those dykes on bikes at Taco Bell."

"How do you know?"

"Did you see the mustache on the dark-haired one? Jesus, what else do you need to know?"

"My mother's friend has a mustache, you asshole. She's married and has six kids."

"Well that bulldagger we saw never felt a man

between her legs.”

“Shut up.”

“What, are you going to turn lezzie too?”

I wished I had a whole mouthful of his nasty-ass squirt to spit on him.

“I don’t care what they are. They had cool bikes.”

“Yeah, bitches got to have something hard between their legs.”

I looked at the Mickey Mouse watch my dad bought me in Orlando. “I should get home. Peter’s probably making supper.”

“Why’s that fag look after you?”

“My mother works, stupid. She travels for her job.” I flicked the last inch of my cigarette in an arc the way Vickie taught me, the tip glowing like a falling star.

“Me and Donny are probably going to be at the clubhouse later.”

I wasn’t sure but I think he pointed his middle finger at his crotch. I got off the swing and said, “Maybe I’ll see you later then,” but I knew I’d rather stay in with Peter than blow Dennis. And Donny gave me the creeps. He had a wispy-ass mustache not much thicker than the woman at Taco Bell even though he acted like a certified stud always bragging about the women he balled. Dennis made me suck Donny off once—said he wouldn’t be my friend if I didn’t. Donny’s dick was a lot bigger, something I’ve been meaning to tell Dennis for a while. I thought my jaw would break it was so big. And it seem like he’d never come. Told me he was nervous, not really knowing me. But not too ner-

vous to zip it back in his jeans.

When I got back to the apartment Peter was setting the table. He stopped and sniffed as I walked by. "You're not smoking are you? Your mother told me you're not allowed."

"No man, I just smell 'cause of Dennis. The kid won't quit."

What a douche bag. Afraid to ever say anything real. A certified weather wuss.

"Call me when it's ready." I headed to my room. I knew I should have offered to help but it was his job. I closed the blinds and stretched out on my bed, thinking of that woman on her Harley. That long red-blond hair falling across her face, wondering how it would feel falling across mine.

I shut my eyes and tried to picture where she lived. Imagined riding on the back of her bike. What would I say if I ever saw her again at Taco Bell? If I told her my dad had a Porsche, she'd know my family appreciates good brands.

"That's a damn fine bike," I'd tell her. Then she'd say "climb on" and we'd ride all the way out of rat's-ass Tallahassee, up to see my daddy and then we'd keep riding till she took me to some kind of commune up north where I'd send Vickie a postcard, and one to Dennis, anonymous-like, telling him I hope his prick falls off.

When Peter hollered, "Supper's ready," I didn't get up. I just lay there, wondering what that fist on her tee shirt meant, wondering if I ever did see her, would she remember me.

Abe Louise Young

STRONG

lover, sea wind and laughter

she asks for my history.

woman. made of electrical tape and tissue paper

dress of billowing air, pelvis an iron anchor

i loved someone once, it was summer,

the cellar door propped open

and rotting apples, i could tickle her

or whimper as we lay in the grass.

i loved someone once, it was winter,

she never crumpled

or cried.

i wrapped frozen pipes with blankets under the
house.

when she was gone and i swept--

oh!--so many grimaces

hidden behind the bathroom mirror.

you know how you sometimes keep one eye awake with a
new lover--

sleep together in trust but cannot remember

your dreams, cannot explain the whirl of red dust

falling on you from the wheels of the fourth-grade school-
bus?

under a string of white lights, fingers spiderwalk

everywhere on her body,

still uncertain

if they're being tested, loved, or wrong.

once we weep it,

we can rest.

lie on the floor, open the cupboards,
and pull down the clanging pots. then we belong.

we make love laughing, fucking, lapping,
a hundred times--

once i told her i was scared to love,

my vagina opened

to her fist, her wrist,

i took her arm.

Rebecca Lee

EATING THE SKELETON

You said the sun
tumbled from my fingertips
swirled toward you
the whirl of the dance from the whirling sun
you said you heard thunder in my hands
saw lightning crackle
felt the dent and burn of cinders
in my deep and dazzling darkness
you wettened to the words
my tongue kissed to the air
my singeing
singing lisp
beckoning you to come
to come
to come

You came towards me
calling my name
each sweet flick of your tongue
a flute's note
your long limbs
swung like branches in the wind your hair rippled
golden
we touched cunt to cunt like butterflies
like leaves falling on a soft heart
you asked for more
more words
more arms
more hands
more whispers along the spine
the wind rocked us in a rhythm
better than sex
you said

my lips brushed your ear
whorled like labia
the lingering tendrils of your questions
dwindled to soft moans
our clitorises grew plump
you were dangling
dangling near the edge of my fire
near the tips of my fingers

(I should have run into the dark night)

You sucked my fingers
those fingers that then could crack notes open
syncopate air
make birds fly to the moon
take us back
to the sweet swaying of sisters

in the soft call of the wind
my tongue traced the veins in your hands
lapped your palm
licked your fate line
we were coming close to the sweet coming
of coming
sweet coming

You came too close to this infant heart
exposed in a sharp winter light
your tongue tore at the membrane
and licked
scraped the sinuous route of my body
you said you wanted to lap
the slope of my thighs
flick and slither
into wet and worrying places
you said you wanted to lick

the inside of my skull
lick
expecting licorice
I said
and you'll go mad with the taste of absinthe
see a child swallow spoons and forks
razor a ladder along her thin arm
lick
and your tongue will catch in contraptions and
devices
contrivances and designs
you said you wanted to suck my old wounds my
dreams diluted by the years
suck
I said
expecting wet and translucent blood
rich as a dark burgundy
and you'll taste the ashes of burnt hearts
cannabis poultice
dick after dick after shriveled dick
and the curdled
dried cream of love

You came ever closer
despite my warning
you licked
you swallowed the words littering the inside of my
cranium
sucked out my marrow
then you walked off
plump with my essence
you walked off
leaving me a translucent shell
stunned to a standstill

a stop to my hands wanting to stroke
your hair hissing in the sun

your curls glistening like labia
a stop to my breathing
the rattles in my broken chest
you left
a fleet light
tracing the lines
of an unendured life
only I could feel the yank
at the roots of my sternum
only I could see the bloody mess
the open scar like a scarlet peony
only I could hear
the whack of the severance
the raging no yelled into the wind
the insistent tapping at my heart
like a come on
to fuck you
fuck you
fuck you
sister
fuck you

We could have tasted mango
sister
we could have tasted mango
our flesh could have melted
with hot blasts of coming
but you chose
clanking sex
a hand here
a hand there
shriveled kisses
two dildoes
polish and lipstick
death of skin and bone and cunt
you chose to keep

a stone in your vagina
your metallic mind
of never coming
never coming
never

You will never slip
into my core
never hear my words
fragrant as ginger
never hear our sighs
solvent with sex
on this ragged day
the cold wind polishes my bones
wipes away the milky traces
of your skin
obliterates all mirage
those desiccated bits
of brain
you sent me through the mail
your bitch and drivell
pieces of charred heart
wheel in the sky
drift to where we intersect
queen mother witch
and broom daughter

I haul your ghost over the snow
the days crawl over me like cold moths
and I forget the smell and sound of the sun
each day
I yank at your carcass chained to my ankle
hack at your frozen limbs
tear at your fingers
gnarled and sharp like icicles
crack all 13 bones of your glacial face

I gnaw at the joint of each long day
when did your eyes fail
when did my fingers fall
like rotted twigs
to the dull earth
when did the sun lose all heat
and seek an abyss of dead moons
when did my words
turn to gristle
clicking in my throat
when did my kisses land
flat and inadequate
in the stale air
when did the butterfly
become a caterpillar
dying
dying

In time
I will resurrect the ordinary
eggshells
a bird's wing
a snake's skin
the vibrato in a fringed heart
the marrow of the word
in time
pennies will wink once again in the sand
bright promises that I will return
to what I was once
before you sucked the gold from my light
before you iced my heart
before I turned into a creature
always turning
towards the light in hair
cascading down a woman's back
always waiting

for the bone touch
of your finger
always stumbling
over what might have been
I will turn the stumbling
into a simple step
into grace
blue and soft shining silver
in time
my fractured ear will link note to note
and hear the symphony
the flute's sweet strain
circling
tongue and finger
and soul

in time
light will ripen
the translucent sound of a leaf
blowing free over the ocean
will startle space awake
transfigure the ragged rhythm of my heart
to Buddha's breath
then the stars will no longer chain me to a dead sky
then our indistinguishable bones
will shine like lines in a poem



Clara Nipper

AWAKENING

Your name, I say it when I'm happy,
lonely, sad, scared it brings a rush, it invokes
you a tiny bit and that's enough. Under the
golden warmth of your smile, I leap into the
headwaters of passion, you awaken my desire,
without you, I want nothing, with you, I want
everything. I swim and dive deep into palpable
blackness pressure mounting no oxygen, at last
I rise breaking the surface gasping screaming.
Who are you who are you I demand just to
hear you say your name. Mary Mary Mary you
repeat. My eyes roll back my veins turgid spell
it I hiss. M A R Y. your voice, your voice, oh,
God, it rips through my cells like a drug your
name ripples over my body like drumbeats
horse hooves, I know who you are, I always
have. I've never forgotten for one second. But I
love to hear you say it. I cover your eyes I
cover your mouth, you press your face against
me, imprinting my whorls on your bones,
bending your face into my palms. You hold my
wrists on either side of my head, I swallow your
thick gaze, we don't have to be friends tonight,

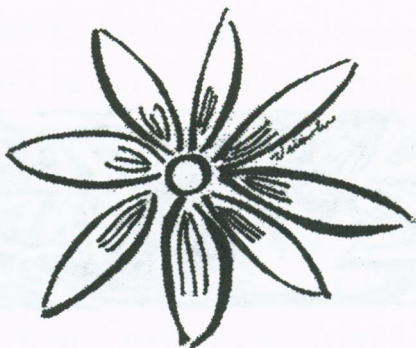
we can be mysterious dangerous, no words, no words, everything said. We are serpentine, entwined, constricting, rolling, undulating, covering one end of the house to the other, knocking over and pulling down furniture I used to like, the desperation and the obsession mix with our sweat and tears whatever this is that happens to us is beyond our ken, it has always been you every minute in spite of my solemn vows to the opposite. Sex used to be clear and abrupt and thin like crashing through a plate glass window. Now there are rooms and textures and doors and velvet curtains and shadows and eons of time. I cry your name to you — grief pours off me. I wonder if you can see me afloat in this pool and you do, you hold me tightly so I don't get pulled away in the wash of the tide and you tell me my name.



Cheryl Whitehead

SUGARCANE SKIN

Oh, this morning, so sweet, lazy
sun rising; her clothes washed
and hanging from the line, her silky nightgown
teases the breeze and takes my breath
as the sun fills it like her naked body
slipping into it and out of it again. I sit
crouched next to her, brushing her thigh
with lips drenched
by the sweetness of her skin
like sugarcane I eat until I feel
her heart beating in my mouth
where passion explodes, will not be quiet.
Noise fills our rooms, it pounds
on the door to our souls. We lift
our faces up to the sky
and howl at the sun with pleasure.



Vivian Lee

Rotem

YOU CALL THIS ENTICING?

Ani Baalat Ha Bayit

I am the landlady
The serious looking blonde
The one you've been staring at all night
With scrawny arms and aching shoulder
Standing near the glass sliding doors
Ready to bolt at any moment

Truth to tell

I own your house
As soon as you ask
I tell you my phone # 921 1297
I scrawl it down and tuck it in your shirt pocket
Actually it's a message number
I'm just living in an excavation site
Right now it's a hole in the ground

As soon as I spoke you could tell I'm not from Germany
But I'm the owner
You don't have to let me in uninvited
You don't have to have sex with me
I'm not as strong as I look
I strained my chest mixing up cement
It feels like a knife is buried in my left lung and oh
my aching armpit

There is just a cement floor with a foam cushion
Rayon sheets and a polyester quilt
There'll be flies buzzing at our heads
You might wake up the next morning with
mosquito bites on your face

Minal Hajratwala

LARGO

— I am a long dash —

I am the sexy of tight —you are the sexy of loose —
the aesthetic of hangin loose

It dreams me
this home glow
this bar of color women
I don't know
hello

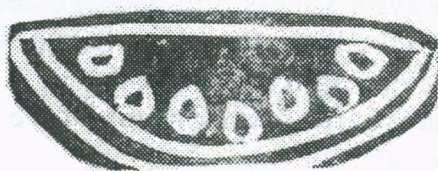
I am watermelon inside, seed outside, crunch & soft,
no white rind crisp, I spit small dark things, alpine
green

Arms & thighs loose ache the way a daiquiri do

I'm in a daze a dose of somethin strong
some dark & sweet

what she say to me
take the knot outta my shoulders
soldiers sold ya's soul does

like these long strips of letters
descenders & ascenders
a kind of comfort



Minal Hajratwala

TRIPTYCH

Dress

Black, of course. Glove leather. The stuff of fantasy, revealing & concealing, custom-stitched, its measurements intimate. Two half cups hold up the front & curve down into a sheath. Your eyes travel the gap, two fingers wide, held together only by leather laces. Splitting at the navel into twin strips of thigh that send you cross-eyed to the bottom hem, hymn to skin, as your cunt sends unobeyable signals to your brain. Really the dress is just an excuse, two pieces of night tied together to frame & inflame the flesh.

Dusk

comes early this night, or any with her, fog in your brain that keeps you from seeing clearly, from knowing anything for sure. All memories, all histories disappear into the low mist of twilight, and as night advances, you cannot distinguish your own name from the color on her lips. Breathing. It is the hour of teeth & understanding, hour of confusion, hour when you would not trade all the diamonds in the sky for your lust.

Running

Don't be foolish. There is no running from this. She is your desire, embodied. She is you, and yours, and not yours: the one you will conjure all your life.

Minal Hajratwala

from PRINCIPLES OF THE HUMAN HEART

ARCH OF AORTA

I say
Here is my heart —
Take it

But she doesn't want it / doesn't know what to do

It sits between us
dripping
staining the bedsheets

its valves pumping
the empty air

Anny Allyn

EXPOSED

she is just
a woman
across this crowded
bar. she can drive
you like a car. she
saunters off
with the map
of your flesh
in her back pocket.
the ink is wet, don't
touch it. yet.
she knows every
way to love
you.
everything you
say, everything
you do.
she smiles.
she knows.
do you feel
exposed?

Jen Kiernan

BEFORE I CAME OUT

Every woman was a possibility.
Movie stars touched me in my dreams.
I went to Dunkin Donuts every day
because the girl
behind the counter
brushed her coffee-wet wrist against mine,
left it there too long
to be casual.

Then, I fell in love with you.
On the sofa
your heat inches that felt miles
from mine.
On the television
a kiss that sounded too wet to be real.
I wondered what your lips felt like.
Slipping off into sleep
your hand dropped on my leg.
Sorry, you said, pulling it back into your space.
I watched your eyes close, your belly swell
and dip with breath,
the rise and fall and rise of you that I kissed every night.
Anyway, if it weren't for your girlfriend, I might have.
She, who peeled oranges for you when you were sick,
touched your forehead with a cool washcloth,
that cloth half off the hook in your bathroom,
mid-flight to the floor
I'll never touch with my bare feet.
From somewhere inside sleep,
you thought you were talking to her:
Honey, could you hit the light?
and, honey, I did.

Maria R. Palacios

DICTIONARY OF A "CLOSETED WIFE"

Marriage: cave where she hides
from the menacing vultures
emerging from a large group
also known as society

Husband: foreign word
she learned to pronounce
with vague acceptance
pretending to be fluent in a language
totally unknown to her heart

Children: tender extension of her being
which makes her envy
the Virgin Mary
who supposedly conceived
without a man

Heterosexual: costume she wears
although it doesn't fit
because others
would not recognize her
without it.

Lesbian: word that describes her inner self
but is never said in public
because after all,
she's married

Joy Wright

MARKED

I.

You place your claim upon my breast
purple and deep, intentional and unintentional
like berries' stains on children's fingers
left after a satisfied indulgence in summer.

Throughout the day I touch it.
Through me rushes the heat of you —
rushes the commitment
wordlessly made with our bodies.

I believe you.
Marked as I am with possibilities,
a door open to explore.
This purple berries' stain you gift me with
holds its promise late
into afternoon. You kiss me then
describe the unseen marks my body
left upon your hands.

II.

Night. In bed alone. Your promise in
the scent of sandalwood
upon my pillow.

Flash. Quick retreat. You change your mark
more swiftly than you left it. No slow berry fade
to fall, winter. This drastic turn upon my flesh
becomes
a bruise, an ice burn. What's left by the vacuum
of your withdrawal.

Erratic. Your voice loud. Rushing
cold through the phone as if it might fracture
before you can retrieve your promise.
My nonexistence in held breath.

Shivering. With my words. I try
to warm you, pull you back
to the promise of my skin.
My words freeze, a blizzard between us.

III.

I place my hand cold
upon my purpled flesh. Cover it.
Though you close the door
of possibilities, last night
still imprints my skin.

You already left your mark.

Jacqueline Miranda

LOVE, LIKE MADNESS

My love for you runs naked
through the city streets
exposed to looks from passers-by
as it flees in search of shelter and
weaves itself amongst the traffic
and the noise of people not accustomed
to such madness

My love for you strays to your doorstep
finds the way back to outside your window
exhausted out of breath
and wants to wait it out,
'til sometime
when you're home again,
fully knowing there is nowhere else
for it to run

Jacqueline Miranda

SUNDAY MORNINGS

Down deep
where my tongue
uncurls around the
sacramental ridge
and takes the offering
of sweet communion,
there plays a gospel
sound where my ears
rest gently against
your inner thighs,
a whispering of ages
tell me, beckon me
to make the ritual,
to have my worship
humbled
and taste you
deep down,
deep down,
deep

Martín

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I'm on a BART train, on my way to a buddy's stag party, and I'm wearing some of my fanciest butch gear: a crisp white shirt with red silk tie, dark grey blazer, black slacks, fine black boots. On top of that, I'm packing, so there's a noticeable bulge in my crotch.

The train stops at a station, and I see this gorgeous femme get on. She's looking pretty fine herself, in a short skirt that shows off her sexy legs and gorgeous ass, low-cut clingy top showing enough cleavage to make my mouth water, and heeled boots. She's all in black, and it suits her quite well. I'm eyeing her body hungrily when we make eye-contact; I grin, but she looks away, as if bored or annoyed. I think: Hmmmm, how can I work my way into this sexy femme's panties?

She chooses a seat on the other side of the aisle from mine, and I can tell from the slinky way she moves, from the way her hips sway back and forth as she approaches her seat, that she's hot in bed. But she still refuses to make eye contact. She sits down and crosses her legs, and that hikes her skirt up even higher, showing off more of those fine, fine legs. She starts reading, and it seems to me that she is studiously trying to ignore me, in spite of the fact that I've been obviously staring at her for some time now. I sigh, look away to stare out the window. As we go through a tunnel, I see in the window's reflection that she's finally looking. I turn to catch

her eyeing my crotch, but she looks quickly away.

As hard as I try, I can't get her to make eye contact, until at one point the train lurches and she drops something on the floor in the aisle between us. Quick as lightning, I reach over and pick it up before she even has a chance to move. She can't ignore me now, and as I hand it back to her, I look directly into her eyes: I want her to see the hot desire I have for her. She does, and it flusters her and pleases her. She momentarily drops her gaze, then looks into my eyes full-on, and this time I see fire in her eyes, too. I softly say, "Encantado," and hold out my hand, but her face again assumes that look of annoyed boredom and she turns away, saying nothing.

I haven't given up yet. She gets up to exit at the next stop, and I follow her, forgetting about the stag party. As she leaves the station, she is aware that I am following her. We walk down a store-lined street, and I watch her hips sway back and forth oh-so-gracefully, her short skirt showing off the gorgeous curves of her ass as she moves. Occasionally, she stops briefly in front of store windows, and I can tell she isn't looking inside but at my reflection, and more than once I see her staring at my crotch and the bulge I have for her there.

Finally, before going into a store, she turns and looks directly at me, as if to challenge me to follow her. I do. Once inside, I scan around quickly for a private place I can take her into. Off in a far corner I find exactly what I am looking for: a dressing room

with a "Closed" sign in front of it.

I bring my attention back to her, expecting to see that fine ass, but she has stopped in the middle of some clothing displays and has turned to face me.

There is the fire of anger in her eyes — but desire is there, too. "What do you want?" she demands. I look her coolly up and down, my eyes ravenously caressing all those curves, then ask, "What do you think?" She doesn't respond, so I say, "If you really want to find out, then why don't you follow me this time?" I turn on my heel and start walking toward the empty dressing room. She hesitates behind me, so I stop and turn to look at her. She's staring at my crotch again, and when I see that, I know she'll follow me. She wants it, and I sure as hell am going to give it to her.

I open the door to the dressing room and allow her to enter before me. Once inside, I drape my jacket over a chair, then block the door to make sure no one can get in — or out — before I'm ready. I turn toward her and see that she is having second thoughts.

She lunges for the door, but I grab her, push her into one of the dressing room stalls and hold her up against the wall. She struggles mightily, but I hold her tight. She stops resisting the moment I rub my hard-on against her thigh. I still see defiance in her eyes, but I know her feelings have changed because even though she's still panting from fighting me, her breathing is deeper, heavier. Slowly, I bring my

lips to hers and kiss her, but she refuses my tongue. I know what to do to fix that: I force myself between her legs, and rub my bulge against her crotch. I feel how hot she is against my slacks. She moans, and I slip my tongue in, thrusting it in every time I push against her.

Her breathing deepens, and she moans again. I whisper in her ear, "Are you going to be a good girl and keep quiet? If you're not quiet the guards will come in, and I won't fuck you." I give her a few good thrusts, making her gasp. "You wouldn't want that, would you?" I ask. "N-no," she breathes "no . . . please, no." Her heavy-lidded eyes reveal her naked desire, so I know she'll behave.

I want her to see me fuck her, so while still keeping a tight grip on her, I kick a small bench that's in the stall, lean her against the wall and prop her leg up on the bench. I check the angle in the mirror, and what I see pleases me: this gorgeous femme held against the wall, her legs spread wide open, with me standing between them ready to ram my cock into her.

She isn't struggling now since she is immobilized by desire. Still, something tells me not to trust her, so I grab both her wrists in one hand and place them over her head, pinning her against the wall. I hike up her skirt with my free hand and see that she has on a sexy little black lace g-string that shows off her very, very wet pussy. I kiss her deeply again, and as I kiss her, I stroke her pussy lightly outside her panties. She gasps, and starts to thrust her hips at

me. I laugh, then say, "Look in the mirror. What do you see?" And as I say this, I slip my fingers beneath her panties and start playing with her lips.

"Please," she begs. "Please fuck me . . . please." Her breathing is so heavy she almost sobs the words. I make a few circles around her very hard clit, then

slowly, slowly glide down through her hot wetness to rest two of my fingers just outside her sweet opening. I'm not going to fuck her yet: I want to make her beg me some more, I want to tease her until she can't stand it. "Want me to fuck you? Do you? Look in the mirror. Look at where my fingers are." Her breath rasps in my ear as I smile and reach up to kiss her. And as I kiss her, she thrusts hard against my hand so my fingers enter her wet velvet softness. Now it's my turn to gasp, and my knees nearly buckle from feeling her pussy suck hungrily at my fingers. I pull my completely drenched hand away immediately and angrily push her against the wall. She made me lose control, and she knows it. The look of triumph in her eyes angers me even more.

With my free hand, I grab her by the hair and bring her face close to mine. "Do that again and I will leave you wanting! I'm in control here, and you'll move only when I tell you to. Do you understand?" Desire and fear replace the triumph in her eyes I kiss her, roughly, letting go of her hair while kissing her. At first she doesn't respond, but as my hand strokes her pussy again, her mouth parts for my tongue.

I pull my hand away from her snatch and explore the rest of her fine body. Her nipples are hard against the palm of my hand, and her body jerks as I pinch them. I position myself between her legs and rub my hard-on against her crotch as I pull her head back so I can get at her neck. I kiss and suck, working my way down, then pull up her blouse and suck on her nipples. I pull down her panties as I continue sucking her nipples, and her juices run down her legs, she's so wet from wanting.

I get her panties off, and shove my fingers into her cunt. She spreads her legs as wide as she can, but mindful of my command to not move, she tries to hold still while I work her g-spot. "Look in the mirror. Look at what I'm doing to you," I whisper. She looks, and the sight of me fucking her with my hand, on top of the pleasure I am giving her, makes her forget about keeping still, and she thrusts against me wildly. I grin at her abandon, knowing that she can't help it, because it feels so so good.

I feel her orgasm begin to build, but I'm not ready to let her come yet. I pull my hand away, and she gasps. "Please . . . please," she pleads, and it looks like she has tears in her eyes. I stare coolly into her eyes for a moment, then slowly reach down to unzip my slacks. She lets out a little shriek when she hears my zipper, and she turns to the mirror to see me pull out my cock and hold it against her wet, wet pussy.

"Do not move," I command between clenched teeth. "If you make the slightest move, I will leave you immediately. Do you understand?" She pants heavily and can't even really speak, so she nods her head slightly in response, and I say, "Good girl." With her

eyes transfixed on the mirror, she watches as I take the tip of my prick and run it slowly up and down the length of her slit, first rubbing it against her clit, then rubbing it just outside of her slit. Her body twitches and jerks with each stroke and I feel her tension build up: I know that when I finally make her come, it will be explosive.

She reaches a fever pitch and can't take it anymore, so she sobs, "I can't stand it, I can't stand it, it hurts!

Please, please make me come . . . I'm begging you, I'll do anything you want, but please make me come!" I stop stroking her and look coldly into her eyes. "No," I say. "No." She closes her eyes as tears leak out of them, then she raises her voice and says, "Please, oh my God, please!" I tighten my grip on her wrists, then with my free hand pull her face close to mine. "Look at me," I say. Her eyes remain closed. "I said look at me!" She opens her eyes and looks into mine. I let go of her hair, grab my cock, and say, "Now look in the mirror."

I gaze at her face as she watches our reflections, and the look of frustrated pain changes into sheer animal pleasure as I shove myself into her. Her eyes close in ecstasy as I ram it deep into her over and over and over again. I let go of her wrists and grab her hips with both hands to help me thrust even further into her, and she turns into a wild tigress — ravenously sucking me deep inside her as she pounds on my back with her fists and bites me wherever she can reach me.

Suddenly, her body tenses and I know that she is about to come. She throws her head back and groans as her orgasm hits, her cum soaking me

completely. She nearly pushes my cock out of her cunt with the initial force of her O, but I shove it back in and keep pounding away. Wave after wave of her orgasm shakes her beautiful body, and it seems that she's on fire with it. I can't get my fill of this gorgeous woman in orgasm . . .

It's over in too short a time. Her breathing returns to normal as her body collapses from the tremendous release. Her knees buckle beneath her, and I catch her in my arms and ease her down onto the bench beneath her. She is absolutely radiant from the afterglow. I hold her for a moment, make sure she is okay, then get my handkerchief from my jacket to wipe her down with. I find her panties for her, and help her put them on — not very easy since she's almost completely limp. I straighten up both her and my clothes as best as I can, then kiss her tenderly and hold her some more. She looks at me, not quite knowing what to say. I just grin. She regains her bearings after a few more moments and I see it is time for me to go. I take out a pen and write my number for her on the wall, then kiss her again softly and tenderly. "I have to go, I've an engagement to go to," I whisper, "but I'd love to see you again. Call me." I give her one last kiss, then take my leave: I have a stag party to go to, after all.



Miriam R. Sachs-Martin

THE HEAT

It's getting hot. It's not quite there yet; only mid-May, after all, not even to my birthday yet. The hills are usually green till a week or two past this time, but already today they're turning brown, scorched by the heat, drying.

It's getting hot. So far it's just hot enough to make you sweat, but soon it'll be hot enough to count, hot enough to hurt, hot enough to know better.

Already i go sit in the backyard and smoke cigarettes, and come back in scant time later with my shoulders seared; fierce sunshine arcs patterns of my clothes into my skin, sunburn, heatwave.

I've always loved the sun, born of fiery temperament and Cuban blood; 110 degrees is hot enough to suit me, and it's only when I'm stuck in a car or sealed up in pantyhose that I need to pant like a dog or cuss like a bitch.

Me and my mama and her mama too, we bicker fluently in the heat and drink bitter acrid coffee to distract our insides, but there's a reason why we live in this city, tropical smart-mouthed birds flown in from the Caribbean. Whatever else we don't have in common, we at least have this: can't take the cold, lord, make

me sweat.

Heat wakes something up in me, some grit, some reality, otherwise lacking, stunted by rain and chill. I can take anything in the heat, I think. I might drink cold beers and sit out on the porch to sweat it, moan about it, and fan myself like everyone else, like women have done since timeless when, but i know deep down in my gut that this ok, that this is me, and that I can always take a little more.

I hate the dry heat, last three days at most in the desert, but city heat, always a bit moist from shared bodies if nothing else, suits me just fine. Oh that city heat, warm wet heat, make my blood boil heat, thank the sweet lord for making me queer heat, it's getting hot.

If you ever need to leave me, do it during a heatwave, so that my misery will have company, and so as to awaken the whiteiron part of me who will lethargically spit at the dust at your feet and never even think of watching you go. i'll sweat profusely instead of cry, so much easier, so less humiliating, my body will bleed for you but god forbid my pride should bend. But you'll never have to leave, unless you can't take the heat, unless you need greener pastures, for I hold all the sun-scorched fires of pressure intensely between my thighs and don't you *ever* forget it.

It's getting hot; cigarettes bother with their

added flame, and i dance in my room; turn up the music with dreams of espresso milkshakes, dreams of hurtling into slimy bottomed lakes; of leaping out with a scream of delight at the cold, an' cool mud sticking in bits to my skin, an' hot air like a slap in the face as I come up to breathe — just dreams.

I smell hot east san josé nights in the air, the kind of night when the fan just stirs the hot around and you have to either fight or fuck on cool blue sheets just to distract yourself from the oppressiveness of it all.

It's getting hot; first generation child blood borne of an island where it never drops below seventy and usually hovers at ninety, of an island where clothing sticks and blood boils, and people communicate in croons and shouts. It's history, present, and future now in East San José because summer's here and I'm at home.

I can smell it in the air, i can feel it in my blood, my bones, the stickiness between my thighs; tank top weather, sexing weather, fight or flight and "fuck you too" weather that makes my hair curl, my fingers flex, and every bit of skin on my body burst into sweat or was that tears

it's getting hot
thank the sweet lord
it's finally getting hot

Gail A. Burton

AMBER PENNY

Amber is hard and sweet.

I reach into your jean pocket to retrieve a sugared plum
that you love watching me bite and suck,
nibble away at, suck
until I get to the core of it.

I want to put it in my mouth and continue to suck
all of the flesh from the bone — clean.

The sensuality of the thought overwhelms me.

I remove the pit from my mouth unfinished.

I have retrieved another gift with the plum
from your pocket, Daddy:

a tear-shaped stone of amber with a leather band.

Amber is red brown sap from the tree hardened.

You advise me that your “sugar Moma” has let you in on
this. We ponder that.

Analytical are we. Seething and hot underneath.

Rising and oozing like sap from below
from within the core of our nature.

I wonder at how:

When we make love, you get high and I get deep.

You get off and I get in — pulled in deep,

too deep to feel the mutual touch when it comes.

For now, I will be your Fem Penny:

Janet Jackson’s role on “Good Times.”

I am the sap oozing. Later I will harden

and give you the sweet rough pleasure that you
desire.

Gail A. Burton

PENNY EATS FRIED CHICKEN AND DRIED
APRICOTS GOING DOWN CHICAGO WAY

I.

That white woman across from me
is envious.

She ain't got no fried chicken in a greasy brown paper bag,
wrapped in a cellophane bag,
like I do.

She got long blond hair though.
I guess that counts for something.

I pull out a few golden brown wingettes,
a small fistful of apricots and a packet of Keebler
brand cheese crackers with peanut butter.
I bring forth this bounty from deep within one of
those preppy canvas bags with colored handles.
(I'm sure that I am the first in history to carry such
colored cargo in tote.)
I am proud of this.

On my walkman, I'm playing on another 'Trane:
John Coltrane, Mr. Day.
I start boppin' my neck, gnawing on my chicken
bone.

I am every young black woman in train history
who has ever had somebody send them into the
world — halfway 'cross the world, on a train.

Sent off with fruit, chicken, water, crackers and
peanut butter and some John Coltrane. I am so self-
satisfied.

II.

The love that I have shared with you
from the beginning
has been about the love of black women
teaching each other and ourselves
how to love each other and ourselves.
I'm listening to blues now, because you
stopped doing that.

The loss of a loved one can drive a someone
crazy sometime.

The loss of a loved one can drive a sister
crazysometime.

Said: loss of a loved one can drive you
crazy sometime.

Crazy nuf to cross another sister like me.
Crazy nuf to cross another sister like she.
She who we needed to be making a pot of chicken for
and sending off on her first journey.
But she wouldn't have wanted the chicken anyway.
She would have wanted to be flown,
first class, and to have eaten plastic airplane food.
Poor child, her Moma didn't raise her right.
She don't know no better.
But I thought you might by now.

III.

And I guess you do.
Cause last night, through all of our pain, we went to
the grocery store
Got the oil, the wingettes, the whole chicken split, the
Old Bay seasoning and you danced in the kitchen,
when I got that chicken popping
in the fryer pot.

Two grown women laughing and shaking our asses
'cause we gone have some chicken.

I have grown thin with rage — actualized
worrying my ass off.

You have regulated your diet to hummus, pita,
smoked turkey.

Your regime of gym and other self-caring, self-help
community gatherings give me hope.

But tonight before I leave you. Let's lose control.
Let's laugh and dance around this chicken.

You were there when my sister put my Moma
in that home...

So I need you to be here for me tonight.

So I need you to let me bring my Moma's ways
in here tonight.

I need you to let me love you and love myself
with some chicken tonight.

We can't have no sex. There is too much pain.

Too much loss. Too much regret. So let me
make love to you with this chicken tonight.

Let me help us with this chicken tonight.

Let me heal us with this chicken tonight.

Let me love you with this chicken tonight.

Like you failed to do before. I won't ask you no more.

I got black girls lined up at the door

but I know you. I have lived you.

You know me. We are the other's Witness.

When I get to Chicago, I'm going to use all of my

change to call you to let you know my chicken
made a white woman jealous.

I look forward to your laughter.

I got many miles to travel yet.

It might take awhile to get back

but I feel like going home.

Teya Schaffer

CLOSURE

i

It is not like drowning any more:
your life no longer a silent film
flickering before my eyes.
No, now you are wrapped like a holy text
over arm and forehead, enscrolled
on the doorposts of my house,
a commandment of remembrance.

ii

I am not done.
I am not finished missing you.
How could memory forget its creator?
The ungiven future would have found us
seeking still the persuasive truths
which show the beloved her beauty;
how could memory forget its purpose?

iii

First I loved you
true and well.
You loved me like a tree:
canopy and root
In those days I could speak your name
in all the public places.

When you were dying
your name became a wreath
on my brow, marking me
as more than I was;
people took your name from my lips
and poured it burning into my ears.
You were a burning crown
and now are ash:
a future bereft of prediction
a silence caught in the teeth.

iv

Your name was Jackie
when you mocked my vanities
my heart was comforted
when you nested your fears in my heart
my courage was sufficient
when you broke my heart with refusal
I still was whole
when my failings tripped your strength
your love was not diminished
what if death is unceasing
there are other things
which last as long.

Anne Kaier

SUNDAY NIGHT LOVER (Excerpt)

III

There you stood, hips ajar
stiff with anger at me and mine,
until I drove you out
with my silent voice:
*go home, lover, go home, don't pressure me
about tomorrow.*

I sat down and drank a beer
and I saw you in my mother's house
shifting in your chair
washed in the shimmering Easter light
light falling like achieved grace
light lingering after nightfall
behind the four great windows
of my mother's living room.

I saw you there, smelling of talcum,
your clean white shirt sloping
down the curve of your breast.
But I didn't do it. Instead
I bought a guilt offering:
French soap; thinking
nothing I can ever do will be enough for you,
you who were left in the orphanage

with two parents living.
You will eat me up, I thought
you will leave me
husked.

On Easter morning you called
to offer your forgiveness.
I'll go to my sister's, you said.

Suddenly I saw you wait
for me, like a nude runner
rocking on the balls
of your feet.

IV

Sometimes a poem fails
to thrive;
lies flat
like you did last night, waiting
for my tongue,
when you lay with your hand behind your
head
your blue eyes closed,
distant as a Cameron photo
living only in the secret images behind your
eyes
as my tongue flicked your nipple

and my hand breezed your thigh
like a punkkah wallah, following
instructions
while now and then, I tried
to suck a kiss from your mouth by force
of will;
turn on me, I begged you, *turn
yourself on me*, but you lay
back and gripped my fingers in the slime and
muscle
of your cunt
as your body filled
with other people's lust
and your husband spat you through my tongue
and
your father tore you with my fingers
until you sat up shaking and I tried to calm
the curve of your buttock
with my empty hand.

Barbara Ruth

FOR NATASHA, WHERE I DID NOT FOLLOW

I could have followed you
Into that world of warmth and sharp-edged danger
That place beyond the hippies
Back to the beatniks
Back to basics.
Would you have let me?
You wouldn't let me call you Natasha, except in bed.
You wouldn't go to bed with me
Until I'd been in bed, and in love
With another woman.
You weren't impressed
With my bisexual, group sex posturing.
"I don't bring people out,"
You said.
You had your ethics.

Maybe I would have had to score smack
Somewhere else, use with someone else
Before you'd tie me off.

It's funny that I wasn't tempted.
Because I did love to do those "righteous" drugs with
you:
The pot, the hash, peyote, psilocybin, mescaline,
The acid.
All those drugs that made the fucking better.
All those drugs that made my fingers on your Russian
eyebrows
Making love.
All those drugs I felt so virtuous about.
I proselytized for them

Like I proselytized for non-monogamy

Out to change the world through chemistry

I preached and practiced that religion

As though I had no quarrel

With making converts or with dogma,

As though I knew what I was doing.

And then there was the opium.

That wasn't a "transcendence" drug

Couldn't find it on the peace and love menu

But didn't I

Didn't we

Love the peace

The piece of the world

It wrapped us in?

Winter in Vermont

Stoned on opium

Riding side by side in some dude's car

We rubbed our shoulders soft and urgent up and

down each other's arms

Through wool jackets and long underwear

We tangled gloves beneath our coats

Trying to be discreet

Pre-Stonewall

Pre-Women's Liberation

There in some dude's car.

But the sex between us was so palpable

The feral smell of Lesbian in crunchy snow

In mid-December night.

The dude said later that we were disgusting.

We were dykes, degenerates,

Our illicit sex narcotic,

Dark and powerful
As it never was with men
Or with boys and girls together
The way I'd dipped my greedy toes
The past two years
Fearing to be washed out.
Natasha, we were dykes, cunt-lappers,
Diving where there was no lifeguard, ignoring posted
warnings
Cherishing the undertow,
The rush, rush of our blood
Over the dull necessity of air.
I thought you fearless
And tried to suck it in, tried to overcome my terror
Through osmosis
Or intoxication.
We were sex outlaws

Back before
The butch-femme
S-M
Sex wars.
It was not a case
Of "Sisterhood feels good."
I came on the illegality,
Came again as that bad girl dare
Throbbled against my clit.

On the surface you were Natalie,
Brilliant
Butch
Aloof
I wanted the exotic you, Natasha,
Wanted to thrust my arm
Up in the fire
Below your smoldering.

I never fooled myself
That I didn't have more than a "taste" for opium
Never fooled myself
That it was not addictive
I only smoked it two or three times, not more.
"The only thing
I don't like about opium," I'd tell my friends
"Is how much I like opium."
I went back to my good girl drugs
Didn't take that dare.

I freaked out when you moved on
From chipping speed to mainlining smack.
What I thought I knew about junkies
Was they didn't have sex
Couldn't come
Didn't care
One way or another
(And yes, it's true, that I have drugged myself
Not to want
Too much
Trying so very hard not to care
one way or another.)
But back then, when we'd moved on
To the city.
Summer, 1967
Our love was wicked, hot
As only outlaw love can be.
If scag came
Between you
And me
I didn't feel it when we fucked.
That scared me shitless.
Made me think I was so oversexed
I couldn't even have cooled out

Junkie sex
Like a normal person.
I wanted to police my want
Needed some cop, some muffling device
To push it down
— I could have reached out for the needle
I reached out for a man instead
— It was more familiar
And respectable.
It was a danger without thrills
I still bear the tracks it left.
For six years I lived as a married, battered woman
Neutralized by 'ludes and Demerol
I took my pills
Disdaining drunks and junkies.
I numbed my want, my pain, my chances for escape,
Never getting high from drugs or violence
Just keeping things familiar
— I knew that bed from childhood, knew the way to
shut me up
Whatever happened in it
— A changeless world
Through chemistry.
Those six years I dreamed of you
Still tasted your velvet lowdown lady high
On your cunt
Your mouth
In the way your hand
Your eyes
Entered me
But never with a needle

Never really in me.
I had my ethics.

“Tie me off.”

“Slap my vein.”
“There — you’ve got it — now put it in “...slow.”
We never said those words, Natasha
And if we had?
Your life
The lives of the junkie-dykes
Who shared your beds, your rigs with you
Didn’t go so well.
The wife-dance that I did
Hustling to keep my rage,
His threats, his fists
Safely choreographed
Wasn’t so great either.
Either one
Can get you killed.

I couldn’t pull you
From your burning house
Only knew how to save myself
Through passing as a specimen
Locked up and labelled
The property
Of a man who collected pretty things
A man who only treated well
The ones that never breathed.
At twelve my career goal had been
To move to Greenwich Village
Wear black tights
And drink heroin in my coffee.
At twenty, the only way I knew
To keep from becoming a burn victim
Was to decrease the oxygen
Turn my flame too low
To be perceived.

In my early thirties

At the Free Women's School I taught a class
In Lesbian Sexuality.
You showed up as a student.

Each of us told her sexual herstory,
You didn't mention me in yours,
I was hurt.
After class I asked you why. You said
You thought it wouldn't be polite.

In my late forties now
I still desire the danger
Still tango with the death angels
Still want to run on fire.
I've lost more than I would have believed possible at
twenty
And survived more
Than I would have credited myself.

My grief is deep
My loneliness is wide
But I do not permit myself
To be collected.
And I am no one's partner in destruction.

And in the ordinary and extraordinary pleasures of
my mind, my flesh
In these words upon the page
I remember to invent another way
To live, to love
My life.

Peggy Munson

CAT SCAN

Today, they take a 3D picture of your throat
where my hands felt a Gulf Stream of rage,
the rhythms of gills, the breath you hold back
as I move slowly up one thigh with the lightest
touch. If they could only reconstruct
a picture of what really grows within you,
they would see the germination of the living,
how my hand blooms in every shaded city,
and every foreign mass becomes an island
rising up within you, so we may have
someplace to swim to.

Peggy Munson

BAD HABITS

We miss the luxury of bad habits
like drinking on an elevator between floors
or riding up and down all night as if
a pulley to the sky. In bed, I tie you up
like a marionette. You like this, because
you can approach the magic of your body
like Houdini. I tie the wrists especially
tight. And then pretend I'm pulling you
out of a well, hand over hand, saving
your life, leaving every drop intact.
I press your head down like a virus under
glass, discard your jeans, and slowly
spread your ass. Then I tease echoes
from ravines.

If I knew I was in love with you,
I'd conquer continents of ice
where no virus could survive,
where frostbite feels like fire. But I cannot say
I love you and mean tomorrow any more.

For now, I press my hand inside your cunt,
and feel a fractal shift in time
where we can be one continent,
a whole enlarging planet, one more
suspended moment. Now.

HUMMERS*

Side A

because we're black, because we're women
because you're beautiful and so am I

we

hum

hands on cats-in-a-bag hips, necks on ball bearings

lips curled back in derision

acknowledgment loaded with contempt.. yo'

hair, yo' clothes

yo' everything

stripped mashed onto a slide shoved under a

microscope thick

with who the fuck do you think you are or

could be?

i won't tell you yo' slip's showin' or there's

lipstick on yo'

teeth or even that yo' woman is sleepin' with me

n o

i won't tell you, you 'bout to lose yo' job or that

yo' boy is

sellin' crack at school

n o

i'll just hum

Side B

black women's eyes
molten chocolate eyes meet mine
submerging
we nod, smile
that deep secret smile we know something you
don't we know how we came to be in this
moment our contact speaks worlds centuries of
understanding cuts through class and the
darkness or lightness of skin
I know you know no matter what facade i've chosen to
help me survive this day
and the days to come that we are exactly the same
when we stop to talk our voices slide into a familiar silky
rollercoaster cadence.. "girrrl puhleeze no you didn't!"
we surface
too brief, not enough
black women's eyes

*Thanks to Carol B.

H. Emilia Paredes

AS JUSTICE

Para Natalia

(1)

you frightened me
the way you looked at me
the way I wanted you

to look at me

at seventeen
I had no other home

except the one

your fingers kindled
on my skin

3 am, bar *Piccolo*, over drink
and talk of *revolución*
you traced

the shape of *Perú*
on my palm

you said, I love my country
I love the shape
of your mouth

you said, *fear is good*
will make you brave

said, *come home with me*

ven

and we walked

the damp city streets of *Lima*.

(2)

your skin earthen brown

like the shores of the *Urubamba* river soft as silt

beneath the feet

of a young girl

knee-deep in el rio *Nanay*

I was that young girl

with a death wish

frozen in my fist

one by one

you thawed my fingers

in your dreams and appetites

your 30 beautiful

woman's years

I had no other hearth

except the fire

you lit

between my thighs.

(3)

outside in the soft *Limeña* rain

every comer reeked of urine
no beauty to shelter

the myriad street children
the want in their eyes

tanks, machine guns

people hurrying by

accustomed to these sights and smells

I never told you

when I was six

James, my teacher

used my body

to save my soul, he said

his penis in my mouth
his knives across my belly
sacrificed cats, doves, parts of me

I never told

you asked me once

*¿que será de mi Perú? ¿what will become of my country
when all who feel are gone?*

I had no words, just my body breathless
said

*you are my country
take your hand*

through the urgencies
of flesh and bodily fluids

we recovered the wealth of *Perú*

la costa, la selva, la sierra

I asked, *is it time to die now?*

(7)

in a dream

you and I lie
moist and warm

you trace my scars with your lips

the mist slowly rising

and reply

querida, you don't want to die
you want justice.

Kit Kennedy

AMONG THE DANGEROUS

I long to be in the company of women
who take only food of juicy color
especially red and yellow:
sun and blood food.
Their deepest hues withstand
the separating cold.

I name these fruits and vegetables
to root me
in a litany
of where we come from
to our return address
redressed.

No patience for stews of unequal melding,
of losing the edge,
of nine pennies to the dime.
Here, only the experience
freshly picked, ripe,
shared among dangerous eaters.

Kit Kennedy

EATING CAKE

Spring. I become a master in spotting lobelia,
lavatera and lesbians in tame and wild spaces.
Suddenly I hear laughter,
see two women talking with the thin man
behind the counter. Both white-shirted.
The woman with red glasses holds
a piece of chocolate cake topped with
one huge strawberry. She carefully slips
the sweet into a white sack. To be shared later,
devoured with care like a communion wafer.

The ritual
one fork
no shirts
naked feet
the evening.

LOSE WEIGHT NOW

Lose weight now. Ask me how. Nikki and I glance at each other. I sigh loudly and lift my shirt to display my ample belly. I go into my Pride Day spiel and begin to rub my tummy. Nikki presses her lips against my stomach.

Everyday, same shit. Everything, everyone trying to tell me how to fix what's wrong with me. Food Rite. I'm thirsty. I buy a flavored bottle of water. "Oh, it's fat free." I sigh. While I'm not morally opposed to fat free like Zanne, fat free normally tastes like spit. And now there's Cashier Lady to contend with. Any 300 pound woman buying fat free flavored water must be on a diet.

Okay, that's it. Now I'm going to be a vigilante like those diet freaks. I'll make sure everything I get is full of fat and sugar. "Oh, that one has more saturated fat." I'll buy gallons of ice cream at a time. Make sure I always have doritos in the house.

Lose weight now. Ask me how. She looks puzzled. Nikki flicks my navel ring with her finger. She asks if she can write her name on my stomach. We both stifle a giggle.

I go to the store. How about this one. Black

will make you look slimmer. Look lady, there's no hiding 300 pounds. And hiding — Please, I'm done with that. I've hidden too much for too long. I'm in the market for a leather mini-skirt, a lace bustier, some thigh highs and a frilly garter belt.

Show's over. We snicker behind Diet Girl's back. I roll my eyes. Diet Girl, you and your kind tire me. But you can't wear me down. I refuse to carry your shame on my back. Don't try to change me, Diet Girl. You can't even see me.



Candyce Brokaw

Tonia Bryan

MORE

*fallout from the sexual liberation wars is piling up, the love-sexy games and morning-after complications have oozed out of my sistas' lives and crossed every conceivable boundary into mine. our liberated no-holds-barred sexuality has become my up-close nightmare. so i'm takin' some space. from a safe distance i'm taking a closer look at the big picture. from a distance i'm realizing that loving wimmin, getting wet or feeling my clit pulse don't mean a thang if i can't **look and think before i lick.***

damm! i've been fantsizing 'bout u again. in my dreams i have no responsibility to the other wimmin in our lives. and not a fucking care in the world...but **u.** in my fantasies i never ask myself **o r u** "what will happen to the friendship and the support if we **get it on.**"

in my fantasies no answer comes barrelling back at me. knocking the wind out of my lust for the taste of your skin. in that space beyond reality i don't have to worry 'bout losing ur interest once you've had a taste of **mine.** there will **be** no nine-and-a-half weeks of fatal attraction when one of us, probably me, wants more than the other can stand to give. wants the body, mind, pussy and soul of her lover forever.

so i'm glad, really glad we haven't followed that **not-so-fine,** old, unspoken lesbian tradition of consummating our friendship with saliva and cum. chemistry and flirtation are fine but that don't necessarily mean we should be sexin'. i don't know 'bout **u,** but i've **had it** up to here with having to use fingers and toes to check off all the friends i've done. after the tongues tasted, the fingers found and the

legs opened, exposing the fragile, insecure insides...the love starved and died. it just up and **died**.

my sista, the ways **u** love me are too precious, too sweet to trade in for a few weeks or months of clinging, needy acting out past horrors or present pain through **SEX. been** there. done **dat** nowadays when the wanting gets bad, but **NOT** bad enough to risk the trauma and drama of sexin' in the lesbian community i **DO** have a head full of smutty stories, ur collection of pat califia's books, a plug-in vibrator, a shower massager, the washing machine on spin cycle and ten lean, mean fingers that i'm learning to use. **yet...** i know how i feel and these yearnings are something i wanna explore not ignore.

i wanna go there. to that place in my mind where i get to hold u for longer and harder. those few, fleeting seconds of touch i get when we meet are stretched into **hours**. u pull me close harder, grabbing a handful of hair. pulling my head back, back until neck and jugular are exposed to your teeth.

i'm not limited either. not forced to say, "hi, how was your day. u look good in those track pants." because i'm making up the rules this time 'round i can say, "hi, u look **goood**. take off those track pants and come 'ere so i can **fuck u**."

i'm breathing hard now. i need to slow down. these scenarios cum so rude, hard and merciless sometimes i even **forget how** to breathe. thinking of u and me in this world of musk and funk parches my mouth... makes my nipples so erect they hurt.

in another time u say ur back hurts and i offer to massage it. when u hurt i want to touch u and soothe it all away. i offer this often and u always laugh that deep, daring laugh saying, "i'll **cum** if u do." this is something the voyeur in me **needs** to see.

u give in and find urself wearin' an X-shaped full body blue-black leather harness with a huge

cowry shell centrepiece that i handmade specially for u. u assume the position: on ur belly with me astride ur butt. my clit pulses as my hands roam over ur naked back. first i breathe heat into my palms. then i pour fragrant oil into one cupped hand, rubbing my hands together to get it nice and warm.

before i even lay my hands down on u, i hear ur moan. rough and rasping. i have to bite back one of my own. soon my hands are **pulling** and searching. fingers and thumbs are **squeeeezing** and releasing ur flesh, pummelling ur muscles. i relish the feel of ur oil-slicked skin moving in waves before my touch. **do u want me?**

i slide down ur length 'til i'm straddling ur thighs. been neglecting ur ass for too long. finally i am allowed access to what has always been denied. allowed to take hold of the twin mounds of supple flesh that have always danced and jumped just out of my reach. more oil. we need more oil. i uncork the container and tip it so the oil can run free. one single stream slips slowly, lazily between ur cheeks and i hear the sharp intake of ur breath.

all of a sudden u cry out. responding instinctively i hold on tight as u roll over. then i'm on my back. ur eyes don't blink. there's hunger and desperation there. i hear my own breath coming fast and furious from deep inside. "cuz we're in fantasy land my clothes melt away. leaving me as naked as u.

"do u want m e?" you ask, voice so gravelly it's almost a growl. your fingers have got a hold on my nipples so tight i cry out and weave up through the curtain of ur locks to find ur lips. . .but wait **UP**.

fantasy **inevitably** gives way to reality. brief reverie cums to an end leaving me in real time where i've been starvin' in the midst of my sistas. needing there to be more to our blak sista love than what we

can strap on and shove between each other's thighs. hoping i'm not the **only** one who can see that intimacy and fuckin' are **not** the same thang.

u are **not** a notch on my belt . **not** this evening's conquest. **not** part of an underwear collection. **not** part of a popularity game. **not** the latest piece in a long line of wet-behind-the ears-just-out-of-the-closet pussy. **u** are a brilliant flesh, blood, bone, feelings and thought blak lesbian sista/motha/warrior with a mission. **u** have **not** been put on this earth to create chaos in my life and i have **not** been sent to disturb your groove.

twelve years fulla makin' out, making love, and one night stands with boys and girls behind me means i need to continue growing. metamorphosis and re-evaluation of my priorities is where i'm at. my life's energies are focused on a change that's gonna move me emotionally, psychologically, bodily **and** spiritually. who's gonna stick around? or maybe i should say who will i **want** to stick around?

frankly i'm not too concerned anymore 'bout where a sista wears her keys. if she's **crazy-sexy-cool*** and can do it to me hard and nasty. don't give a **damn** if she's a vanilla queen who knows all **twenty-three-positions-in-a-1-nite-stand***. couldn't care less if she can push it real good, pump it, ram it **or** jam it. and when her sole claim to fame is her ability to take out the competition and fuck with her sistas minds and bodies? i'll **pass**.

right now, i'm in the market for some sista-to-sista friendship, slowly maturing and evolving into family. **minus** the incestuous undertows and dangerous liaisons. i've got a feelin' for tha flava of a self-lovin' Blak woman who loves me **so much** she'll **b**e here even when there is a **kickin'** party goin' on tonight. i'll expect her to appreciate all the different wimmin i can be. she'll need to understand the

meanings of denial, addiction, disassociation, responsibility, respect and **NO**. and i'll need **some** assurance that she'll at least **try** to process, deal and stick it out even if she **does** have a fatter, less conscious, more easygoing fish to fry in another part of town.

my sista, been waitin' a long time for u and i wouldn't give u up for the **world**. u've got the guts and the sense to love me when the armpits smellin' funky, the hair ain't been combed for days, ain't wearin' a push-up bra and the face is about as smooth as the surface of the moon. that's **good**. cuz this hair is goin' grey, these breasts are slowly reachin' for my waist and anyone with cash to spare and a bus pass can buy face paint at a make-up counter downtown. u know what i'm sayin'?

there's gotta be **more**. i **need** there to be more cuz i've got **more** to **give**. i've got the uncanny ability to choose my sex partners carefully. which comes in handy when confronted with the overwhelming beauty of the wimmin/sistas/supports already in ur life. i'm learning to nurture my boundaries and **developing** a respect for other wimmin's limits. i wanna be here for a long time to come. in fact, i've got visions of me and u exchanging books, cackling over each other's bad jokes, listening to joplin and sharing love and friendship when i'm sixty-seven and seventy-four.

*cuz fingers and tongues will eventually tire. and cunt juice binds sticky and viscous only as long as its wet. i've made a **conscious** decision to avoid the love-sexy games and morning-after complications **whenever-and wherever-i-can**. desperately seeking, i've got a feelin' **u** know there's more to our blak sista-to-sista love than sex could **eva**h bring. desperately seeking,*

developing a respect for other wimmin's limits. i wanna be here for a long time to come. in fact, i've got visions of me and u exchanging books, cackling over each other's bad jokes, listening to joplin and sharing love and friendship when i'm sixty-seven and seventy-four.

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FOR UR INFORMATION:

***Crazy-Sexy-Cool** is the name of a song by **TLC**.

***The words twenty-three-positions-in-a-1-nite-stand** are from **Get Off**, a song by the artist formerly known as Prince.

Vivian Lee



Candyce Brokaw

Book Review by Abimbola Folisade Adama

Oral Tradition, Jewelle Gomez

Firebrand Books, 1998, Ithaca

The varied rhythms of *Oral Tradition* guide the reader through several of the lives of the author, Jewelle Gomez. Gilda, the immortal vampire of Gomez's award-winning Black lesbian vampire novel, *The Gilda Stories*, introduces each of the four sections of poetry with a poem of her own. There are no vampire stories, but there is the weightiness of immortality and the relative nature of life as "Gilda Sings: Escape."

"Someone said to me once, 'Gilda it must be hard in this world being black, descended from slaves, 'buked and scorned, benign neglect.'

No, actually it's being two hundred years old that pulls my patience. And I still don't know
all I want about the past."

In "Gilda Sings: Dreaming Awake," one of my favorites, Gilda realizes:

"I am not a woman ripe for splitting
open

but a lightly wrapped package of everything we need to know.”

The collection includes the tension, curiosity and courage of inter-racial romances in “Getaway” as well as the heart pounding of two lesbians walking past men full of “cockish noises” in “Beneath the Williamsburg Bridge” and the simple joy of a woman who has crossed the country to be with her lover realizing “You really are upstairs in our bed.”

”Hiroshima Red in Black and White” haunts the reader, reminding that:

“Karen Silkwood’s bones will glow
beneath our soil
for years to come. Somewhere
on that red sun island
a child still burns.

Oral Tradition is a serious examination of life as women have lived, imagined, denied and feared it.

Book Review by Abimbola Folisade Adama

the bull-jean stories by sharon bridgforth
Red Bone Press

The ferocious voice of sharon bridgforth rolls, jumps, and glides through the bull-jean stories. Each page reconstructs a moment of deep love, harsh disappointment, or a lesson learned on how to effectively pursue or love a woman.

It is the language of African Americans from the rural south, the rhythmic gullah dialect of the 1920s that lights up this too small volume of gutsy poetry.

For those who value the importance of the history recorded in dialect, bull jean is a treasure trove. An inspired poet, bridgforth sketches clear, strong images brushed with humor, daring the reader to walk away, untouched. For example, bull jean says of herself:

“na/i’s a wo’mn
what’s Lovved many wy’mns.
me/they call bull-dog-jean i say
that’s cause i works like somekinda

ole dog trying to a get a bone or two
they say it's cause i be sniffing after
wy'mns
down-low /begging and thangs
whatever."

the bull-jean stories, a good read of
African American herstory.



Vivian Lee



© KAREN J. BURNS

OBITUARIES

Martha Courtot died April 25th of this year at home with her three daughters Thea, Heather and Cynthia; her granddaughter Sonia; and her long-term partner, Cathy nearby.

Born in Cincinnati in 1941, Martha helped shaped lesbian-feminist consciousness by chronicling her journey as a working-class midwestern fat lesbian searching for spiritual and political expression. A poet, novelist, essayist, and activist, Martha read and published her work since the mid-60s.

Words from Tribe and *Journey*, chapbooks published in 1977, were widely used in women's rituals and performances. Martha's poems were published in numerous journals and widely anthologized. Her column in the Sonoma County publication *Women's Voices* has been a challenging and comforting presence in recent times.

Martha helped found several women's land collectives and the Lesbian Voters Action Caucus. Her life was filled with grass-roots activism, mothering, women's spirituality, lesbian relationships, and writing.

Martha was disabled since the mid-80s. She was diagnosed with end-stage Non-Alcoholic Steatic Hepatitis in February of this year. She very much wanted to put together a book of poetry encompassing her writer's life. A literary group formed to complete this project, important both because Martha's earlier books are out of print and because she has written so much subsequent to their publication.

Contributions can be sent to the Martha Courtot Literary Fund, P.O. Box 683, Santa Rosa, CA 95402. Martha completed a powerful, multi-generational novel, *Wilderness Prayers*. Interested publishers may contact her literary executor, at the same address.

Jessica M. Barchay, a pioneer in Bay Area feminist psychotherapy, died peacefully by her own hand on Oct.5, 1998 as a consequence of a 13-year struggle with chronic illnesses including chronic fatigue immune dysfunction syndrome, fibromyalgia, and multiple chemical sensitivities. She succumbed to her illness after a protracted fight not only with disease, but with a medical establishment that refused to acknowledge and were ignorant to treat the devastating effects of these ailments. In the days preceding her death, she was surrounded by family and friends.

Born in 1940 in New York City, Jess attended the University of Iowa and UC Berkeley's School of Social Welfare. In recent years she had relocated to the Southwest in an effort to find relief from her chronic illnesses away from the growing pollution in the San Francisco Bay Area. By the time she reached Santa Fe she had exhausted all possible medical and alternative ways to relieve her suffering and felt there was nowhere else that she could live.

Jessica will be remembered for her razor sharp mind, her tremendous compassion for animals, her stubborn, often recalcitrant personality, and her droll sense of humor. Her salty, whimsical nature prevailed until her last days. She will also be remembered for her commitment to lesbian and feminist issues and for her hungry pursuit of moral and philosophical questions.

Jessica was a practicing Buddhist for over thirty years, and in the final days of her life was able to take the precept and receive a long awaited lay ordination. She was given the Buddhist name of “Anto” meaning “peaceful passage.”

She is survived by her beloved partner of eighteen years, Judith Masur; her sister Elizabeth Ryan of Berkeley; her nephew, Ethan Schutz of New York City; her loving friends; and her two dear dogs, Baci and Happy.



Jessica M. Barshay

Contributors' Notes

Kimberly Aceves-Denyer: I'm a 28 year old Latina Dyke who spends most of my time working to create social change for youth of color and lesbians of color in the Bay Area. I was born and raised between Calexico, Bonita and Chula Vista and for the last eleven years I've called the Bay Area my home. My passion for writing is fed by mi familia, especially mi novia.

abimbola folisade adama is currently looking for an agent for a completed novel. When not writing I enjoy teaching meditation and other metaphysical practices, doing yoga, looking for the right mate, sewing, walking, laughing, hugging trees, creating black angels from fabric, in short, living 200% value of life while leaning on the Divine.

Megan Boler: A native San Franciscan and a professor at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. Her fiction and poetry have been published in *The Threepenny Review*, *New Zealand Poetry*, and *Hecate*. Her first non-fiction book *Feeling Power: Emotions and Education* was published by Routledge 1999.

sharon bridgforth: bridgforth is the author of the the bull-jean stories published by RedBone Press and is founder/writer/ artistic director for THE ROOT WY'MN THEATRE COMPANY.

Susan Buchanan: I'm 38, a freelance writer, living with Jeanne, my partner, and our wonderful standard poodle, Xena, the Warrior Princess in Prince Edward Island, Canada, half the year and Greenwich Village, New York City the remaining half of theyear. I've been a quadriplegic for 21 years and besides neatly dividing my life into Before and After, this on-going experience often finds expression in my writing.

Karen Burns is a painter, sculptor, graphic designer and illustrator living near Seneca Falls, NY. She and her partner are currently building their home/studio out of straw bales, with much help from women in the community. She calls it her biggest art project yet.

Catherine Byrd: After earning a Master's in German studies and spending a year in the comparative literature grad program at U.C. Davis, Catherine Byrd decided to flee academia in order to pursue her true passion, photography. Catherine resides with two feline friends and her partner of 12 years.

Susana Cattaneo has published several books of poetry and stories starting with *Afrodita en tu alma* in 1964. She lives in Buenos Aires and edits the magazine, *Extranjera a la intemperie*.

Terri de la Pena is the author of three novels: "Margins" (Seal, 1992), "Latin Satins" (Seal, 1994), and "Faults" (Alyson, 1999), and one children's book, "A is for the Americas," co-written with Cynthia Chin-Lee (Orchard, 1999). Terri is a two-time winner of the UC Irvine Chicano/Latino Literary Prize, 1986 and 1992.

Rebekah Edwards has won a number of awards including the James D. Phelen Award and the Eisner award. Most recently she has had poetry published in *The New Delta Review* and in *Lilith Magazine*.

Karen J. Hall is an artist, activist and graduate student in Syracuse, New York. Queer communities sustain and inspire her in all that she does.

Minal Hajratwala is a newspaper editor and poet in San Jose, California. Her work has been published in literary journals and anthologies, including *Contours of the Heart: South Asians Map North America*, winner of a 1997 American Book Award. She is a graduate of Stanford University.

Holly Iglesias: Her poetry and nonfiction have appeared in journals such as *The Women's Review of*

Books, Cream City Review, Spoon River Poetry Review and Puerto del Sol. She recently completed her dissertation, *Boxing Inside the Box: Women's Prose Poetry.* She also co-edited *Every Woman I've Ever Loved: Lesbian Writers on Their Mothers* (Cleis, 1997).

Kit Kennedy: My work has appeared in *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, 33 *REVIEW*, *The Harvard Gay and Lesbian Review*, and *AWAA-TE 4*.†† I live in San Francisco and work in sales. "Among the Dangerous" was inspired after reading Judy Grahn's *BLOOD, BREAD, and ROSES*.

Rebecca Lee: I am an Associate Professor of Literature and Director of the Writing Program at the University of Hawaii-West Oahu. In my youth, I was a Peace Corps volunteer in Tanzania and then a newspaper reporter. I have been teaching writing and literature for over a quarter of a century.

Martín is a randy Chicana butch who writes when there is time.

Miriam R. Sachs Martin has previously been published in *New to North American*, *Paginas Tortilleras* and *Free to Be*. She has also been accepted for publication in the upcoming Latina lesbian anthology, *Sinvergencias*.

Jacqueline Miranda is a Cuban butch who makes a mean flan. Her poetry has been published in *Wanting Women*, *The Poetry of Sex*, *Sinister Wisdom*, and *Circulo de las Americas*.

Pam Mitchell is a 47-year-old working-class dyke of mixed Jewish/Appalachian-WASP heritage. She lives in the Bay Area, where she supports herself and her writing habit by pretending to be a secretary.

Peggy Munson was born in Normal, IL. Her work has been published in *13th Moon*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Literature and Medicine*, *Yellow Silk*, *Best Lesbian Erotica 1998 and 1999*, *Perceiving the Elephant and Hers*³. She is now editing a collection of

writings on the Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome (CFIDS) epidemic entitled *Stricken: Voices from a Hidden Epidemic*.

Jill Nagle: Her most recent book is *Whores and Other Feminists* (Routledge, 1997). Her work has appeared in a number of anthologies and periodicals including *Looking Queer*, *PomoSexuals*, *Bisexual Politics*, *Closer to Home*, *Girlfriends*, *On Our Backs* and *Black Sheets*.

Clara Nipper is a full-time writer living in Tulsa. She does not enjoy writing these bios about herself.

Deb Parks-Satterfield is a writer and performer who lives in Seattle, WA. She just completed the first act of her play *Hard Times Will Make A Monkey Eat Red Pepper*. She is also in the process of completing a book of short fiction titled *Third Finger Left Hand: The Wedding Stories*.

Mary Damon Peltier started writing poetry not long after attending her first women's liberation meeting. While a member of Bread & Roses, she wrote one of the early lesbian commentaries on the women's movement, which usually appeared as "Letter from Mary" in underground newspapers in the early seventies - and in various anthologies since. She was one of the founding editors of the journal *Women/Poems*.

Sybil Plank: I am a lesbian; I live in Vancouver.

Zantui Rose devoted eight years to a private therapy practice in Asheville, NC working with female clients recovering from sexual abuse. She now devotes her time to awakening public consciousness about the expanding options of gender expression.

Rotem is an Ashkenazi American lesbian of mixed heritage. She lives in San Francisco.

Barbara Ruth lives in San Rafael, Ca and was born in 1946. I am a passionate composer and gardener, and even more amazed than I used to be. I recently learned that Natasha is still living, kinehura.

Elizabeth Ruth is a Toronto based writer and editor who is squeezing a novel out between the cracks of her nine-to-five life (she likes to think the day job is a figment of someone else's imagination). She sometimes thinks writing erotica is the highest form of masturbation.

Teya Schaffer lives and works in Oakland, Ca. her book, *A Ritual of Drowning: Poems of Love and Mourning* is available from Tabor Sarah Books, 367 50th St., Oakland, CA 94609. \$10.45 includes postage.

Carla Schick: I am a politically active writer living in Oakland, CA. I began writing in my high school years in New York to help me survive growing up poor, queer, and Jewish. I continue to struggle to find words that reveal truths, and that shatter myths and stereotypes.

Anne Seale is a writer and performer of lesbian songs, plays, stories and poems. She is published in several recent anthologies.

Leaf Seligman lives and writes among glorious trees in Eliot, Maine. After fourteen years of college teaching I will begin divinity school in the fall.

Aspen is a political disabled lesbian feminist, passionate about life, love, friendship and positive change. I am part of a tape friendship circle for print disabled lesbians which welcomes new members. Contact TAPE CONNECTION c/o Gemma PO BOX5700, London WCIN 3XXX, England.

Amy Sonnie is a 24-year-old writer, editor and activist currently living in San Francisco. She is editor of *Revolutionary Voices: A Collection of Work By and for Queer Youth*, and Publications Director at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts.

Cheryl Whitehead was the recipient of the 1997 Lesbian Writers Fund Award from the Astraea Foundation for her poetry. She now lives in Miami

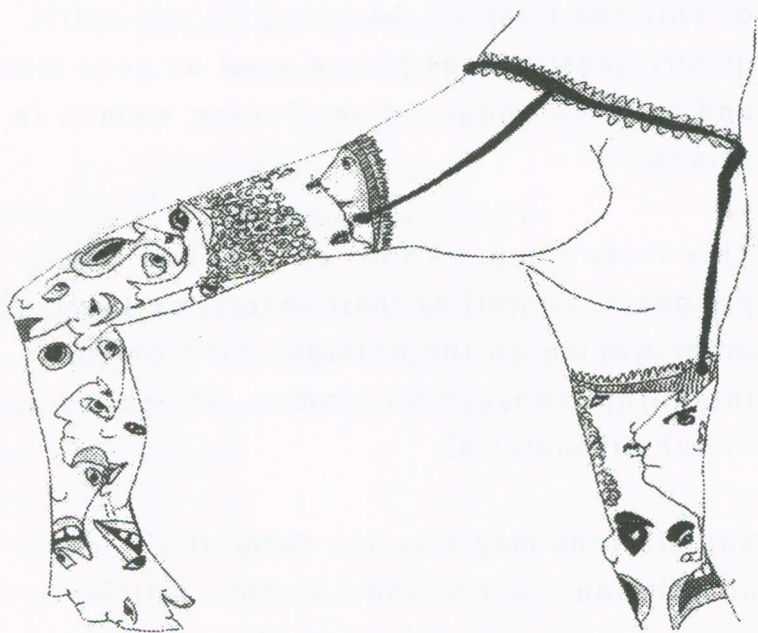
and teaches music in the Dade County Public schools.

Joy Wright works in the domestic violence movement and is a founding member of the Chicago women's writing group Tribe of Dorothy and Big Smith, a radical feminist drum ensemble. She is currently working on an anthology entitled *Progressive Notions, Radical Motions: Connecting Domestic Violence and Anti-Oppression Work*.

Abe Louise Young tends a herd of magical cattle on the cliffs of Albion, California.

K'harria Zen lives in Philadelphia, PA with five womyn loving womyn, numerous mice, and the occasional stray kitty. She spends her nights chasing people out of the library. Ms. Zen is a proud member of the Philadelphia Dyke March Planning Committee.

Candyce Brokaw



WOMEN LOVING WOMEN IN PRISON

A NEW ISSUE OF SINISTER WISDOM

Call For Submissions

Sinister Wisdom, the nation's oldest lesbian literary journal, is seeking submissions for a special issue devoted to women loving women in prison. We are looking for material that explores the wide range of experiences of women's same-sex relationships and attraction on the inside. No matter what your sexual orientation (lesbian, bi, straight, two-spirit, queer, questioning) please send us your stories and artwork about women loving women in prison.

This issue is open to all current and former prisoners, as well as their lovers, ex-lovers, and other women on the outside. All women, including transgender women, are encouraged to submit material.

Submissions may take the form of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, short stories, articles, artwork, cartoons, photographs, graphics, or

any other paper-based medium. Please limit written material to 10 hand-written pages or 8 double-spaced typewritten pages, and feel free to send in multiple pieces in any of the above mediums. You may choose to be published anonymously (without your name listed) or to have your name printed along with your piece. Either way, please be sure to include your name and address on each page that you submit to us so that we do not lose your material.

**The deadline for submission is:
July 15, 2001.**

Send your submissions to:
Sinister Wisdom
Attn: Judy and Beth
P.O. Box 3252
Berkeley, CA 94703

Help us spread the word about this exciting issue. We look forward to hearing from you! For more information, please call (510) 665-1935 (voicemail)

Books Received

About this list: I have included almost all of the books sent to Sinister Wisdom. Unfortunately there is never much room to review them. Most of the blurbs that follow each book's vital statistics are from the publishers' press releases or the back cover of the book. The exception is the information included in brackets, the signal that I have read all or part of the book in question. Margo

Women in Hawai'i: Sites, Identities, and Voices. Social Process in Hawai'i, volume 38, 1997. Available from University of Hawai'i at Manoa, Office for Women's Research, (808)956-3641. [This is a special thematic issue of this journal focusing on Hawaiian women's voices.

Especially compelling is a piece called "Trying Fo' Do Anykine to Donna: Fragments of a Prose Work" by Donna Tsuyuko Tanigawa who describes herself as a "yonsei lesbian of Japanese ancestry from Waipahu." In her work Donna writes about piecing together a quilt as she pieces together her identity from learning to speak "good kine" English and the struggles of having to use standard English to be respected in academia and other places. Tanigawa also

shares with us the multitude of messages she's been given about her body as an Asian woman. Into her piece she weaves in the illusion of making a quilt about herself and her identities complete with bloodstains and leftover natto. Also noteworthy is an essay by Hediana Utari-Miller called "Alien Encounters." Utari-Miller writes about being a foreigner in Hawai'i and what her own experience is racially. From a section about the importance of "coffee," "For coffee lovers whom I run into, learning that I am from Java is like meeting their true destiny. To be associated with coffee is not too bad, I guess. Its aroma, taste and jolt in the mornings snap me out from my dreamland and get me ready for the day. But I wonder what do I have to do to jolt these people's experience." Utari-Miller also relates how food is often used to assume ethnic even global understanding. She relates a potluck experience:

I was summoned to judge someone's newest experiment, what she called Indonesian rice. Looking at it I saw some ingredients commonly used in Indonesian dishes: peanut sauce, fried tofu and bean sprouts. But I couldn't say this was "Indonsian rice," as there is no such thing. Every island, even every province, has its own style of rice dishes. Indonesian people don't usually put

raisins in rice dishes, especially not mixed with peanut sauce, for raisins are usually associated with dessert. But, I didn't want to ruin the mood of "diversity." Trained well by my American friends, I reacted "properly": "Oh, how exciting!" "Terrific," "Good job!"

This issue is definitely worth checking out!.]

The Indelible Alison Bechdel: Confession, Comix and Miscellaneous Dykes to Watch out For by Alison Bechdel. Firebrand Books, 1998. [This is an absolute must-read for anyone who is even a tiny fan of Bechdel's comics. Packed with info about the artist, the genesis of DTWOF, other Bechdel art including stuff dating back to preschool, and my personal fave- feedback from the audience. Pure enjoyment!]

The Complete Hothead Paisan: Homicidal Lesbian Terrorist by Diane Dimassa. Cleis Press, 1999. [The perfect read for those days when the outside world is too much and you just want some well-placed revenge. Even if Hothead goes a little too far for you, Chicken is the most wonderful cartoon pussy around — dancing, rescuing Hothead or carrying an Uzi — Chicken is IT. Perfect dessert after the aforementioned book.]

A Fragile Union by Joan Nestle. Cleis Press, 1998. [A lovely collection of Joan's writings - the visions of a hot jewish fem.

For over four decades, I have made my way in this world as a lover of women. I have spread my legs and lowered my lips for the love of women at night and taught my students during the day. The way I loved filled the way I taught, the way I loved shaped the books I wrote, the way I loved shaped the politics of change I fought for. Hundreds of thousands of us held our passions close as we created public beauty in this country...

Includes a wonderful chapter about Mabel Hampton and her life and my personal fave, My Woman Poppa. Joan also writes candidly about her struggle with cancer. Necessary reading for anyone interested in a broad view of lesbian history, sexuality and politics].

Friday the Rabbi Wore Lace: Jewish Lesbian Erotica edited by Karen X. Tulchinsky. Cleis Press, 1998.

The Oy of Sex: Jewish Women Write Erotica ed. by Marcy Sheiner. Cleis Press, 1999.

Split Level Dykes to Watch Out For by Alison Bechdel. Firebrand, 1998.

The Dyke and the Dybbuk by Ellen Galford.

Seal Press, 1993. [A highly enjoyable, uniquely Jewish novel with many good laughs].

Black Widow's Wardrobe by Lucha Corpi. Arte Publico Press, 1999.

Restricted Access: Lesbians on Disability edited by Victoria A. Brownworth and Susan Raffo. Seal Press, 1999.

Exile and Pride: Disability, Queerness, and Liberation by Eli Clare. South End, 1999.

Don't Explain by Jewelle Gomez. Firebrand Books, 1998.

Living Chicana Theory edited by Carla Trujillo. Third Woman Press, 1998. [It's all here, La Virgen de Guadalupe reconstruction in Chicana lesbian desire, ponderings on who Aztlan is really for (men), Chicana lesbian motherhood, an "interview" with Sor Juana, Chicana Psych, sexy photos, and much more.]

Queerly Classed: Gay Men and Lesbian Write About Class. Edited by Susan Raffo. South End Press, 1997. [There is never enough on the topic of "class" which seems to have taken a nose-dive off most peoples' tongues in the seventies. Many of the essays piss me off while others tingle and resonate. Overall, worth reading with a

thick marker or exacto at hand.]

- Where Oceans Meet* by Bhargavi C. Mandava. Seal Press, 1996. With magical prose and a flair for storytelling, Mandava captures the lives of Indian and Indian American women and girls.
- Life on the Line* by Faye Wattleton. Ballentine Publishing Company, 1996.
- Love Ruins Everything* by Karen X. Tulchinsky. Press Gang Publishers, 1998.
- Lesbian Love Companion* by Marny Hall. Harper San Francisco, 1998.
- Blue Windows: A Christian Science Childhood* by Barbara Wilson. Picador, 1998.
- Car Maintenance, Explosives, and Love and Other Contemporary Lesbian Writings* ed. by Susan Hawthorne, Spinifex, 1997.
- Skin to Skin: Erotic Lesbian Love Stories* by Martha Miller. New Victoria, 1998.
- Waiting in the Wings: Portrait of a Queer Motherhood* by Cherríe Moraga. Firebrand Books, 1997.
- Daughters of the Moon, Sisters of the Sun: Young Women & Mentors on the Transition to Womanhood* by K. Wind Hughes and Linda Wolf. New Society Publishers, 1997.
- Tending Lives: Nurses on the Medical Front* by Echo Heron. Fawcett, 1998.

- Another America: Otra América* by Barbara Kingsolver. Seal Press, 1998.
- Herotica 1: A Collection of Women's Erotic Fiction*. Edited by Susie Bright. 10th Anniversary Ed. Down There, 1998.
- Herotica 6*. Edited by Marcy Sheiner. Down There Press, 1999.
- Cunt: A Declaration of Independence* by Inga Muscio. Seal Press, 1998.
- A Woman Determined* by Jean Swallow. Spinsters Ink, 1998.
- Alma Rose* by Edith Forbes. Seal Press, 1998 edition.
- Don't Get Me Started* by Kate Clinton. Ballentine, 1998.
- Masks* by Ruthann Robson. Leapfrog Press, 1999.
- Tales of the Lavendar Menace: A Memoir of Liberation* by Karla Jay. Basic Books, 1999.
- Ordinary Justice* by Trudy Labovitz. Spinsters Ink, 1999.
- Fire and Flower* by Laura Kasischke. Alice James Books, 1998.
- Fugitive Red* by Karen Donovan. U. Mass, 1999.
- The End of the Class War* by Catherine Brady. Calyx, 1999.
- Voices of Color* edited by Yolanda Alaniz and Nellie Wong. Red Letter Press, 1999.





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Some Current & Back Issues

#58 Open Issue

#57 On Healing

#56 On Language

#55 An open issue explores issues of racial identity and sexual identification

#54 Lesbians & Religion: explores questions of faith and community

#53 Old Lesbians/Dykes: guest edited by 9 old dykes, features the work of 38 womyn over 60, including Del Martin, Phyllis Lyon & Sally Miller Gearhart.

#52 Allies includes 10 interviews by Jamie Lee Evans with lesbian activists.

#51 An open issue in which lesbians lay claim to our lives.

#50 Not The Ethics Issue we had planned (read it to find out why). But there is great work on ethics & more. Guest edited by Caryatis Cardea and Sauda Burch.

#49 The Lesbian Body: here's where flesh and theory meet — includes lesbians of color, roles, disability, body image, fat, sex, menopause and more.

#48 Lesbian Resistance: investigations into the activist heart of our courage — including messages from dykes in prison.

#47 Lesbians of Color. Tellin' It Like It Tis'. Special 160-page issue edited by lesbians of color, includes new work in all forms — essential reading.

#46 Dyke Lives. New, international fiction and poetry.

#45 Lesbians and Class. The first issue edited entirely by poor and working class dykes includes analysis, personal narrative, poetry, fiction & a graffiti wall.

#43/44 The 15th Anniversary Retrospective. 368 pages, over 90 lesbians' work from the second wave. An amazing, indispensable source collection!

#42 Lesbian Voices. Our first intentional all-lesbian issue.

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

#40 Special Focus on Friendship.

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

#35 Passing. Investigations into trying to appear other than we are.

#34 Special Focus on Lesbian Visions, Fantasy, SciFi.

#33 Special Focus on Wisdom. Lesbians of Color, non-violence, war stories, incest, leaving a will, assimilation.

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Submission Guidelines

All written work should be mailed flat (not folded), with your name and address on each page. Submissions may be in any style or form, or combination of forms. Maximum submission: five poems or two stories per issue. We may return longer submissions. We prefer you type (or send your work on 3 1/2" discs with a printout). Legible handwritten work accepted, tapes accepted from print-impaired women. All submissions must be on white paper. SASE MUST BE ENCLOSED. *Selection may take up to nine months.* If you want acknowledgment of receipt, enclose a separate, stamped postcard. GRAPHIC ARTISTS should send B&W photos, stats, or other duplicates of their work. Let us know if we can keep artwork on file for future use.

We publish only lesbians' work. We are particularly interested in work that reflects the diversity of our experiences: as lesbians of color, ethnic lesbians, Jewish, old, young, working class, poor, disabled, fat. We welcome experimental work. We will not print anything that is oppressive or demeaning to lesbians or women, or that perpetuates negative stereotypes. We do intend to keep an open and critical dialogue on all the issues that affect our work, joy and survival. We are open to suggestions for new themes.

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"Butchness has always been at the center of my desire. Eroticizing crippledness was perhaps initially an outcome of my radical crip politics. Sometimes I feel shame at this new fetish of mine, but then I have felt shame before with each new round of coming into my ever blossoming sexuality."

Mary Frances Platt

"God lowered herself over my steaming cunt. She growled. She began biting my thighs and licking residue from them. I shook and trembled, my cunt rising in tortured pleas. All the same knowing this is how we both got our best pleasure."

Clara Nipper

"I am watermelon inside, seeds outside, crunch & soft, no white rind crisp, I spit small dark things, alpine green..."

Minal Hajratwala

**"She entered lips
first/large juicy smooth
and brown
she entered hips turning/black cream
quivering"**

sharon bridgforth

\$11

